

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

In today's interconnected world, the very nature of diplomacy has undergone a dramatic transformation. Traditional diplomacy, which was once confined to formal state-to-state interactions, has evolved significantly, encompassing more diverse channels and actors. Public diplomacy which is a relatively recent addition to the diplomatic toolset, is an essential facet of modern international relations. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which relies primarily on government representatives and formal negotiations, public diplomacy seeks to engage the public, both domestically and internationally, to foster mutual understanding, promote national interests, and shape perceptions¹.

This expansion of diplomatic tools comes in response to a rapidly globalizing world where communication and influence no longer hinge solely on state-level negotiations. With the rise of digital platforms, social media has emerged as a critical component in the global communication landscape, offering governments, institutions, and individuals a platform to engage in dialogue, promote cultural exchange, and influence global opinions². Public diplomacy's growing significance cannot be overstated. It plays a pivotal role in the modern diplomatic sphere, fostering goodwill and supporting long-term strategic relationships between countries.

This is especially evident in the relationship between Nigeria and China, the two nations whose diplomatic and economic ties have flourished over the last decade. While both countries have embraced traditional diplomatic measures, their engagement has been heavily influenced by the rapid rise of social media and digital platforms. This digital

evolution has reshaped how public diplomacy is conducted and has altered the nature of international relations, shifting it from traditional, face-to-face interactions to a more dynamic, real-time digital exchange³.

Public diplomacy itself can be seen as a form of influence, where nations strategically engage the world to shape perceptions, project soft power, and promote their values and interests. In a globalized world, where national boundaries are becoming increasingly porous, governments must work harder to maintain relevance on the world stage. As such, public diplomacy serves as a bridge between governments and foreign publics, where the voices of individuals, institutions, and civil societies become as crucial as those of state representatives⁴. The influence of public diplomacy is particularly pronounced when it comes to cultural and economic exchanges, where perceptions about a country's values, economic opportunities, and political stances are vital for fostering long-term diplomatic ties.

Social media has undoubtedly become the catalyst for this new era of diplomacy. Platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and LinkedIn have revolutionized the ways in which governments, citizens, and institutions communicate and share information globally. Through these platforms, information can be disseminated to millions of people instantaneously, providing both opportunities and challenges. Social media empowers individuals and organizations, including foreign governments, to influence public opinion, advocate for policy change, and engage in diplomatic dialogue without the constraints of traditional statecraft⁵.

In international relations, social media has had a profound impact by offering new ways of shaping global perceptions. The concept of real-time communication, once unimaginable,

has now become an everyday occurrence. Through platforms such as X, world leaders, diplomats, and ordinary citizens can directly interact with one another, bypassing traditional communication channels. This has transformed the scope and speed at which diplomatic messages are conveyed. It also provides a more personal, immediate way to engage with the international community, breaking down barriers and making diplomacy more accessible to the public.

The rise of social media influencers has added another layer of complexity to this landscape. In the past, media and public diplomacy were largely controlled by state actors or institutional elites. However, in the digital age, influencers have become central players in shaping public opinion, both domestically and internationally⁶. These individuals, with their large followings and ability to sway public sentiment, have become powerful tools for governments looking to communicate their policies, promote their culture, or shape their international image.

The relationship between Nigeria and China offers a prime example of how social media is being harnessed for public diplomacy. Over the past decade, the ties between these two countries have strengthened, underpinned by economic collaboration, political diplomacy, and a shared interest in promoting mutual prosperity⁷. The Nigeria-China relationship has seen significant developments, particularly in the areas of trade, investment, and technology. The period from 2015 to 2023 has been marked by numerous bilateral agreements in technology and trade, high-level visits, and joint ventures. Both countries have made considerable efforts to deepen their economic ties, with China playing an increasingly prominent role in Nigeria's infrastructural development and investment sectors.

In terms of public diplomacy, both nations have used social media as a tool for engagement. China, with its vast social media platforms like WeChat, has utilized these tools to promote its image and foster goodwill among Nigerian audiences⁸. Similarly, Nigeria has used social media to amplify its message, not just to its domestic audience, but also to the broader international community. Through digital platforms, both nations have sought to portray their partnership as mutually beneficial, highlighting their shared goals in development, trade, and innovation.

The impact of social media on Nigeria-China relations has been profound. The governments of both countries have used social media to communicate their policies, share updates on bilateral projects, and engage with the public on issues related to their relationship⁹. For instance, during key political events or economic agreements, social media has provided an immediate and accessible platform to communicate messages, respond to queries, and clarify positions. This form of engagement has allowed the Nigerian and Chinese governments to interact with one another and with global audiences, enhancing transparency and fostering a sense of direct communication.

However, the use of social media in Nigeria-China relations is not without its challenges. Both countries face the issue of misinformation, a prevalent issue in the digital age. The rapid dissemination of unverified information has the potential to damage diplomatic relations, especially when messages are manipulated or distorted¹⁰. The digital divide also presents a challenge, as not all segments of the population in both countries have equal access to social media platforms or the internet. This creates an unequal playing field in terms of public engagement, where only certain voices are amplified while others remain unheard. Additionally, issues related to censorship and government control of digital

platforms have raised concerns about the manipulation of public opinion, particularly in a diplomatic context¹¹.

Previous studies on social media and public diplomacy have explored a range of topics, from the role of social media in shaping public opinion to its impact on government strategies. However, the literature on Nigeria-China relations, particularly in the context of social media and public diplomacy, remains relatively underdeveloped. Most studies have focused on the broader impact of social media on diplomacy and international relations, without delving deeply into specific bilateral relationships. This study therefore aimed to fill that gap by focusing on the assessment of social media in the Sino-Nigeria relationship between 2015 and 2023. The Sino-Nigeria relationship is a study, showcasing the power of social media as a diplomatic tool in fostering stronger bilateral ties. However, as both countries embrace this new form of diplomacy, they must also navigate the challenges posed by misinformation, censorship, and digital divides.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the age of digital interconnectedness, the traditional boundaries of diplomacy have been reshaped by the pervasive influence of social media. Social media platforms which was once considered informal channels for personal expression have become integral to shaping international discourse, influencing global public opinion, and transforming diplomatic strategies. These platforms, such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and are now crucial tools for governments, organizations, and individuals alike in advancing diplomatic messages, fostering dialogue, and shaping perceptions. However, the extent to which these platforms influence formal diplomatic interactions, particularly between nations with complex bilateral relationships, remains an area requiring deeper investigation.

The relationship between Nigeria and China from 2015 to 2023 exemplifies the growing impact of social media on international relations. Over these years, both nations have engaged in substantial diplomatic, economic, and political exchanges, marked by trade agreements, infrastructure projects, and strategic collaborations. While these interactions have garnered significant attention, the role social media plays in shaping these diplomatic efforts and influencing public perception is yet to be adequately explored. Despite the increasing reliance on digital platforms, research into the specific impact of social media on public diplomacy, especially within the context of emerging economies like Nigeria, remains limited.

While social media is often seen as a tool for government-led diplomacy, it also plays a crucial role in influencing public opinion, grassroots movements, and informal diplomatic efforts. This dual role has not been sufficiently examined in existing studies, especially concerning the intricate dynamics between nations like Nigeria and China. Moreover, the rapid spread of both accurate and misleading information through social media channels poses significant challenges to the management of diplomatic relations. The spread of misinformation, in particular, can distort diplomatic messages, complicating efforts to maintain stable and positive international relations. Previous studies have pointed out that while social media offers governments a platform for direct communication, it also poses significant challenges due to its dual role in disseminating both truthful and misleading information, which can distort diplomatic messages.

This study seeks to bridge these gaps by providing a detailed examination of how social media influences public diplomacy, public perception, and international relations, particularly within the context of Nigeria-China relations. This research aims to inform

both Nigerian and Chinese foreign policies and offer broader insights into the role of social media in shaping modern diplomacy.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to assess how twitter influenced public diplomacy between Sino-Nigeria Relations, 2015 – 2023, the objectives of the study were to:

- i. examine the role of twitter in shaping the Sino-Nigeria bilateral relations between 2015 to 2023;
- ii. analyse the impact of social media influencers and opinion leaders on the promotion of Sino-Nigeria cultural exchange and cooperation;
- iii. assess the influence of social media on Sino-Nigeria cooperation in trade, technology, and education between 2015 and 2023; and,
- iv. explore the challenges and opportunities presented by twitter in the Sino-Nigeria relations.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1 How has twitter contributed to the shaping of Sino-Nigeria bilateral relations between 2015 and 2023?
- 2 What role have social media influencers and opinion leaders played in the promotion of Sino-Nigeria cultural exchange and cooperation?
- 3 How has the use of social media impacted Sino-Nigeria cooperation in the fields of trade, technology, and education from 2015 to 2023?
- 4 What challenges and opportunities have twitter platform presented in the diplomatic relations between Nigeria and China?

1.5 Significance of the Study

In today's rapidly evolving digital world, social media has transformed how nations interact on the global stage, providing new avenues for public diplomacy, international relations, and socio-cultural exchange. The dynamics of global diplomacy have shifted significantly as social media platforms now offer interactive, and mass-reach opportunities for governments, individuals, and influencers to shape foreign relations. The relationship between Nigeria and China has been profoundly impacted by these changes. Thus, understanding the influence of social media on this bilateral connection is critical, not only for enhancing diplomatic ties but also for navigating the opportunities and challenges presented by digital platforms.

This study is timely as it highlights the crucial role that social media plays in the geopolitics of today's interconnected and fragmented world. The influence of digital communication on international relations is growing, particularly in the context of Africa's increasing engagement with major global powers such as China. This research provides insights that are vital for policymakers, diplomats, and international relations experts who aim to leverage digital platforms for strategic advantage.

The findings of this study are invaluable to government agencies, diplomats, and businesses operating in both Nigeria and China. They were equipped with a deeper understanding of the impact social media has on trade, technology transfer, education, and cultural diplomacy. The study also holds relevance for educational institutions, providing a basis for new curricula on digital diplomacy. Furthermore, stakeholders in the tech industry and social media marketing will benefit by learning how digital communication can enhance or challenge diplomatic efforts in an increasingly globalized digital environment.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This research assessed the use of twitter as a channel of public diplomacy in the context of Sino–Nigeria Relations from 2015 to 2023. It explores how official and non-official actors, such as government agencies, diplomatic missions, media organizations, and citizens—have used the platform to communicate, promote national interests, and shape mutual perceptions between both countries. The study period, 2015 to 2023, was selected because it reflects a time of growing social media influence in Nigeria and the steady expansion of China’s presence and engagement across Africa. The geographical focus is limited to Nigeria, though relevant Twitter exchanges involving Chinese officials and institutions are considered where they have a bearing on Nigeria–China relations. The study is concerned primarily with issues of public diplomacy, communication practices, image projection, and the broader implications of social media interactions for the conduct of foreign relations between the two nations.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to the use of twitter by the governments of both China and Nigeria because it is the only social media platform or handle that government of nations use. Social media content is dynamic and subject to bias, propaganda, and censorship, which may affect the accuracy of interpretations. Another limitation stemmed on its reliance on secondary data such as media reports, policy documents, and online publications, which may not fully capture the depth of informal diplomatic interactions between China and Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study is restricted to the period between 2015 and 2023, thereby excluding earlier developments and future trends that may shape public diplomacy.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

Public Diplomacy: Public diplomacy refers to the use of media, communication strategies, and cultural exchanges by governments to influence foreign publics and promote national interests. It examines how Nigeria and China utilize social media to shape public perception and diplomatic relations.

Social Media: For the purpose of this study, *social media* refers to web-based and mobile technologies that enable users to create, share, and exchange information and ideas through virtual communities and networks. It encompasses digital platforms that allow for interactive communication, content generation, and real-time feedback among users. In this study, social media is viewed as a key tool for public diplomacy; serving as a medium through which governments, diplomats, and citizens engage in dialogue, project national images, and influence public perception across borders, particularly in the context of Nigeria–China relations.

Twitter: Within the scope of this study, *Twitter* is defined as a microblogging and social networking platform that allows registered users to post and interact through short messages known as “tweets.” It serves as a public space for diplomatic communication, official statements, policy clarifications, and public engagement. In the context of Sino–Nigeria relations, Twitter is operationalized as a medium through which both Nigerian and

Chinese diplomats, institutions, and publics share information, shape narratives, and influence bilateral understanding and cooperation in the digital environment.

Sino–Nigeria Relations

For the purpose of this study, *Sino–Nigeria relations* refer to the multifaceted diplomatic, economic, cultural, and socio-political interactions between the People’s Republic of China and the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Operationally, within this study, it focuses on how these bilateral relations are represented, negotiated, and influenced through digital communication, specifically on Twitter, between 2015 and 2023. This includes official engagements such as diplomatic communications, policy statements, and development partnerships, as well as public discourses involving citizens, media, and institutions of both countries on the platform. The term is thus limited to the analysis of online expressions, narratives, and interactions that reflect or impact the conduct and perception of Nigeria–China relations within the study period.

Endnotes

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Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Diplomacy

In an era where global interconnectivity dictates the flow of information, resources, and even ideologies, the role of diplomacy remains a central pillar in maintaining peace, fostering relationships, and navigating conflicts between states and various international actors. Diplomacy is much more than the formal negotiations between governments; it encompasses a complex web of processes, tactics, and strategies used by nations to protect their interests, build alliances, and resolve conflicts¹. The term itself, however, is laden with various interpretations. Understanding diplomacy, therefore, requires looking at its evolution, its diverse meanings, and its implications within the global system.

Historically, diplomacy has been seen as a tool for negotiation between states, a means to ensure that conflicts are avoided or resolved through peaceful means. Diplomacy has been an art that sought to represent a nation's interests without resorting to the more extreme measures of war or violence. From this perspective, diplomacy has been a practice founded in careful conversation, tactful maneuvering, and, above all, an understanding of the international system's power dynamics². Yet, as international relations have become more

intricate, so too has the definition of diplomacy, now including various facets that transcend the scope of statecraft alone.

In its early conception, diplomacy was limited to negotiations between sovereign states. The ambassadors who represented nations were seen as the primary agents of diplomacy. These diplomatic figures, often well-versed in the art of communication and skilled in the intricate details of their nation's interests, would negotiate treaties, peace accords, and other significant agreements that defined the relations between their home state and foreign entities³. In this early framework, diplomacy was seen primarily as an extension of national power and authority. It was about achieving outcomes that served a country's strategic, political, and economic goals while maintaining a level of decorum that avoided armed conflict.

However, the traditional approach to diplomacy evolved as the international system became increasingly multipolar. States could no longer rely solely on the actions of ambassadors to represent their interests. The scope of diplomacy expanded to include a broader array of actors beyond diplomats themselves. The rise of international organizations, non-governmental actors, and increasingly interconnected economies has placed greater emphasis on multilateral diplomacy⁴. Nations now collaborate with one another not only through direct diplomatic exchanges but also through platforms such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and various regional organizations, reflecting the increasing complexity of global governance.

Modern diplomatic practice has also been shaped by the recognition that diplomacy is not merely about formal negotiations; it is also about the communication and management of relationships. Today, diplomacy is recognized as a means of managing relations, not just

through negotiations, but through ongoing communication and the establishment of long-term strategic partnerships⁵. These relationships are not solely focused on political power but also economic, cultural, and social exchanges. As such, diplomacy has expanded beyond the scope of governmental negotiations and into the realm of public diplomacy, where states work to shape perceptions, influence public opinion, and promote soft power through cultural exchange, education programs, and media⁶.

Diplomacy also serves as an essential tool for foreign policy implementation. Governments use diplomatic channels to assert their policy preferences and to influence other nations' decisions in areas such as trade, military cooperation, environmental protection, and human rights⁷. In this view, diplomacy is not just a passive form of communication but an active process through which states seek to influence one another, negotiate terms, and make decisions that reflect their own national interests. Over time, it became clear that diplomacy's role was no longer limited to the art of negotiation, but it extended to all aspects of international relations, including the strategic management of a state's foreign policy⁸.

Yet another way in which diplomacy has been conceptualized is through its role as a system of institutions and processes that govern the relationships between states. The diplomatic system includes foreign ministries, embassies, consulates, and other institutions that facilitate international relations⁹. This institutional framework ensures that diplomatic activities are carried out systematically, according to established norms and procedures. Through this institutional lens, diplomacy is seen as a formalized process that is both structured and regulated, ensuring that interactions between states are carried out with professionalism, consistency, and adherence to international law.

In addition to the bureaucratic and institutional approach, there is also a view of diplomacy as a method for influencing the decisions of other states. In this sense, diplomacy is a strategy through which states engage with one another, using various tools—ranging from economic aid to military support, from cultural exchange to environmental agreements—to guide the behavior of other nations¹⁰. This framework casts diplomacy as both a method of negotiation and a tool of persuasion and power, where countries use their diplomatic channels to sway the actions of others in pursuit of their own national interests.

The modern concept of diplomacy also extends beyond statecraft to include civil society, international organizations, and even individuals. In this broad interpretation, diplomacy is seen as a multilevel process, where a wide range of actors—governments, non-governmental organizations, multilateral institutions, and even individuals—play a part in shaping the outcomes of international relations¹¹. Diplomacy, in this view, is not confined to government representatives but includes a complex network of interactions between various stakeholders working towards common goals such as peace, development, and cooperation.

Moreover, diplomacy is increasingly being recognized as a vital tool for addressing global challenges that transcend national borders. These challenges, such as climate change, terrorism, and human rights violations, require cooperative solutions that can only be achieved through dialogue, negotiation, and compromise¹². As such, diplomacy has become an essential instrument for addressing transnational issues, helping states navigate complex global problems through collective action and coordination. In this regard, diplomacy is no longer merely a state-to-state interaction; it has evolved into a global

process that engages a multitude of actors in the search for solutions to pressing issues facing humanity¹³.

Finally, it is important to consider diplomacy's role in the modern digital age. With the advent of the internet and social media, diplomacy has become an increasingly transparent and publicly engaged activity. Governments and international organizations now communicate directly with the global public, influencing opinions and creating diplomatic initiatives that resonate with people outside of the formal state-to-state framework¹⁴. Public diplomacy, particularly in the context of global issues like climate change or international trade, has given rise to a new dimension of diplomacy that works to shape not just political alliances but global public opinion.

Diplomacy is thus a dynamic and evolving process. What was once a formalized system of state-to-state negotiations has expanded into a complex network of relationships that involves a multitude of actors, processes, and strategies¹⁵. It is a mechanism through which states pursue their national interests while also working together to tackle global challenges. Diplomacy today is not just about maintaining peaceful relations; it is about fostering collaboration, promoting shared values, and managing an increasingly interdependent world.

From the above, the concept of diplomacy has evolved significantly over time. While its foundations remain rooted in negotiation and communication between states, diplomacy today encompasses a broader range of practices and actors. From its traditional role in representing national interests to its modern application in managing global challenges, diplomacy remains a cornerstone of international relations¹⁶. As global interdependence

continues to deepen, the scope and practice of diplomacy will continue to evolve, adapting to new challenges and opportunities in the ever-changing international landscape.

2.1.1.1 Some Features of Diplomacy

Diplomacy encompasses a range of features that facilitate peaceful interactions among states and other global actors. These features have evolved over time to address the complexities of global interdependence and the diverse interests of nations. One of the primary features of diplomacy is its role in managing international relations through negotiation and dialogue¹⁷. This process allows states to address conflicts, establish agreements, and promote cooperation on various issues such as trade, security, and environmental concerns. Through diplomatic channels, nations can articulate their interests, seek common ground, and resolve disputes without resorting to force.

Another salient feature is the institutional framework within which diplomacy operates. This includes diplomatic missions, such as embassies and consulates, as well as international organizations like the United Nations. These institutions provide platforms for dialogue, standardize diplomatic practices, and offer mechanisms for conflict resolution¹⁸. They also serve as venues for multilateral negotiations, where multiple parties can discuss and address global challenges collectively.

Diplomacy is also characterized by its adaptability to changing global dynamics. As the international landscape evolves, so too do diplomatic practices. Modern diplomacy increasingly incorporates elements like public diplomacy, which involves engaging with foreign publics to influence perceptions and foster mutual understanding. Additionally, the

rise of digital technologies has introduced new avenues for diplomatic engagement, enabling real-time communication and the rapid dissemination of information¹⁹.

Furthermore, diplomacy is distinguished by its emphasis on protocol and etiquette. Established norms and practices govern diplomatic interactions, ensuring respect and order in international relations. These protocols dictate the conduct of diplomatic personnel, the organization of state visits, and the procedures for treaty negotiations, among other aspects²⁰. Adherence to these conventions is crucial for maintaining the decorum and effectiveness of diplomatic engagements. The features of diplomacy are multifaceted and dynamic, reflecting the complexities of international relations. Through negotiation, institutional frameworks, adaptability, and adherence to protocol, diplomacy continues to play a pivotal role in fostering peaceful coexistence and cooperation among nations²¹.

2.1.2 Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy has evolved as a central component of contemporary international relations, defined broadly as the communication and relationship-building efforts undertaken by a state to influence foreign publics and shape its global image. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which primarily involves government-to-government interactions, public diplomacy operates through direct engagement with the citizens of other nations²². The objective is to project favourable national narratives, cultivate goodwill, and indirectly support foreign policy goals through attraction rather than coercion. This conceptual distinction aligns with theory of *soft power*, which underscores the ability of a country to achieve desired outcomes through persuasion and cultural appeal rather than economic or military pressure²³.

The practice of public diplomacy involves various strategies such as international broadcasting, cultural exchanges, educational programs, and digital engagement²². These methods serve as instruments through which nations attempt to foster understanding, mitigate misinformation, and advance cooperation. In recent years, scholars have argued that digital communication technologies have redefined the contours of public diplomacy²⁴. The immediacy and accessibility of social media have blurred the boundaries between official and non-official actors, enabling citizens, journalists, and non-state entities to participate actively in diplomatic discourse.

In this evolving digital context, states like China and Nigeria have leveraged online platforms to shape public opinion and defend national interests in global conversations. Digital public diplomacy enables the monitoring of global sentiments, the countering of negative narratives, and the projection of developmental or cooperative messages to external audiences²⁵. However, the digital environment also presents challenges such as information saturation, propaganda, and public skepticism. These dynamics make public diplomacy a more participatory, yet unpredictable, arena of international communication. Within the Sino–Nigeria context, public diplomacy provides a framework for examining how both states engage publics, justify their policies, and negotiate images of partnership, development, and mutual benefit through digital media such as Twitter.

2.1.3 Twitter

Twitter, launched in 2006, has evolved from a microblogging site into a global communication platform that shapes public discourse. Its defining features; brevity, immediacy, interactivity, and openness; make it a distinctive medium for public engagement and real-time information exchange. The platform allows users to post short messages known as *tweets*, limited originally to 140 characters (later expanded to 280), which can be retweeted, liked, and commented upon

by a wide audience²⁶. Because tweets are public and searchable, Twitter facilitates participation in discussions across social, political, and diplomatic spheres.

In communication studies, Twitter is viewed as an interactive space where messages are not only transmitted but co-created through dialogue, reactions, and user-generated content²⁷. Its ability to connect political leaders, journalists, institutions, and citizens makes it both a broadcasting and conversational tool. Twitter functions as a hybrid medium that merges aspects of traditional journalism and digital networking, enabling faster and broader information dissemination than conventional media²⁸. Governments, organizations, and individuals can use the platform to bypass traditional media filters and engage directly with audiences; a characteristic that has transformed communication and agenda-setting globally.

However, Twitter's advantages coexist with challenges. The platform's brevity may encourage oversimplification, while its speed can facilitate misinformation and misinterpretation²⁹. Algorithmic amplification may also privilege dominant narratives while silencing others. Despite these concerns, Twitter's participatory nature and transnational reach make it a critical instrument of public communication and reputation management, particularly for states navigating the complexities of global visibility in the digital era.

2.1.3.1 Twitter and Digital Diplomacy

Twitter has emerged as one of the most prominent tools for digital diplomacy, offering a real-time, interactive medium through which diplomats, embassies, and government agencies communicate with global audiences. The platform's format; short, public, and easily shareable messages—facilitates rapid dissemination of information and enables governments to engage directly with both domestic and foreign publics²⁶. Twitter's openness allows states to bypass

traditional media filters, thus granting greater control over message framing and timing³⁰. It also functions as a “listening platform,” enabling policymakers to gauge public reactions, track global discussions, and respond to emerging issues.

The concept of *Twiplomacy* (Twitter diplomacy) encapsulates this growing trend of states and leaders using the platform for image projection, crisis communication, and public engagement. Studies have shown that embassies and diplomats increasingly use Twitter to share official statements, promote cultural initiatives, and counter misinformation³¹. However, Twitter’s openness also exposes states to contestation, criticism, and narrative challenges from foreign publics, media actors, and rival governments. As a result, diplomatic communication on Twitter must balance persuasion with credibility and transparency³².

In the context of Sino–Nigeria relations, Twitter offers an observable and measurable space for examining the dynamics of public diplomacy between the two nations. Since 2015, both China and Nigeria have expanded their digital footprints, through verified embassy accounts, diplomatic missions, and state-affiliated media outlets; to promote bilateral cooperation and clarify policy positions. These interactions have mirrored broader geopolitical narratives such as South–South cooperation, technological partnership, and infrastructure development. Thus, analysing Twitter as a diplomatic tool provides valuable insight into how both countries frame their relationship to domestic and international audiences, while also revealing public perceptions, tensions, and evolving power relations in the digital age.

2.1.3 The Evolution of Sino-Nigeria Bilateral Relations

Nigeria–China relations have evolved from tentative diplomatic outreach in the early 1970s into one of Africa’s most consequential bilateral partnerships. Over the past decade, the

relationship has deepened across diplomacy, trade and investment, infrastructure, finance, security cooperation, and people-to-people ties, even as frictions over trade imbalances, governance standards, and social perceptions have sharpened the debate in Nigeria about the costs and benefits of engagement²².

A critical review of recent literature and data shows a pattern of intensifying interdependence anchored in large-scale projects and financing instruments, punctuated by efforts on both sides to institutionalise cooperation through frameworks such as the Belt and Road and the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, and, more recently, to upgrade the political symbolism of the partnership²³. The result is a decade defined by pragmatic bargains: Nigeria has sought infrastructure, technology, and liquidity to support growth and diversification; China has sought access to a large consumer market, energy and minerals, and a strategic anchor in West Africa.

Diplomatically, the last decade consolidated long-standing foundations. Abuja has consistently affirmed the “One China” principle and tightened practice around it, most visibly when Nigeria asked Taiwan’s mission to move from Abuja to Lagos in 2017—a signal that was read domestically and internationally as aligning diplomatic form with declared policy²⁴. Subsequent parliamentary and executive statements have reiterated that stance, keeping political relations stable despite occasional public controversies. The diplomatic architecture has simultaneously grown denser around ministerial visits, intergovernmental committee meetings, and summits. In January 2025, during a high-level visit to Abuja, the two governments announced an elevation of ties to a “comprehensive strategic partnership,” combining symbolism with concrete items such as support for prospective Panda-bond issuance and openness to expanding the bilateral currency-swap line—gestures that speak to

Nigeria's need for diversified financing channels during a period of exchange-rate volatility. These moves also reflect Beijing's interest in consolidating a premier partnership with Africa's largest economy and a pivotal security actor in the Gulf of Guinea²⁵.

Economically, the trade and investment story of the decade is one of scale and asymmetry. Annual bilateral trade surpassed the twenty-billion-dollar mark by 2024, with Nigeria remaining a top African buyer of Chinese manufactures and China consolidating its position among Nigeria's leading import partners²⁶. The structure of trade has, however, remained highly skewed: Chinese exports to Nigeria consist largely of machinery, electronics, textiles, and consumer goods, while Nigerian exports to China are dominated by crude oil, gas and other raw materials.

Multiple recent datasets and official summaries converge on the same picture—rising volumes, persistent deficits. The implications for Nigerian industry have been debated for years, and the past decade's literature stresses both consumer welfare gains from cheaper imports and pressures on domestic manufacturing, especially textiles and light industry²⁷. The asymmetry has put a premium on instruments that can lower transaction costs and ease liquidity constraints; in that sense, the 2018 bilateral currency-swap agreement, renewed at end-2024, and the suggestion of Panda-bond issuance in 2025 are not mere finance footnotes but part of a broader attempt to stabilise flows and hedge against dollar scarcity in trade settlement²⁸.

Project finance and infrastructure have been the most visible arena of cooperation. Rail modernisation and port expansion have progressed from announcements into operations, with significant macro and logistics effects. The Lagos–Ibadan standard-gauge line, built by a Chinese contractor, moved into container freight service in late 2023, linking the Apapa port complex to inland dry-port capacity in Ibadan and signalling a slow shift from road-heavy to

rail-enabled cargo movement²⁹. The Lekki Deep Sea Port, developed with Chinese equity and a substantial commercial loan from China Development Bank—began operations in 2023 and has already attracted larger vessels than Nigeria’s legacy channels could accommodate, relieving congestion and complementing the Lagos Free Zone.

In power, the 700 MW Zungeru hydropower project reached commissioning in 2023 after years of construction by a Chinese consortium backed by an Exim Bank of China preferential loan, with documented concessional terms that illustrate how Chinese policy banks bundle long tenors and relatively low interest rates with country risk and counterpart obligations³⁰. While each project has drawn scrutiny about procurement, transparency and cost, the cumulative effect is unmistakable: Chinese capital and contracting have altered Nigeria’s physical economy in ways that will shape productivity and fiscal flows for decades.

The debt dimension has inevitably become central to public debate, particularly as Nigeria’s external obligations rose in the 2020s amid currency pressures and fiscal constraints. Recent data from Nigeria’s Debt Management Office and independent trackers of Chinese finance point to a stock of roughly five billion dollars owed to Chinese lenders by late 2023, up on the year, with the largest exposures linked to transport and power projects³¹. Available documentation shows that a significant share of these loans carry concessional terms—maturities around twenty years, grace periods of seven years, and interest around two and a half percent—yet sustainability is determined less by nominal rates and more by the naira’s path, project cash flows, sovereign revenue, and the quality of execution. Nigerian authorities have repeatedly emphasised that the loans are tied to specific projects with revenue potential and that there are no blanket asset-seizure clauses; nonetheless, civil society organisations and analysts continue to call for fuller disclosure of terms and contingent liabilities. The tension

here is typical of many emerging-market borrowers: Chinese finance can close infrastructure gaps quickly, but weak institutions and foreign-exchange risk can turn concessional loans into heavy burdens if projects underperform or macroeconomic shocks hit³².

Free-trade zones and industrial platforms offer a more mixed, but instructive, picture of the decade. Chinese-linked zones such as the Ogun–Guangdong Free Trade Zone and the wider Lekki corridor have progressed unevenly, yet the maturing of the Lekki ecosystem—deep-sea port, free zone, and adjacent large-scale industrial anchors—demonstrates how port-centric development can reconfigure supply chains³³. Evidence points to job creation and firm entry in some zones, though bottlenecks in power, connectivity and regulatory coordination have constrained spillovers. The literature suggests that the success of these platforms depends on the quality of local content policies, enforcement against smuggling, dispute resolution, and the depth of linkages to Nigerian small and medium enterprises³⁴. China’s role has been catalytic in capital and construction, but local policy choices will determine whether these enclaves become hubs with broad multipliers or remain islands of efficiency.

Security and defence cooperation advanced in quieter but meaningful ways. Nigeria’s acquisition of Chinese offshore patrol vessels in the mid-2010s and armed unmanned aerial vehicles thereafter created a baseline of equipment and training relationships that carried into the 2020s³⁵. Reporting in 2024–2025 points to an agenda that now includes training pipelines, grants, and discussion of localised production of certain categories of materiel. The operational impact of Chinese-made systems has been debated, particularly after early mishaps with some platforms; however, the broader pattern is of Nigeria diversifying suppliers in response to embargo risks and licensing delays elsewhere. For China, the security portfolio complements its economic footprint and protects commercial interests at sea and on land; for Nigeria, it

hedges dependencies while bargaining for technology transfer³⁶. Governance and accountability considerations remain salient, as do long-term maintenance and interoperability costs.

The most contentious social episode of the decade was the 2020 Guangzhou controversy, when Africans, including Nigerians, reported evictions and discriminatory treatment amid local pandemic controls. The incident produced rare, sharp African diplomatic pushback, strained public sentiment, and prompted extensive Chinese messaging and remedial pledges³⁷. It did not derail state-to-state cooperation, but it revealed how quickly people-to-people frictions can undermine elite-level progress. The episode was later counterbalanced, at least symbolically, by Chinese vaccine donations and talk of health collaboration, including discussions about local production. The underlying lesson for bilateral relations was that legitimacy now depends on tangible respect for citizens abroad as much as on the delivery of infrastructure at home³⁸.

Critical minerals introduced a new and delicate layer to the relationship in the latter half of the decade. Nigeria's push to formalise and monetise lithium and other critical resources intersected with a surge in illegal mining, some of it linked in public discourse to Chinese buyers and intermediaries³⁹. Security operations in 2024 and 2025 led to arrests and seizures and to the deployment of mining marshals. The Nigerian government's stance has been to court lawful investment while tightening enforcement, a balance that will determine whether Chinese commercial demand channels into formal value chains with community benefits or fuels a shadow economy that corrodes state authority⁴⁰. The literature on resource governance underscores that Nigerian agency—in licensing, environmental safeguards, and beneficiation requirements, will be decisive; Chinese state and private actors will operate to the incentives they face.

The financial architecture of the relationship has grown more sophisticated. Beyond the widely cited project loans, instruments such as the RMB swap line, originally agreed in 2018 and renewed in 2024; aim to lower trade settlement costs and reduce pressure on dollar reserves⁴¹. If effectively used, the swap can underwrite import bills for Chinese goods and broaden the menu of hedging tools for Nigerian banks and corporates. Prospective Panda bonds could further diversify Nigeria's investor base and benchmark its sovereign credit in China's onshore market, although pricing will reflect Nigeria's fiscal reforms, inflation trajectory and credibility of consolidation plans. The challenge is to ensure that these instruments support structural change rather than merely smoothing consumption; the literature suggests their developmental value rises when paired with export-capacity building and standards compliance for access to Chinese markets⁴².

It is also notable that cooperation has extended into digital and educational spaces. Confucius Institutes in Nigerian universities have continued to expand Chinese language training that feeds into corporate labour pipelines and cultural exchanges, while Chinese technology firms have pledged labs and training facilities in the renewable-energy and ICT domains⁴³. These softer channels of influence can create durable networks of familiarity and skills, though critics warn of dependencies and the need to safeguard data, competition, and academic autonomy. As with infrastructure and finance, outcomes are mediated by Nigerian regulation and the capacity to set terms that anchor technology transfer and protect the public interest.

Taking stock of the decade, three evaluative conclusions emerge from the literature. First, the partnership has been transformative in physical and financial terms. Rail corridors, a deep-water port, and a major hydropower plant have already altered Nigeria's logistics and

energy landscape, with measurable effects on travel times, port throughput and generation capacity⁴⁴. The trade and finance channels have deepened integration and provided buffers during balance-of-payments stress. These are gains that alternative partners often discussed but did not deliver at comparable speed or scale.

Second, the benefits have been uneven and the risks persistent. Trade deficits, limited local content, opacity in some contracts, and governance gaps in enforcement have constrained broader industrialisation effects. Debt-service burdens have grown heavier in naira terms during devaluations, even when the loans are concessional in dollars or RMB⁴⁵. Social tensions—from Guangzhou to mining sites—have periodically undermined public trust. The literature’s critical consensus is that Chinese financing is not inherently problematic, but that Nigeria must strengthen due diligence, publish terms, tighten project selection to those with strong economic rates of return, and systematically enforce environmental and labour standards.

Third, the political signalling of the most recent period indicates a desire on both sides to lock in a higher-order relationship that spans security and clean-energy cooperation alongside trade and infrastructure⁴⁶. Whether this becomes a platform for structural transformation depends on Nigeria’s domestic reforms: tariff policy that nurtures competitive firms rather than rent-seeking, credible power-sector rules that translate new generation into reliable supply, industrial policy that leverages logistics assets like Lekki into export capability, and a minerals regime that moves from extraction to beneficiation⁴⁷. China’s incentives will continue to be commercial and strategic; it will provide capital, technology, and political cover so long as projects are bankable and the partnership advances its global posture. Nigeria’s challenge is to convert that external energy into

inclusive growth and resilience, ensuring that the next decade of Nigeria–China relations is judged not only by kilometres of rail or megawatts on paper, but by diversified exports, skilled jobs, and stronger institutions.

The evolution of Nigeria–China bilateral relations over the past decade has been a story of deepening engagement underpinned by large projects and novel financial tools, accompanied by persistent asymmetries and governance tests. The partnership has delivered tangible infrastructure and opened additional channels of trade and finance, while also confronting Nigerian policymakers with hard choices about debt, transparency, industrial strategy, and social safeguards⁴⁸. If the current diplomatic upgrading is matched by a domestic reform agenda that maximises spillovers and mitigates risks, the next chapter could move beyond import-heavy consumption towards export-led growth and technology absorption. If not, the relationship will remain valuable but constrained, delivering headline projects without the full developmental pay-off that Nigeria seeks.

2.1.3.1 Some Key Aspects of Sino-Nigeria Relations

Strategic alliances based on comparative advantage have historically shaped international relations, with Nigeria-China relations being a prime example. The benefits each country derives from this partnership, however, have sparked debate. China's rapid rise in global political and economic influence in recent years has been remarkable⁴⁹. This growth can be attributed to China's “going out” strategy, which has led to numerous multilateral and bilateral trade agreements with countries worldwide, particularly in Africa, through initiatives like the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). As a result, China has emerged as one of Nigeria's key trade and investment partners, with a significant focus on

infrastructure development, energy collaboration, and expanding trade and investment ties⁵⁰.

i. Infrastructure Development

China's involvement in Nigeria's infrastructure development has been one of the most prominent outcomes of the growing bilateral relationship between the two nations. Chinese organizations have played a pivotal role in constructing vital infrastructure such as roads, railways, ports, and airports, contributing to the improvement of Nigeria's transportation networks⁵¹. These advancements have had a positive impact on both economic growth and connectivity across the country. A significant portion of these infrastructure projects is financed through low-interest loans from China, as part of its state-driven involvement in major industrial and infrastructure ventures. This approach has led to China becoming deeply embedded in Nigeria's infrastructure sector, funding projects such as the construction of new rail lines and expanding existing facilities.

China's involvement in Nigeria's rail system is particularly noteworthy, with more than \$20 billion in rail projects currently underway. These include new commuter rail systems in cities like Abuja and Lagos, designed to ease transportation and reduce road congestion. The Nigerian government, which had long struggled to revitalize its ailing rail infrastructure, has found a valuable partner in China. Under the leadership of both former presidents efforts to build functional rail infrastructure have received substantial support, including from the Chinese Export-Import Bank⁵². One of the key projects, the \$1.5 billion Lagos-Ibadan rail line, spans more than 150 kilometers and has been largely funded by China. Additionally, the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) is

responsible for the construction of the Lagos-Kano railway, a north-south connection expected to significantly enhance the nation's transportation capacity⁵³.

Another landmark infrastructure project is the Mambilla Dam, a \$5.8 billion hydropower project that has struggled for decades to gain traction. However, with China's involvement through the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation and financing from the China Export-Import Bank, the project is now taking shape. Similarly, China Energy Engineering Corporation has entered into a \$550 million deal with a Nigerian private energy company to build a 400-megawatt gas-fired power station in Sagamu. The construction of the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Abuja, backed by a \$200 million Exim Bank loan and built by CCECC, is another example of China's major infrastructural footprint in Nigeria⁵⁴.

In addition to these monumental projects, the China Harbor Engineering Company is developing a \$1.5 billion deepwater harbor complex in Lekki, Lagos, aimed at alleviating congestion at the existing port. The new facility will be able to handle 2.7 million containers annually and is expected to be surrounded by a large free trade zone, offering both Nigerian and international businesses opportunities for economic activity⁵⁵. While these developments are impressive, concerns remain about the long-term economic impact of these high-cost projects. Critics question whether the exorbitant costs of such investments will prove to be sustainable in the future.

Another area of concern is the communication satellite program initiated by China, which some view as a potential source of corruption and inefficiency. Despite the potential for progress, some observers argue that these satellite ventures have not lived up to expectations and have become tangled in bureaucratic red tape. Furthermore, the Ajaokuta-

Kaduna-Kano gas pipeline, a \$2.8 billion, 614-kilometer project funded by a consortium led by the China Petroleum Pipeline Bureau, faces its own challenges⁵⁶. The project, which also involves Nigerian companies, has seen little progress since its inauguration under the Buhari government, further highlighting the complex nature of some of these investments.

The rail system remains one of the key sectors benefiting from the partnership between Nigeria and China. After years of neglect, efforts to revive the rail network began under President Jonathan's administration, and subsequent support from the Buhari administration has been crucial. Through Chinese financing and technical expertise, Nigeria has seen significant progress, with projects such as the \$1.5 billion Lagos-Ibadan rail project and the ongoing Lagos-Kano rail development⁵³. These investments are expected to spur economic growth, create jobs, and relieve pressure on the country's overburdened road network.

Despite the benefits of these investments, there are growing concerns about the potential economic dominance of China in Nigeria. Many of the projects are funded through loans, raising questions about the long-term sustainability of Nigeria's debt burden. Critics also point out that Chinese firms involved in these projects tend to favor their own nationals over local workers, limiting opportunities for Nigeria's domestic workforce⁵⁷. Additionally, the use of local materials and innovative local talent has been insufficient, which undermines the potential for these projects to contribute to broader economic development. Nonetheless, China's extensive infrastructural investments in Nigeria, whether in rail, energy, or ports—remain a key component of the country's ongoing development.

Trade and investment relations between Nigeria and China have also flourished, with both countries benefiting from the exchange of goods and services across a variety of sectors⁵⁸.

China has become one of Nigeria's largest trading partners, with significant imports and exports taking place between the two nations. China has not only invested heavily in infrastructure but also in the supply of military hardware. In an effort to strengthen Nigeria's defense capabilities, China has provided the Nigerian military with various equipment, including tanks, self-propelled howitzers, and other weaponry, through a \$152 million deal. This has been particularly important in the context of Nigeria's ongoing battle with insurgent groups, including Boko Haram. The Chinese equipment, including VT-4 main battle tanks and SH-5 self-propelled artillery, has bolstered the Nigerian military's ability to address security challenges, illustrating the growing defense ties between the two countries⁵⁹.

ii. Trade and Investment

The trade relationship between Nigeria and China has also had a significant impact on job creation and economic growth. Chinese investments have created thousands of jobs, particularly in the construction and infrastructure sectors. The exchange of goods, such as oil and non-oil products, continues to drive the economic relationship forward, with both nations benefiting from this dynamic trade. However, concerns about the long-term economic implications of Chinese investment in Nigeria's critical sectors remain, with some questioning whether the country's growing reliance on Chinese capital will result in an imbalance of power in future years⁶⁰. Despite these reservations, the trade and investment ties between Nigeria and China continue to strengthen, positioning China as an essential partner in Nigeria's developmental trajectory.

Bilateral trade, especially the importation of Chinese consumer and manufacturing products, forms the foundation of the relationship between China and Nigeria. Nigeria is

predominantly a net importer of manufactured goods from China, with the influx of Chinese products dominating various sectors in Nigeria⁶¹. A notable aspect of this trade relationship is the significant involvement of Nigerian businesses, who play a crucial role in facilitating Chinese imports. Between 2010 and 2016, Nigerian imports from China saw a dramatic increase, nearly quadrupling in value. Major trading hubs such as Lagos, Onitsha, and Kano have seen Nigerian bulk buyers frequently traveling to Chinese industrial cities like Guangzhou. The Nigerian diaspora in China is believed to number in the hundreds of thousands, with a well-established community that has created its own social structures, including community institutions, informal court systems, and welfare programs⁶². Chinese-owned enterprises are active across various industries in Nigeria, including steel production, textile manufacturing, communications, information technology, and home consumer products.

Trade serves as a key driver of cooperation between the two countries. Despite setbacks from the global pandemic, the bilateral trade between China and Nigeria surged in 2021, reaching \$25.68 billion, marking a 33.3% increase from the previous year. Nigeria's exports to China also grew by 22.4% year-on-year, amounting to \$3.04 billion. The overall trade volume between the two nations saw a significant increase of about 142% from 2016 to 2021⁶³. China is now Nigeria's largest trading partner, and Nigeria has become China's third-largest commercial partner in Africa. This growing trade relationship is further evidenced by the trade volume of nearly \$5.4 billion in the first quarter of 2023 alone, with China reaffirming its commitment to supporting Nigeria in fostering development, promoting dialogue, and maintaining strong bilateral ties at all levels. China is Nigeria's

top civil engineering contracting market, second-largest export destination, and a major source of investment⁶⁴.

However, the expanding trade between the two countries has had some notable effects on Nigeria's domestic economy. Chinese textile firms operating in Nigeria have increased competition for local manufacturers, putting pressure on Nigeria's indigenous textile industry. The influx of low-cost, mass-produced items from China is gradually pushing Nigerian producers out of business, making it difficult for them to compete⁶⁵. The growing dominance of Chinese goods, especially in sectors such as textiles, has led to the decline of local production capabilities. Additionally, the Nigerian trade relationship with China has been criticized for being unbalanced, as Nigeria mainly exports limited commodities such as oil and gas, ores, seeds, fruits, and other raw materials to China. As a result, Nigeria's overall gains from the trade relationship have been relatively modest, with the country not benefitting from the full potential of its commercial exchanges with China⁶⁶.

Research into Nigeria-China trade relations suggests that Nigeria's performance in this bilateral relationship has been less fruitful due to the narrow scope of its exports. Between 1990 and 2018, Nigeria's exports to China have been restricted to a few raw materials, limiting the diversity and value of its trade contributions. In contrast, China has been able to capitalize on the lack of infrastructure in Nigeria, exporting goods to meet demands in sectors that would otherwise have been under-served⁶⁷. Nigeria's manufacturing sector, in particular, has struggled due to poor infrastructure, which has made it difficult for local businesses to thrive. This gap has allowed Chinese goods to dominate the Nigerian market, undermining the growth and competitiveness of Nigerian industries.

Despite these challenges, the relationship between China and Nigeria continues to be vital, with China serving as both an important trade partner and investor in Nigeria. However, there are concerns about the sustainability of this trade model, as Nigeria's reliance on raw material exports to China and the continued influx of Chinese goods into its markets may hinder the growth of its own manufacturing industries⁶⁸. The situation highlights the broader issues of infrastructure deficits, economic dependence on exports of primary commodities, and the need for Nigeria to diversify its economy in order to fully benefit from its bilateral relationship with China.

iii. Transfer of Technology

China has played a significant role in supporting the transfer of technology to Nigeria, particularly in the fields of information and communication technology (ICT) and telecommunications. This support has greatly enhanced Nigeria's access to digital services, contributing to the growth of its technology sector. Over time, the ICT sector has become one of the most valuable global industries, and Nigeria's ICT industry has seen impressive growth, increasing from 3.08% of GDP in 2001 to 18.44% of GDP in 2022⁶⁹. A major driver of this growth has been the telecommunications sector, which expanded significantly after the privatization of state-owned enterprises and the sale of GSM licenses to private companies in 2001.

Chinese companies like Huawei and Zhong Xing Telecommunication Equipment Company Ltd. (ZTE) have played a vital role in developing the infrastructure for Nigeria's digital economy, including the ongoing construction of 5G networks. Chinese fintech companies, such as Opay, have also contributed significantly to Nigeria's digital landscape, with Opay boasting over 18 million registered users. Additionally, Egate, a Chinese e-commerce

company, is working to establish itself as a leading cross-border logistics and online payment platform in Nigeria⁷⁰.

The economic policies and strategies employed by China, particularly its focus on technology and infrastructure development, have been a key factor in its remarkable economic growth, which has lifted around 800 million people out of poverty in the past four decades. In contrast, Nigeria faces significant challenges, with 133 million people, or 63% of the population, living in multidimensional poverty⁷¹. As China continues to influence Nigeria's digital economy, it is essential for the country to ensure that relevant agencies, such as the Federal Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, and the Nigerian Communications Commission, are involved in shaping the direction of the bilateral relationship.

In addition to Chinese firms, indigenous companies such as Global Communication (GLOBACOM) and First Atlantic Semiconductors and Microelectronics (FASMICRO) are also contributing significantly to Nigeria's technological growth. Their involvement plays a key role in adapting and advancing local technological capabilities. The combination of foreign and local contributions has led to a sustainable increase in Nigeria's tech sector, which supports national security and fosters socioeconomic development⁷².

China's involvement extends beyond just technology, as it has been active in several other sectors in Nigeria, including energy, education, cultural exchange, medical cooperation, capacity building, and multilateral engagements. These contributions have been crucial in Nigeria's development, and as the bilateral relationship continues to evolve, it is vital that both countries continue to work together in these diverse areas to foster mutual growth⁷³.

2.1.4 Media

In contemporary times, political transitions across the globe, coupled with the rapid advancement of digital technology, have transformed the manner in which governments exert influence over the media. In most countries, the era of strict pre-publication censorship or the requirement of government pre-approval before releasing news or information has largely faded into history, although some exceptions remain⁷⁴. These political changes have redefined the mechanisms of control that states use, shifting away from overt restrictions to more subtle means of influence. Media and society, as two interdependent entities, are closely connected, and this relationship has only deepened in recent years. The far-reaching impact of the media is visible in every aspect of modern life, as it not only reflects the dynamics of society but also actively shapes how it functions and what it represents⁷⁵.

Mass media, in its broadest sense, refers to all the channels through which information is disseminated from a single source to a vast, scattered, and diverse audience. It serves as the vehicle for transmitting messages, ideas, knowledge, culture, and values to large groups of people, often simultaneously⁷⁶. From a technical standpoint, mass media represents the tools and devices used by communicators to deliver their content across distance or time in a mediated setting. In this regard, mass media is not merely about the content but about the methods and technologies employed to ensure communication on a massive scale. Such media are therefore the essential and modern means of reaching a dispersed and heterogeneous public quickly, often instantaneously. The major examples include traditional outlets such as radio, television, newspapers, and magazines, as well as the more recent but equally dominant force of the internet⁷⁷.

Because of their position as the primary source of information for much of the public, mass media outlets wield significant power. They are capable of shaping opinions, framing issues, and even influencing political processes. The presence of bias, whether democratic or otherwise, within media coverage can deeply affect the way individuals perceive issues and respond to them⁷⁸. This public reliance on media content grants the press and other platforms the ability to set political or democratic agendas, determining which matters are elevated to the level of public debate. In democratic contexts, this function is particularly vital since it ensures that citizens are educated about their rights and responsibilities, enabling them to engage meaningfully in governance and decision-making. Hence, media outlets serve not just as information providers but also as key instruments for civic education and democratic participation.

Beyond its political role, mass media can be defined more generally as a large-scale communication system that penetrates nearly every aspect of society, touching the lives of almost all individuals to some extent. The concept of “media” derives from the notion of a medium, which is a channel through which ideas, messages, or information is transmitted⁷⁹. In this light, mass media refers to the wide range of communication channels that characterise modern societies, particularly those associated with print and electronic forms. It can also be understood as the organised, institutional means of transmitting messages openly and rapidly to countless receivers. Unlike interpersonal communication, the mass media function as impersonal sources that reach vast and anonymous audiences, producing content that is consumed by millions at the same time⁸⁰.

The purpose of mass media lies in its ability to deliver information to large groups of people. However, its significance extends beyond this basic function, for it is also highly

influential in shaping perceptions, guiding behaviour, and moulding collective thought. Each medium, whether print, broadcast, or digital, has a unique effect on its audience, influencing them in distinct ways⁸¹. The interaction between media and society is therefore reciprocal: media affects the way society operates, while society itself influences the media's content and priorities. Their importance stems largely from the fact that they shape modes of perception, discourse, and action, playing a central role in the functioning of modern politics and culture. Given the size of their audiences and their ability to transmit information widely, the media's impact on social life is immense and cannot be overstated⁸².

Scholars often summarise the influence of mass media metaphorically as oil, glue, and dynamite. When compared to oil, media functions as a lubricant that helps individuals adapt to the realities of life by providing explanations and offering solutions that are deemed socially acceptable⁸³. In this sense, media ensures that society continues to run smoothly, maintaining stability by diffusing information that aids in adjustment and problem-solving. As glue, media reinforces social cohesion by fostering communication and providing shared topics of discussion that link even strangers together.

Over time, this ongoing flow of communication strengthens the bonds that hold communities intact, reinforcing the fabric of social unity. Yet, as dynamite, mass media also has the potential to disrupt and divide, as its messages can ignite tensions and conflicts. Historical examples illustrate this destructive power vividly, such as the propaganda campaigns that preceded the Russian Revolution of 1917 or the media-driven narratives that facilitated Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933⁸⁴. In more positive terms,

the press and magazines in Nigeria were instrumental in galvanising support for independence, playing a decisive role in the eventual attainment of sovereignty in 1960.

Thus, the mass media stand at the centre of modern communication, simultaneously capable of informing, uniting, and dividing. They reflect the complexities of society while also shaping them, operating as powerful institutions whose reach extends to nearly every individual. Whether as instruments of democracy, agents of social cohesion, or tools of propaganda, their influence is both profound and enduring.

2.1.4.1 The Role of Social Media in Modern Diplomacy

The role of social media in modern diplomacy has become increasingly significant, transforming how nations engage with one another and the global public. Over recent years, social media platforms have reshaped diplomatic strategies, giving governments and diplomatic missions a direct and accessible means of communication that transcends traditional diplomatic channels⁸⁵. These platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, serve as tools not just for communication, but also for cultivating soft power, engaging in public diplomacy, and shaping national narratives.

In this era of digital diplomacy, the traditional model of diplomacy, which relied on face-to-face meetings and formal diplomatic channels, has been augmented by the speed and accessibility of social media. Social media platforms enable governments to engage directly with their citizens and foreign audiences without the mediation of the traditional media⁸⁶. This shift has allowed for faster, more dynamic exchanges and has redefined what it means to be a diplomat in the 21st century.

For countries like Nigeria, which is strategically located within Africa and plays an essential role in the continent's political and economic sphere, social media has become a vital tool for projecting its influence. Through digital platforms, Nigeria's government and its diplomatic representatives share information regarding its political stability, economic initiatives, and cultural heritage, creating a more transparent, engaging, and accessible public diplomacy⁸⁷. Social media serves not only as a promotional tool but as an active means of responding to the international community's perceptions of Nigeria.

However, the use of social media in diplomacy is not without its challenges. In Nigeria's case, limited infrastructure and access to technology, particularly in rural areas, can hinder the effectiveness of social media-driven diplomatic efforts. In addition, social media platforms are often vulnerable to manipulation, which can distort the diplomatic messages a country seeks to send⁸⁸. Fake news, disinformation, and malicious cyberattacks have become growing concerns, making it imperative for nations to use these platforms with caution and to develop strategies to counter misinformation.

For China, social media has been harnessed with particular purpose. Despite the Chinese government's strict control over domestic media and the Great Firewall that limits access to international platforms, China has used social media to build an international narrative of strength, assertiveness, and global leadership⁸⁹. The Chinese government's approach has been particularly noteworthy with the "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy, characterized by a more combative and direct form of communication with the global audience. This style of diplomacy has garnered significant attention and often led to diplomatic confrontations. It is also a means for China to promote its global initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, further shaping how the world perceives China's role in the international arena⁹⁰.

Bilateral relations between Nigeria and China, social media plays a crucial role in bridging the distance between governments and their populations. These platforms help both governments engage directly with their respective citizens and the broader international community, often providing real-time updates on joint initiatives⁹¹. In areas like trade, infrastructure development, and cultural exchange, social media has enabled both countries to highlight their collaborations and showcase their shared goals. This direct communication allows the Nigerian and Chinese governments to manage their public images and respond to the global discourse surrounding their relationship.

Moreover, the engagement facilitated by social media platforms provides citizens, non-governmental organizations, and think tanks a space to participate in diplomatic discussions. By allowing for more voices to be heard in diplomatic matters, social media democratizes international relations to an extent, enabling citizens to engage with the diplomacy of their nation in ways that were once not possible. This engagement enhances transparency and accountability, allowing citizens to better understand their country's diplomatic priorities and actions⁵⁴.

Despite the potential advantages, the strategic use of social media in diplomacy requires addressing key challenges. Governments must grapple with the ethical implications of digital communication, particularly the risk of misinformation and the challenge of maintaining the integrity of their diplomatic efforts. The viral nature of social media means that messages—whether intended or not—can spread rapidly and often beyond the control of the initial source⁷⁷. Therefore, government agencies and diplomatic missions need to develop proactive strategies for managing digital narratives, mitigating the spread of false information, and responding swiftly to crises.

Furthermore, there are concerns about the unequal access to technology, which exacerbates the digital divide. While some countries have robust digital infrastructures, others, particularly in developing regions, face significant challenges in terms of internet access and digital literacy⁹². This inequality means that the potential of social media as a diplomatic tool is not universally accessible. For countries like Nigeria, improving access to technology and digital education is critical for ensuring that their digital diplomacy is inclusive and effective.

Looking forward, the role of social media in diplomacy is only expected to grow. Advancements in technology, including artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and data analytics, will offer new possibilities for how governments engage in digital diplomacy. These tools could provide more immersive experiences for international audiences, create personalized diplomatic interactions, and enable more effective monitoring of public sentiment⁹³.

In the case of Nigeria and China, the future of social media in diplomacy will likely involve even deeper engagement, with both countries capitalizing on emerging technologies to enhance their diplomatic strategies⁹⁴. For Nigeria, this could mean further diversifying its approach to digital diplomacy by integrating more localized content and strategies that resonate with its diverse population. For China, its continued assertive use of social media could shift the global narrative, shaping perceptions of the country's growing global influence.

2.1.4.2 Social Media and Public Diplomacy from the Global Perspective

Social media has dramatically reshaped the dynamics of public diplomacy, enabling states and non-state actors to engage with global audiences in novel and impactful ways. This shift has redefined how diplomacy is conducted, moving it beyond traditional, state-centric mechanisms to more open and interactive communication channels. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have become indispensable tools in global diplomatic efforts, offering diplomats direct access to both domestic and international audiences⁹⁵.

The transformation brought about by social media has greatly impacted how states communicate and respond to events on the world stage. Through these platforms, diplomats can convey official messages swiftly, bypassing traditional media intermediaries. This capability is particularly critical in moments of crisis, where the ability to communicate quickly can influence public opinion and shape the international community's response⁹⁶. The role of social media in shaping public perception cannot be overstated. It provides states with a platform to project their values, policies, and cultural narratives to a global audience, carefully crafting messages that serve their diplomatic objectives. Beyond state narratives, social media enables a wide range of actors, including activists, civil society organizations, and citizens, to engage in the diplomatic conversation. This democratization of discourse has introduced a more diverse range of perspectives, enriching the global conversation while also creating new challenges. The interactive nature of social media platforms allows for ongoing dialogues between states and the public, with feedback loops formed through likes, shares, and comments that influence the direction and tone of diplomatic communication⁹⁷.

Social media has also introduced new dynamics in international relations, particularly in terms of soft power. States can utilize social media to reach global audiences, showcasing their culture, values, and foreign policy objectives in ways that resonate with citizens around the world⁸⁷. However, this power to influence global opinion through social media is not without its pitfalls. The speed with which information spreads on these platforms also means that misinformation and disinformation can take hold quickly, potentially undermining trust in diplomatic institutions and inflaming international tensions.

The ability of state and non-state actors to manipulate narratives through these digital channels poses a serious challenge to the integrity of international relations. Furthermore, the public nature of social media interactions means that every diplomatic statement is subject to public scrutiny and potential misinterpretation, which can lead to unintended diplomatic consequences⁹⁸. The transparency afforded by social media requires diplomats to be more cautious and strategic in their digital communications, as they must constantly monitor how their messages are received and interpreted across diverse cultural and political contexts.

Despite its potential, the use of social media for public diplomacy also presents numerous challenges. One of the most pressing concerns is the spread of false or misleading information. The anonymity afforded by social media platforms can allow for the rapid dissemination of rumors and fabricated narratives, making it increasingly difficult to discern fact from fiction. This proliferation of misinformation has serious implications for global trust, not just in diplomatic communications, but in international institutions and alliances as well⁹⁹. Additionally, the ethical use of social media for diplomatic purposes remains a contested issue. While social media enables greater access to information, it also

raises questions about the authenticity of messages shared and whether such communications border on propaganda rather than genuine dialogue.

The role of social media in diplomacy also intersects with issues of equity and inclusion. Despite the widespread access to digital platforms, there remains a significant digital divide, with some populations still excluded from the global diplomatic conversation. The uneven distribution of internet access and social media usage across the globe creates a scenario where certain regions or demographic groups are underrepresented in digital diplomacy¹⁰⁰. This disparity raises important questions about whose voices are heard in the diplomatic process and how to ensure that all global citizens have a seat at the table.

As we look to the future, the role of social media in public diplomacy is likely to expand and evolve. The continuous advancement of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and blockchain, offers new possibilities for engaging with global audiences. These technologies promise to create more immersive and interactive diplomatic experiences, allowing for personalized engagement that could redefine how diplomatic messages are communicated¹⁰¹. However, these technological advancements also introduce new challenges, particularly in terms of data privacy, cybersecurity, and the ethical use of these tools in diplomatic efforts. States must carefully navigate these new technologies, ensuring that they do not compromise the integrity or ethical standards of their diplomatic missions.

Social media has become an integral part of modern public diplomacy, offering both significant opportunities and complex challenges. It has redefined how states communicate and engage with the global public, shaping perceptions and influencing international relations in ways that were previously unimaginable¹⁰². However, the rapid spread of

information, the potential for misinformation, and the ethical dilemmas raised by digital diplomacy require careful management. As technology continues to evolve, so too will the methods and strategies used in public diplomacy. The future of diplomacy is increasingly digital, and understanding the dynamics of social media will be critical for states seeking to navigate this new era of global engagement.

2.1.5 Geopolitics

Geopolitics, as a concept, has evolved over centuries, transforming with the changing dynamics of international relations, power structures, and global conflicts. The term itself embodies the intersection of geography, political power, and strategic interests, influencing how states navigate their relationships with one another. While the broad definition of geopolitics encompasses the influence of geographical factors on global politics, its nuances have been debated extensively in scholarly works. As global political systems shift, understanding geopolitics through different lenses becomes imperative. In this context, this essay aims to critically review the various definitions of geopolitics and examine their relevance in understanding contemporary geopolitical relations, specifically focusing on the relations between Nigeria, the West, and China in West Africa¹⁰³.

The term “geopolitics” is often regarded as the study of the strategic interactions of states and the power dynamics influenced by geographical elements. Initially, geopolitics sought to address the territorial ambitions of states, emphasizing the importance of natural resources, borders, and geographic positioning in determining the extent of political influence¹⁰⁴. This definition, though useful, has evolved over time to incorporate non-territorial factors such as economic influence, cultural connections, and technological advancements. As a result, the definitions of geopolitics vary, with some emphasizing the

role of geography in power struggles, while others focus on ideological, economic, and technological factors that shape modern geopolitical landscapes.

One of the earliest and most well-known formulations of geopolitics was based on the idea that geographic factors, such as proximity to vital resources or strategic locations, determine the power dynamics between states. According to this perspective, a nation's geopolitical strength is intrinsically linked to its ability to control or influence key geographic regions¹⁰⁵. This understanding reflects the notion that states must secure and defend their positions within specific geographical areas to maintain or increase their influence. This definition historically tied geopolitics to territorial control, manifesting in wars of expansion and conquest, which were seen as natural extensions of a state's geopolitical strategy.

However, this definition began to change as the world became more interconnected. In the modern world, borders are often less definitive in dictating a state's power and influence. Political power today is frequently exercised through economic, technological, and cultural means, rather than through mere territorial control. As such, many scholars argue that the concept of geopolitics should no longer be confined solely to territorial borders or physical resources, but rather should include an examination of how states use their political, economic, and cultural tools to exert power on the global stage¹⁰⁶.

The shifting nature of geopolitics became evident in the 20th century, as the traditional understanding of geopolitics as a territorial struggle increasingly gave way to new dynamics. During the Cold War, for example, ideological alignment, rather than geography, often dictated the geopolitical behavior of states. Countries aligned themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union, not based on geographic location, but on shared

ideologies and strategic interests. In this era, geopolitics transcended geography, as the influence of ideologies, alliances, and economic systems played a pivotal role in shaping the global order¹⁰⁷.

In contemporary international relations, geopolitics is often defined as the strategic behavior of states within an interconnected global system, where economic, political, technological, and cultural factors contribute to shaping power relations. Modern definitions reflect the complexities of global interactions, emphasizing the role of non-geographic elements in geopolitical calculations¹⁰⁸. As countries grow more interconnected, new factors such as cyber warfare, financial systems, and trade agreements are becoming crucial elements of geopolitical strategy. For instance, economic sanctions, trade agreements, and technological dominance are now recognized as integral to the geopolitical strategies of leading powers.

Geopolitics in the 21st century also recognizes the importance of global institutions and multilateral agreements. In the past, geopolitics was largely a state-to-state interaction, but with the rise of global institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund, geopolitics has expanded to include multilateral discussions and the influence of non-state actors. The actions and influence of multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and even influential individuals now factor into geopolitical considerations¹⁰⁹.

An evaluation of the above definitions of geopolitics reveals that the concept has expanded from a narrow focus on territorial struggles to encompass a broader spectrum of political, economic, and cultural factors. Geopolitics now includes global trade dynamics, digital economies, and the shifting influence of rising powers such as China and India. This

evolution reflects the changing nature of global power dynamics, where the global south and east increasingly play significant roles in shaping world politics¹¹⁰.

In examining the contemporary relevance of these definitions in West Africa, particularly in relation to Nigeria, the West, and China, it becomes apparent that geopolitics continues to be a significant tool for understanding regional dynamics. In the context of Nigeria, its strategic positioning in West Africa, its large population, and its rich natural resources make it a critical player in the geopolitical landscape of the region. Nigeria's relations with Western powers and China are shaped by both geographical realities and shifting strategic interests¹¹¹.

Nigeria's geographical location in West Africa makes it a key player in the broader African geopolitical context. Its proximity to key global shipping routes and its control over critical energy resources, including oil, place it at the center of international geopolitical concerns. In this context, Nigeria's relations with the West are largely shaped by economic considerations, including trade, security, and energy. The West, particularly former colonial powers such as the United Kingdom and France, has long maintained close ties with Nigeria due to its resource wealth and strategic location¹¹². However, these relationships are increasingly influenced by changing global dynamics, including the rise of China as a major player in the region.

China's growing influence in West Africa, particularly in Nigeria, reflects a shift in the global balance of power. China's investments in infrastructure, energy, and trade partnerships in Nigeria have made it a significant geopolitical actor in the region. While the West has traditionally dominated African geopolitics, China's growing presence in the continent, including in Nigeria, presents a challenge to Western influence¹¹³. China's

engagement in the region is driven not only by economic interests but also by its broader geopolitical strategy to secure access to critical resources and expand its political influence.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) plays a pivotal role in shaping Nigeria's geopolitical landscape. Through large-scale infrastructure projects, China is working to strengthen its economic and political ties with Nigeria, offering an alternative to the Western-dominated model of international engagement. These investments are reshaping Nigeria's geopolitical orientation, as the country increasingly turns to China for support in areas such as infrastructure development, trade, and technology¹¹⁴. The growing presence of China in Nigeria also has implications for the West's traditional influence in the region. As Nigeria strengthens its ties with China, the West may find itself facing a diminished geopolitical influence in the country. This shift is not only economic but also strategic, as China offers Nigeria an alternative source of support that is not tied to Western demands for political reforms or human rights considerations.

The complex geopolitical relationships between Nigeria, the West, and China illustrate the contemporary relevance of geopolitics in the region. While geographical factors continue to play a role in shaping power dynamics, the influence of economic and strategic considerations is increasingly dominant. Nigeria's relations with China and the West reflect a balancing act between competing geopolitical interests, with the country navigating between these two global powers to secure its strategic interests¹¹⁵.

The concept of geopolitics has evolved significantly over time, reflecting the changing nature of global power dynamics. Initially rooted in territorial considerations, geopolitics now encompasses a range of economic, political, technological, and cultural factors that influence global relations. The definitions of geopolitics examined in this essay highlight

the complexity of the concept and its relevance in understanding contemporary global politics. In West Africa, particularly in the case of Nigeria, geopolitics continues to play a crucial role in shaping the country's relations with the West and China¹¹⁶. As global power structures continue to shift, understanding the evolving nature of geopolitics will be essential for analyzing future geopolitical developments in the region.

2.1.5.1 Features and Significance of Geopolitics among Nation States

Geopolitics is a multifaceted discipline that examines the intersection of geography, political power, and global relations. It focuses on how geographic features, such as climate, terrain, natural resources, and strategic locations, shape political behaviour and influence international dynamics. As global interactions increasingly shape the global landscape, the study of geopolitics has become essential for understanding how countries and international organizations position themselves for dominance, survival, and cooperation¹¹⁷. The following explores key features of geopolitics in greater detail, examining how each aspect contributes to the broader geopolitical discourse.

Geographical determinism is a theory that posits geography as a major driver of societal development. This perspective suggests that a region's physical environment, its climate, terrain, and natural resources, greatly influences the political, economic, and social behavior of its inhabitants. The idea traces its roots back to early geopolitical theorists who believed that geography shapes the success or failure of civilizations. In this framework, the natural environment determines the type of resources available, the development of infrastructures like transportation networks, and even the defense strategies employed by states¹¹⁸.

For instance, the natural barriers presented by mountains and seas have long served as defensive advantages. In ancient times, empires such as India were shielded from invasions by the towering Himalayas, which served as an effective natural defense. Similarly, nations like the United Kingdom have benefited from their insular geography, which has historically protected them from many external invasions. However, critics of geographical determinism emphasize that human ingenuity and technological advancements often overcome geographical limitations. While geography undoubtedly impacts societal development, it does not solely define the course of history. Technology, culture, and international cooperation also play critical roles in shaping the development trajectory of nations¹¹⁹.

The distribution of resources is one of the most influential factors in geopolitics, impacting national security, economic prosperity, and global relations. Countries endowed with abundant resources, such as oil, minerals, and water, often wield significant power in global politics. These resources not only fuel economic growth but also provide leverage in diplomatic negotiations and international alliances. Resource-rich countries may use their assets to assert influence, either through trade or military power¹²⁰.

On the other hand, nations with limited access to essential resources face economic challenges and may develop foreign policies aimed at securing access to these commodities. The strategic importance of resources can lead to competition, conflicts, and alliances. For example, the Middle East, which is rich in oil reserves, plays a pivotal role in global energy markets and has become a focal point for geopolitical tensions. Nations like Saudi Arabia and Iraq have used their oil wealth to influence global markets and secure military alliances with powerful states¹²¹. Conversely, countries without substantial

resource wealth may align with resource-rich nations or seek alternative sources of energy and raw materials to ensure their survival in a competitive international system.

Furthermore, resource distribution also influences the environmental sustainability of nations. As the world grapples with climate change and resource depletion, access to renewable resources such as water and arable land is becoming increasingly critical for global stability. The management and protection of these resources are becoming central tenets of geopolitical strategy, as nations vie for control over increasingly scarce and valuable assets¹²².

Strategic locations are geographic areas that hold significant political and military value due to their positioning within key global systems. These locations are often pivotal to trade, security, and military operations, and their control can shift the balance of power in international relations. Strategic locations include chokepoints, such as narrow seas and canals, vital trade routes, and border regions between rival nations¹²³. These locations often act as leverage points in geopolitics, shaping the strategies of states seeking to secure or control them.

For example, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz are two of the most strategically important maritime chokepoints in the world. The Suez Canal, linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea, serves as a crucial conduit for international trade, particularly for oil and goods passing between Europe and Asia. Control over this vital waterway is of immense geopolitical importance, as any disruption could have far-reaching economic consequences¹²⁴. Similarly, the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway through which a significant portion of the world's oil supply passes, holds strategic importance in global energy markets. Countries in the region, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, have long been

engaged in geopolitical maneuvers to control or influence these locations, recognizing their power to impact global trade and military strategies.

Additionally, border regions, particularly those in contested areas, can become zones of heightened military activity and political tension. For instance, the conflict between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir region, a politically sensitive border area, is one of the most enduring territorial disputes in modern geopolitics. Control over such regions not only has economic implications but can also shape national security strategies, influence military alliances, and provoke international interventions¹²⁵. Thus, the importance of strategic locations in geopolitics cannot be overstated, as they remain central to the stability and security of global systems.

Cultural and ethnic factors are significant drivers of geopolitical behavior, shaping national identities, alliances, and conflicts. Countries with diverse ethnic and cultural groups often experience internal tensions as they navigate competing identities and historical grievances. In multi-ethnic states, disparities in power, wealth, and representation can lead to instability and conflict, both internally and externally. The Balkan conflict, the Rwandan genocide, and the ongoing struggles in Sudan are tragic examples of how cultural and ethnic factors can lead to violence and political disintegration¹²⁶.

On the global stage, cultural and ethnic ties can serve as both a unifying force and a source of division. Shared cultural values and ethnic backgrounds often strengthen regional cooperation, as seen in organizations like the Arab League, where member states share linguistic, cultural, and historical ties. Similarly, the European Union draws on common cultural and historical values to promote cooperation and solidarity among its member states. Conversely, ethnic divisions can contribute to the emergence of nationalist

movements, separatist agendas, and territorial disputes, which challenge the existing political order¹²⁷.

Technological advancements have dramatically reshaped the global geopolitical landscape, influencing military strategies, economic power, and national security. Innovations in communication technologies, military equipment, and economic infrastructure have empowered nations to exert influence more effectively and to address emerging global challenges. For instance, advancements in information technology, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity have transformed the ways in which nations conduct espionage, warfare, and diplomacy¹²⁸. Cybersecurity has become a central component of national defense strategies, as countries increasingly rely on digital infrastructure for economic activities, governance, and communication.

Military technologies, such as drones, precision-guided weapons, and nuclear capabilities, have changed the nature of warfare, allowing countries to project military power and influence without the need for traditional large-scale combat. For instance, countries with advanced drone technology can conduct targeted strikes on adversaries, while cyberattacks can cripple critical infrastructure without the need for conventional military action¹²⁹. These advancements offer states the ability to act in ways that are less overt, reducing the risk of direct military confrontation while still exerting influence.

Economic technologies, including the development of renewable energy sources and automation, also play a critical role in geopolitics. Countries leading in these technologies gain a competitive edge in global trade and industry, securing their position as economic powerhouses. As the world shifts towards more sustainable energy sources, nations with access to renewable resources, such as wind or solar energy, are positioned to lead the

global energy market. In addition, advancements in automation and artificial intelligence are revolutionizing manufacturing industries, enhancing productivity, and changing the dynamics of international trade¹³⁰. Thus, technological advancements are a key driver of modern geopolitics, reshaping the global order and altering the balance of power among nations. As new technologies continue to emerge, nations must adapt their geopolitical strategies to maintain their competitive edge and influence in an increasingly interconnected world.

2.1.6 China's Rising Influence in West Africa

China's expanding influence in West Africa, particularly in countries like Nigeria, has been characterized by a multifaceted approach encompassing economic partnerships, infrastructural development, and strategic diplomacy. This engagement has led to significant shifts in the region's social structures, governance, and geopolitical alignments. Economically, China has emerged as a pivotal partner for West African nations, offering an alternative to traditional Western financial institutions. Through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has invested heavily in infrastructure projects across the region¹³¹.

These investments include the construction of roads, railways, ports, and energy facilities, which have been instrumental in enhancing connectivity and stimulating economic growth. In Nigeria, for instance, Chinese firms have been involved in revitalizing key sectors, including energy and manufacturing, through substantial investments. A notable example is the \$1.2 billion agreement between Nigeria and a Chinese state-owned company to refurbish a gas processing plant, aiming to bolster the nation's aluminum production capacity¹³².

Socially, China's presence has introduced new dynamics in local communities. The influx of Chinese businesses and workers has led to increased employment opportunities in various sectors, including construction and services. Additionally, China has established educational programs, such as the "Luban Workshops," which provide vocational training to local populations, thereby enhancing skill development and fostering cultural exchange. However, this growing presence has also sparked debates about economic dominance and the displacement of local enterprises, particularly in retail and small-scale industries¹³³.

Governance-wise, China's approach contrasts with Western models by emphasizing non-interference and mutual respect for sovereignty. This stance has been appealing to many West African governments, especially those seeking to avoid the conditionalities often attached to Western aid. China's "no strings attached" policy has facilitated smoother diplomatic relations and has been perceived as a pragmatic approach to development assistance. In Nigeria, the elevation of bilateral relations to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" underscores the deepening ties and mutual interests between the two nations¹³⁴.

Geopolitically, China's engagement has led to a reorientation of alliances in West Africa. As African nations increasingly turn to China for development support, there has been a noticeable shift away from traditional Western partners. This realignment is evident in the growing participation of West African countries in forums like the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), where collective development goals are discussed and pursued¹³⁵. China's influence in these multilateral settings has provided African nations with a platform to assert their interests and advocate for a more balanced global order.

China's rising influence in West Africa has brought about significant changes in the region's social fabric, governance structures, and geopolitical affiliations. While the

economic benefits are evident, the long-term implications of this engagement will depend on the ability of West African nations to navigate the complexities of these partnerships, ensuring that they lead to sustainable development and equitable growth.

2.1.7 Social Media and Educational Exchange between Nigeria and China

Social media has become a pivotal force in shaping the landscape of educational exchanges between Nigeria and China. The role of digital platforms in enhancing educational cooperation, particularly in areas such as student exchanges, academic partnerships, and online learning initiatives, has been transformative. In the realm of student exchanges, social media has opened up new avenues for engagement, enabling students from both countries to connect and collaborate beyond the traditional physical exchange programs¹³⁶.

Social media platforms allow students to communicate in real-time, share academic resources, and engage in discussions. This virtual interaction provides an opportunity to expand students' worldviews, fostering cross-cultural understanding and broadening their academic and social horizons. Furthermore, these platforms offer a space for students to seek academic support, exchange ideas, and build lasting networks that transcend institutional boundaries. These connections help prepare students for a globally connected world, where the ability to collaborate with peers from diverse backgrounds is crucial¹⁸⁷.

Academic partnerships between Nigerian and Chinese institutions have also been significantly bolstered by the use of social media. Universities and academic organizations in both countries have turned to digital platforms to initiate and sustain collaborative projects, share research findings, and host academic events. Through webinars, online

conferences, and collaborative research efforts, these institutions overcome geographic and resource-based limitations, fostering a more integrated academic community⁸⁹. These platforms also serve as tools for promoting joint ventures, providing a space for scholars to share methodologies, best practices, and innovative ideas. As a result, social media contributes to the global visibility of both Nigerian and Chinese academic institutions, enabling them to attract international collaborators and increase their influence in global academic circles.

Another key area where social media has made a significant impact is in the promotion of online learning initiatives. In response to global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions have increasingly relied on digital platforms to continue providing quality education. Social media is at the forefront of this shift, helping to distribute online courses, lectures, and academic resources⁹⁰. For instance, platforms like XuetangX in China offer courses in various disciplines, giving Nigerian students access to Chinese educational content and facilitating cross-border learning. These platforms not only provide academic materials but also create interactive learning environments where students can engage with peers, participate in discussions, and receive feedback from instructors. This has led to an enriching educational experience that blends content delivery with collaborative learning.

However, the integration of social media into educational exchanges is not without its challenges. While the potential of digital platforms is vast, issues such as digital literacy, internet connectivity, and cultural differences can hinder the effective use of these tools. For instance, not all students may have access to reliable internet or the necessary digital skills to navigate these platforms efficiently. This digital divide can limit the benefits that

social media offers, particularly in rural or less-developed areas¹³⁷. To address these challenges, educational institutions in both Nigeria and China must focus on enhancing digital literacy and providing necessary training to students and educators. This can help bridge the gap and ensure that social media is leveraged effectively to its full potential.

Additionally, the abundance of information available on social media necessitates a critical approach to media literacy. Students need to be equipped with the skills to discern credible sources of information from unreliable ones. Educational programs that focus on critical media literacy can help students navigate the digital landscape responsibly, ensuring that the knowledge they gain is both accurate and meaningful¹³⁸. Social media plays a crucial role in enhancing educational exchanges between Nigeria and China. While facilitating student interactions, fostering academic partnerships, and promoting online learning initiatives, social media has bridged geographical divides and created new opportunities for collaboration. Although there are challenges to overcome, the proactive use of social media in educational frameworks has the potential to transform the educational experience for students and scholars alike, fostering a more interconnected and collaborative global academic community¹³⁹.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Soft Power Theory

Soft power refers to a form of influence in international relations that relies on attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion or force. It is distinct from hard power, which involves the use of military or economic force to achieve desired outcomes. Soft power encompasses cultural influence, political ideals, diplomatic strategies, and the capacity to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. The theory suggests that

countries can achieve their foreign policy objectives by making others want what they want, often through the promotion of values, culture, education, and media¹⁴⁰.

The proponents of soft power argue that it is a more sustainable and ethical approach to international influence, compared to hard power, which can create resistance and resentment. It emphasizes the importance of non-coercive methods such as the use of media, cultural exchanges, public diplomacy, and international collaboration. The hypothesis of soft power theory posits that nations can expand their global influence and secure their objectives through these means, thereby creating a global image that attracts others to align with their interests¹⁴¹.

The theory's main assertion is that a country's global standing can be enhanced by its ability to project a desirable image and influence other nations' perceptions. Rather than forcing compliance, soft power invites cooperation through the charm of a nation's values, cultural export, and diplomatic approaches. This has become increasingly relevant in the age of global communication, where social media platforms play a central role in shaping public perception and international relations¹⁴².

In examining the influence of social media on public diplomacy and international relations, particularly between Nigeria and China, it becomes clear that soft power is a critical mechanism. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, provide an accessible and wide-reaching medium through which countries can project their values, culture, and political narratives. In the case of Nigeria and China, these platforms allow both nations to engage with global audiences and shape public opinion in ways that were not possible through traditional media outlets¹⁴³.

For Nigeria, social media has become an essential tool for broadcasting its cultural heritage, promoting tourism, and enhancing its diplomatic reach. Through digital media, Nigeria can showcase its music, films, fashion, and cuisine, which resonate with both local and global audiences. This cultural export fosters a sense of belonging and creates positive associations with the country, making it more attractive on the global stage. Additionally, Nigeria's diplomatic outreach via social media platforms enables it to communicate directly with other nations, bypassing traditional diplomatic channels and engaging with citizens and governments on a more personal and immediate level¹⁴⁴.

China, on the other hand, has effectively used social media to reinforce its global influence, emphasizing its economic rise and technological advancements. Platforms like WeChat and Weibo allow China to showcase its development model and the benefits of its political system. Through these platforms, China engages with African nations, including Nigeria, presenting itself as a partner in development and economic growth. This portrayal aligns with China's soft power strategy of promoting its Belt and Road Initiative and fostering closer ties with African countries¹⁴⁵.

Social media's role in public diplomacy extends beyond cultural promotion; it also allows countries to respond rapidly to global events and shape international discourse. In the case of Nigeria-China relations, both countries use social media to engage with global debates on issues such as trade, security, and climate change, further solidifying their positions in the international arena¹⁴⁶. Through these digital engagements, they can project their leadership on various global challenges, thereby enhancing their influence. However, the influence of social media in public diplomacy is not without challenges. Misinformation, cyber-attacks, and the spread of fake news can undermine the credibility of a nation's soft

power efforts. Both Nigeria and China must navigate these issues carefully, as the digital space can be a double-edged sword in international relations.

Soft power theory remains highly relevant in the context of social media's role in modern diplomacy. The use of social media by both Nigeria and China illustrates the growing importance of non-coercive methods in shaping international relations. These digital platforms offer a unique avenue for countries to project their cultural values, engage in diplomatic dialogue, and strengthen their influence on the global stage, all key components of soft power theory¹⁴⁷.

2.2.2 Constructivism Theory

Constructivism is a social theory that examines the ways in which individuals and groups construct meaning within their societies, especially in the context of international relations. Unlike realist and liberal theories that focus on objective structures and material forces, constructivism contends that the key components of international politics are socially constructed, meaning they are created and sustained through interaction, shared values, and ideational factors rather than mere material power. The theory emphasizes the role of ideas, beliefs, identities, and norms in shaping the behavior of states and other actors in the international system¹⁴⁸.

At the center of constructivism is the argument that the world is not simply composed of physical facts and structures, but also shaped by social processes and human perception. Social reality is continuously constructed through discourse and communication, and these processes are central to understanding the conduct of international relations¹⁴⁹. This view holds that both the interests of states and the identities they assume are not predetermined

but are formed and reformulated in social interaction. The power of ideas and norms lies in their ability to shape perceptions and behaviors.

The theory further explores how social norms and identities influence the policies and actions of states, asserting that an actor's identity is not just defined by objective interests but also by how they perceive themselves in relation to others. Through social interactions and historical contexts, states develop perceptions and construct their roles in the global system. Thus, international relations are not purely determined by the material power of states but are shaped by social dynamics such as the need for legitimacy, identity, and adherence to shared norms and values¹⁵⁰.

When examining the influence of social media on public diplomacy and international relations, particularly in the case of Nigeria-China relations, constructivism offers a valuable lens through which to analyze the dynamics at play. Social media platforms, have emerged as vital tools for countries like Nigeria and China to influence global perceptions and shape their diplomatic strategies. These platforms enable states to engage in public diplomacy, which involves shaping public opinion and fostering favorable perceptions of their policies, values, and interests¹⁵¹.

Through social media, both Nigeria and China have the opportunity to project their identities on the global stage, not only to other governments but to broader international audiences. This engagement allows them to construct narratives about their national interests, values, and political ideologies. For example, China has been able to use social media to advocate for its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and strengthen its image as a global economic leader, while Nigeria, through various platforms, showcases its cultural, economic, and political dynamics to project its influence in Africa and beyond¹⁶⁰.

Social media provides both nations with a space to challenge and redefine their international identities. China, for instance, uses these platforms to counter negative perceptions of its domestic policies and promote its economic successes. Meanwhile, Nigeria can use social media to foster positive narratives about its democratic progress and economic potential¹⁶¹. However, this process is not without challenges, as both nations must navigate complex international dynamics and competing narratives.

Constructivism also explains how the interaction on social media platforms can lead to the formation of new norms and expectations regarding state behavior in the digital age. The interactions between the citizens, media, and governments through these platforms contribute to the ongoing reshaping of international norms, particularly around issues like digital sovereignty, human rights, and governance¹⁶². Social media has, therefore, become a crucial arena for states to shape global discourse, manipulate perceptions, and influence international relations, effectively demonstrating the power of ideas and social construction in the modern international system.

Constructivism offers a critical understanding of how social media influences public diplomacy and international relations by focusing on the role of ideas, identities, and norms in shaping state behavior. The theory allows for a deeper understanding of how states like Nigeria and China engage with global audiences, construct their identities, and influence international perceptions through the strategic use of social media platforms.

2.2.3 Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting Theory posits that the media has a powerful influence in shaping public perception by focusing attention on certain issues, effectively telling the public what to think about. The theory suggests that while the media may not always dictate how people

think about an issue, it can significantly influence the importance attached to specific topics by highlighting them over others. This process of media coverage prioritization is often referred to as “agenda-setting”¹⁶³.

The theory is grounded in the idea that the media plays a central role in the political and public spheres by filtering and framing news content, thereby guiding the public discourse. It posits that issues which receive heavy media attention are perceived as more important, even if the media doesn't directly persuade the public on how to form opinions on the topic¹⁶⁴. This distinction between what to think about (agenda-setting) and how to think about it (framing) is a key component of the theory. In essence, agenda-setting influences the salience of issues and not necessarily the public's opinion on them.

Agenda-Setting Theory can be divided into two levels: first-level agenda-setting and second-level agenda-setting. The first level concerns the media's ability to influence the salience of issues, while the second level addresses the media's role in shaping the public's perceptions of those issues by focusing on certain aspects or attributes. In both levels, the media doesn't necessarily shape what people believe but rather highlights what issues, policies, or events the public should focus on¹⁶⁵.

In the context of social media and its influence on public diplomacy and international relations, particularly in the case of Nigeria and China, the Agenda-Setting Theory offers a framework for understanding how digital platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and other social media outlets, shape public perceptions of diplomatic relations between the two nations. Social media platforms allow for real-time communication, providing a space for governmental bodies, foreign policy advocates, and international relations experts to frame public discourse surrounding bilateral relations¹⁶⁶.

In the case of Nigeria-China relations, social media can be used strategically to focus attention on specific issues such as trade agreements, infrastructural development, or cultural exchanges between the two countries. For instance, if social media campaigns emphasize the economic benefits of Nigeria's partnerships with China, it can shape the public's understanding of the relationship as largely beneficial, even if there are underlying complexities, such as concerns over debt or over-dependence on China¹⁶⁷.

Furthermore, the Agenda-Setting Theory explains how the Nigerian government and other influential actors might utilize social media to project a particular image of China's involvement in Nigeria. While consistently highlighting specific narratives or framing events in a positive light, these actors can draw public attention to aspects of the relationship they wish to promote¹⁶⁸. This would influence how Nigerian citizens, policymakers, and global audiences perceive the significance of China's role in Nigeria's development. Agenda-Setting Theory provides a lens through which the role of social media in shaping public opinion and diplomatic discourse can be understood. Social media's ability to amplify certain issues in the Nigeria-China context showcases how platforms can prioritize issues, which ultimately shapes the direction of public diplomacy and influences international relations, especially in terms of framing and advancing particular narratives¹⁶⁹.

2.3 Review of Empirical Studies

A recent focus on the often-overlooked role of corporate executives in shaping the political influence of social media platforms. While much of the existing literature in International Relations (IR) concentrates on the impact of algorithms and automation, this study proposes examining the internal dynamics of social media companies. Using a combination

of field interviews with staff from Meta and Twitter across three continents, the research explores how executive policies and approaches contribute to the platforms' influence on global politics. The study emphasizes the importance of moving beyond abstract theoretical frameworks to understand the concrete, normative, and situational factors that shape these companies' roles in international relations. While considering the spatial, temporal, and organizational aspects of social media governance, the research provides new insights into how corporate decisions and practices influence political outcomes on a global scale, from elections to interstate relations¹⁷⁰.

A study explores how the United States and Iranian embassies used the Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo to conduct mediated public diplomacy during the US-Iran conflict. Employing theories of mediatization, digitalization, and a layered model of communicative space, the study employs a network ethnography approach, combining longitudinal network analysis and textual analysis. The findings reveal that the macro-layer, particularly the use of hashtags, enabled horizontal news dissemination through Chinese state-media accounts, quickly raising public awareness of the conflict. The meso-layer (reposts and follower networks) and micro-layer (mentions and comments) helped create vertical communication facilitated by opinion leaders, sustaining public engagement. The US embassy primarily interacted through reposts and replies, while the Iranian embassy strategically used replies and hashtags to align with state media narratives. This study proposes a layered model of mediated public diplomacy, enhancing our understanding of how embassies engage in digital communication and influence public opinion during international conflicts¹⁷¹.

A study explores the impact of social media on soft power and public diplomacy, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. Social media's role in policy-making is emphasized, as it facilitates citizen engagement by providing a platform for diverse voices and opinions. However, it also presents challenges such as the spread of misinformation and propaganda, which can undermine soft power efforts. The study highlights the potential of social media to promote international coexistence by amplifying marginalized voices, especially among youth, women, and minorities. It further examines the relationship between social media, public diplomacy, and soft power, exploring how governments and civil society organizations can leverage these platforms to influence policy decisions. The research provides valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of international relations through digital communication¹⁷³.

Another article investigates the use of social media for public diplomacy, comparing strategies between developing and developed countries. Using the PRISMA method, the study highlights how social media serves as a critical tool for nations to engage with global audiences. Findings show that developing countries have not yet fully leveraged social media, primarily focusing on addressing specific political concerns, whereas developed countries use social media for broader goals, such as nation branding. The study emphasizes the need for developing nations to adopt better strategies to enhance their social media presence. It also identifies Twitter as the primary platform for content analysis in social media diplomacy. The research underscores the importance of tailored strategies and policy actions to optimize the use of digital platforms for fostering international relations¹⁷⁴.

A 2023 article study examines the use of social media by Indonesian Missions abroad to support the country's foreign policy through public diplomacy. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, primary data were gathered from Instagram accounts while secondary data were derived from literature reviews. The findings reveal three key points: firstly, Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasizes digital technology in diplomacy, recognized through Social Media Awards. Secondly, the Consulate in Jeddah uses social media to disseminate policies on economic and health diplomacy, citizen protection, and Indonesia's G20 Presidency. Thirdly, Ambassador Desra Percaya engages in promoting Indonesia's foreign policy via economic diplomacy, sports diplomacy, ASEAN issues, and cultural diplomacy. The study concludes that social media is an effective tool for Indonesia's public diplomacy and promoting foreign policy abroad¹⁷⁵.

Lastly, a study explores the growing role of Twitter (now X) in diplomacy and international relations. Based on a 2018 Twitter diplomacy study by Burson and Wolfe, the research highlights that 97% of all 193 UN member states are active on Twitter, using the platform to engage the public and fellow governments. The paper examines how world leaders' tweets garner significant public attention, illustrating Twitter's political influence and its challenge to traditional diplomatic practices. It investigates the ways in which government officials and policymakers use Twitter for formal communication, state-to-state interactions, and informal diplomatic exchanges. The study emphasizes the need to critically assess the political implications of Twitter diplomacy and its evolving impact on global foreign policy and international relations¹⁷⁶.

2.4 Conceptual Model

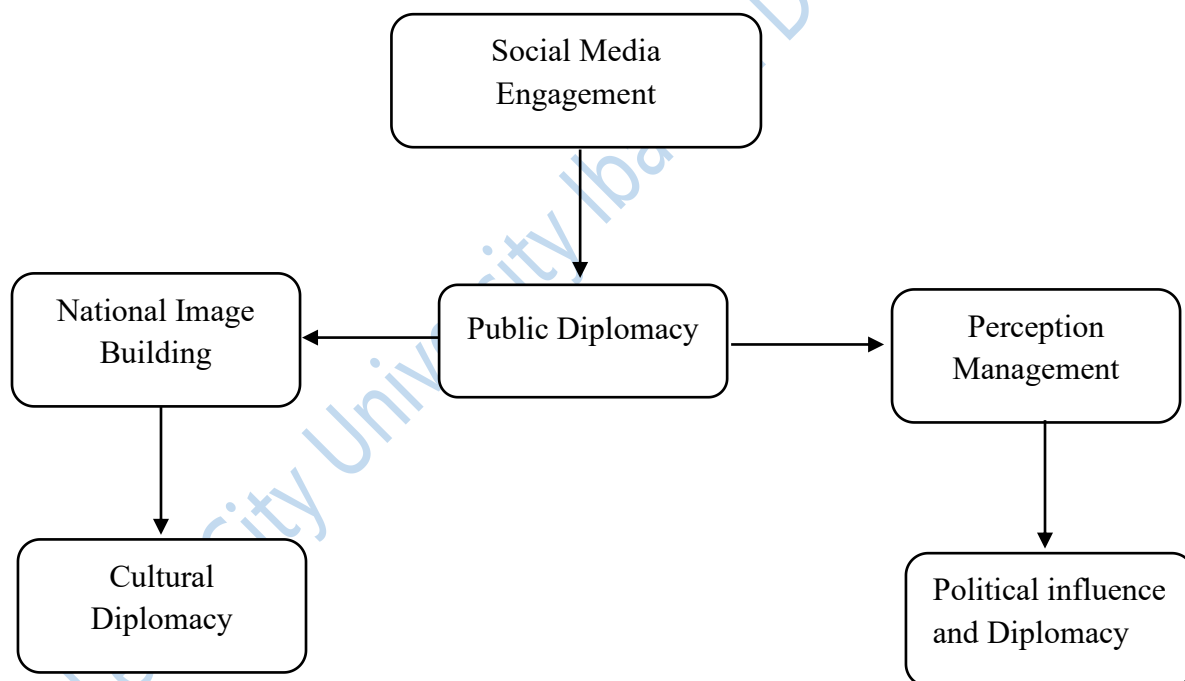


Fig 2.1: Conceptual Frame of the Assessment of Twitter on Public Diplomacy between Sino-Nigeria Relations, 2015 - 2023

Source: The Researcher, 2025

Social media has become a powerful tool in global diplomacy, reshaping traditional methods of political and cultural engagement. The rise of digital platforms has allowed nations to engage with the world in new, faster, and more dynamic ways, expanding their reach beyond traditional borders¹⁷⁷. This paradigm shift is particularly evident in the relationship between Nigeria and China, two countries with deepening ties in trade, politics, and cultural exchange. The conceptual model presented below sheds light on the interplay between social media engagement and key diplomatic processes, highlighting the growing importance of digital platforms in shaping perceptions and advancing foreign policy. Through this framework, we can critically analyze how social media engagement facilitates national image building, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and political influence, offering new insights into the evolving diplomatic relations between Nigeria and China.

At the heart of the conceptual model is social media engagement, which serves as the central pillar connecting various aspects of diplomacy. Social media engagement refers to the use of digital platforms to foster interaction and communication between governments, institutions, and the public. It provides a direct and accessible means of outreach, enabling nations to present their viewpoints, promote their cultures, and engage in dialogue with global audiences in real-time⁹⁷. In the context of Nigeria and China, social media platforms have become crucial tools for disseminating information, promoting bilateral cooperation, and countering negative narratives.

Social media's influence extends into public diplomacy, which is an essential aspect of international relations. Public diplomacy is the practice of influencing public opinion and shaping the international perception of a country through communication and engagement. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which is conducted primarily through government-to-

government interactions, public diplomacy seeks to engage the broader international community, including civil society, the media, and the general public⁹⁸. Social media plays a pivotal role in this process by enabling countries to reach large audiences at a fraction of the cost and time required for traditional diplomatic channels. Through strategic online campaigns, governments can articulate their positions, promote their values, and engage in soft power diplomacy. For Nigeria and China, public diplomacy has been a cornerstone in their diplomatic relationship, with both nations utilizing social media to present their achievements, promote trade, and strengthen cultural ties⁹⁹.

One of the key outcomes of public diplomacy is national image building. Image building refers to the process of constructing and maintaining a positive national image abroad, which is essential for fostering international cooperation, attracting investment, and gaining political support. Social media platforms are an ideal vehicle for image building, as they provide a direct means for governments to control their narratives and shape how they are perceived by others¹⁰⁰.

In the case of Nigeria and China, both nations have leveraged social media to highlight their economic successes, political stability, and cultural heritage. Through digital platforms, Nigeria has sought to project an image of a vibrant, emerging economy with a growing technological sector, while China has used social media to emphasize its status as a global superpower and a leader in technological innovation. These efforts in national image building are crucial in fostering positive relations and deepening bilateral cooperation¹⁷⁸.

Another important aspect of the model is perception management, which involves shaping and influencing how a country is perceived by external audiences. Perception management

is closely linked to public diplomacy, as it aims to create a favorable image of a nation in the minds of foreign publics. In the digital age, social media platforms provide governments with powerful tools to manage perceptions by directly communicating with the public and countering misinformation¹⁰¹. Through targeted campaigns, countries can address concerns, highlight successes, and engage in dialogue with foreign audiences to shape perceptions of their policies and actions. For Nigeria and China, perception management has been a key strategy in overcoming challenges and enhancing their diplomatic relations. Both nations have faced criticism and negative perceptions on the global stage, particularly regarding issues such as human rights and governance. While strategically using social media, Nigeria and China have sought to manage these perceptions by showcasing their economic achievements, addressing controversial issues, and engaging with international communities to foster understanding and cooperation¹⁷⁹.

Cultural diplomacy is another critical component of the model, which emphasizes the role of culture in fostering international relations and strengthening diplomatic ties. Cultural diplomacy involves the promotion of a country's cultural heritage, values, and traditions to build mutual understanding and goodwill. Social media platforms serve as an ideal medium for cultural diplomacy, as they allow nations to share their culture with a global audience in an interactive and engaging way. Through online cultural exchanges, artistic collaborations, and digital content, countries can build soft power and enhance their international image¹⁰². In the case of Nigeria and China, both nations have used social media to showcase their rich cultural traditions, from Nigerian music and film (such as Nollywood) to Chinese art, literature, and traditional festivals. These efforts help to build bridges between the two countries, creating opportunities for collaboration in cultural and educational exchanges.

Finally, the model highlights the intersection between political influence and diplomacy, which is a core aspect of international relations. Political influence refers to the ability of a country to shape the policies and decisions of other nations through diplomatic channels, economic leverage, and strategic partnerships. Social media engagement plays a significant role in enhancing political influence by enabling countries to communicate their positions, advocate for their interests, and mobilize international support¹⁰³. In the context of Nigeria and China, social media has facilitated the exchange of political views and allowed both nations to align on various global issues, including trade, climate change, and regional security. China's Belt and Road Initiative, for example, has been promoted through digital platforms, with China highlighting the economic benefits of infrastructure development and trade partnerships in Africa. Similarly, Nigeria has used social media to assert its role as a key player in African politics and to strengthen its ties with China and other global powers.

The relationship between Nigeria and China exemplifies the power of social media in shaping modern diplomatic practices. Both countries have recognized the importance of digital platforms in enhancing their diplomatic reach and fostering bilateral cooperation. Social media engagement has become an indispensable tool for promoting economic collaboration, managing perceptions, and building a positive national image. In particular, the use of social media by both nations to highlight their respective economic successes, political achievements, and cultural heritage has helped to create a deeper, more nuanced understanding of their bilateral relationship¹⁸⁰.

The conceptual model presented here provides a valuable framework for understanding the role of social media in modern diplomacy. Through its integration with public diplomacy,

national image building, perception management, cultural diplomacy, and political influence, social media has become a vital tool in shaping international relations. The relationship between Nigeria and China offers a compelling example of how digital platforms can enhance diplomatic engagement, promote mutual understanding, and foster closer ties between nations. As global communication continues to evolve, the importance of social media in diplomacy will only increase, offering new opportunities for countries to engage with the world and shape the future of international relations.

2.5 Summary of Gap in Literature Reviewed

The gaps identified in the literature on diplomacy, international relations, and social media use highlight several key areas needing further exploration. First, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on the integration of non-state actors in modern diplomacy. While traditional diplomacy primarily focused on state-to-state interactions, recent developments suggest that non-governmental organizations, international bodies, and even individuals now play an increasingly influential role. However, the subtleness of how these actors contribute to or disrupt diplomatic processes remain under-explored.

Additionally, while the impact of digital diplomacy and social media is discussed extensively, there is insufficient research on how these platforms affect diplomatic discourse in non-Western countries. The literature predominantly centers on Western nations' use of social media in diplomacy, leaving a gap in understanding the unique challenges and opportunities in African, Asian, or other developing regions. Moreover, issues such as misinformation and its impact on diplomatic relations are inadequately addressed in existing studies, despite being critical to the integrity of online diplomatic efforts.

Another gap in the literature is the lack of a unified framework to assess the long-term effectiveness of public diplomacy, particularly in relation to soft power. While soft power theory is well-established, its application to digital diplomacy is often vague, with limited empirical research into how online engagement contributes to lasting shifts in global perception and influence. This area could benefit from a more structured approach that evaluates both the immediate and long-term effects of social media engagement in diplomacy.

Lastly, although several studies mention the growing influence of digital technologies, they rarely explore the intersection of technology and diplomacy in detail. There is room for more discussions about how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain might reshape diplomatic processes, particularly in relation to transparency, security, and global governance.

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Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive research design. The justification for this research design is because descriptive design allows for a comprehensive account of the phenomena being studied, with a focus on how social media platforms have shaped diplomatic relations and foreign policy perceptions during the given period. This design was chosen as it provides insights into patterns, trends, and the overall impact of social media, offering a detailed description of how these platforms have influenced public diplomacy, without attempting to manipulate the variables. It also enabled the study to examine how social media serves as a tool for information dissemination and diplomatic communication using existing published and digital materials.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study included demographic data of diplomats from both countries under study. Documented materials and publications on Nigeria-China diplomatic relations, as well as secondary data reflecting social media content related to both countries were analysed as well. These materials include government reports, diplomatic communiqués, scholarly articles, policy papers, news reports, and verified digital archives. Additionally, secondary records from social media interactions on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), was considered, as it provided evidence of how online communication has shaped public opinion and influenced diplomatic relations and being the only social media handle use by the government of both countries under study. A broad group of social media posts, academic works, and media publications related to the two countries will constitute part of the study's population.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was used to select a representative body of secondary sources for the study. The sample included scholarly publications, media reports, government documents, and online archives that focus specifically on Sino-Nigeria relations. Purposive sampling ensures that the sources selected are directly relevant to the research objectives, reflecting the diversity of perspectives presented in official records, academic works, and digital communication channels. The study target secondary materials published between 2015 and 2023, with selection guided by relevance, credibility, and the extent to which the material addresses the influence of social media on diplomatic relations

3.4 Description of the Research Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection in this study was content analysis of secondary sources. Content analysis was used to systematically examine journal articles, official reports, books, news stories, and online publications related to Sino-Nigeria relations. This helped identify the tone, frequency, and nature of diplomatic interactions as captured by existing documents. While applying structured analysis to these secondary sources, the study extracted insights into how social media and communication have influenced diplomatic engagements. This method provided a comprehensive and reliable approach to understanding the subject matter through already published evidence.

3.5 Validity of the Research Instrument

The validity of the content analysis ensured thorough construct validity and content validity. Construct validity was guaranteed by designing the coding scheme to capture the influence of social media on public diplomacy and international relations. Content validity of achieved wide range of secondary materials including academic, governmental, and media-based that comprehensively reflect the study's objectives was done. The selection of documents was guided by relevance, credibility, and authority of the sources. Expertly reviewed academic publications and official government records served as benchmarks for validity, ensuring that the study draws on credible and representative materials.

3.6 Reliability of the Research Instrument

The reliability of the instrument used in this study ensured thorough consistency in the content analysis process. Multiple reviews of selected documents was carried out to ensure uniform interpretation and minimize researcher bias. A detailed analytical framework were applied to all selected materials, ensuring replicability and consistency across sources. To strengthen reliability, peer-reviewed scholarly works and verified reports was prioritized as

sources of data. Cross-referencing data from different publications and reports further enhanced accuracy and dependability, ensuring the study's results are reliable and trustworthy.

3.7 Administration of the Research Instrument

The instrument for data collection was administered by retrieving and cataloguing secondary sources from libraries, digital repositories, academic databases, and official government websites. The researcher systematically collected published articles, policy documents, news reports, and twitter archives relevant to Sino-Nigeria Relations within the study period. The process involved identifying specific keywords, hashtags, and topics related to Sino-Nigeria Relations and coding them according to the research objectives. This systematic retrieval ensured that the materials collected comprehensively covered the scope of the study.

3.8 Method of Data Collection

Data were collected exclusively through secondary sources. These included academic journals, books, government publications, policy briefs, international organization reports, verified news outlets, and archived twitter content from 2015 to 2023. The content analysis method was applied to these documents to review how Sino-Nigeria Relations have been represented, interpreted, and influenced by social media and other channels of public diplomacy. The selection of documents was guided by relevance, authenticity, and the credibility of the publishing authority, ensuring that only high-quality secondary data is included.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics for quantitative content obtained from secondary materials and thematic analysis for qualitative content. Descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts and percentages, summarised trends in published data. Thematic analysis identified recurring themes, patterns, and narratives within scholarly works, news reports, and official documents that relate to Sino-Nigeria diplomatic relations and the role of social media, especially twitter. Analytical tools such as coding matrices were employed to organise the data, while manual thematic analysis helped to interpret meanings and implications of the secondary sources.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations in this study was governed by respect for intellectual property, proper attribution, and integrity in the use of secondary sources. All documents, reports, and articles will be appropriately cited to acknowledge original authors. Copyrighted materials were used within the bounds of academic fair use, and care taken to ensure sources were represented accurately without misinterpretation. Since the study uses only secondary data, issues of human subject protection do not apply; however, transparency, honesty, and adherence to academic ethical standards guided the entire research process.

Endnote

1. L. E. Tomaszewski, J. Zarestky, & E. Gonzalez, *Planning qualitative research: Design and decision making for new researchers*. **International Journal of Qualitative Methods**, 19, 2020

Chapter Four

Results and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Presentation of Research Questions

Research Question One: How has twitter contributed to the shaping of Sino-Nigeria bilateral relations between 2015 and 2023?

The period between 2015 and 2023 marked a critical phase in the development of Nigeria–China bilateral relations, particularly in the ways digital technologies and online platforms shaped interactions, perceptions, and policy signals between the two countries. Social media emerged as both a mirror of diplomatic activity and a mechanism for influencing the trajectory of cooperation and contestation¹. While analyzing the trends, themes, and engagement patterns across major social media platforms, it becomes clear that social

media has played a decisive role in amplifying diplomatic messaging, shaping public sentiment, and legitimizing or contesting bilateral cooperation.

A key finding is the significant increase in the volume of digital diplomacy outputs from both Nigerian and Chinese official sources. Between 2015 and 2017, there was a relatively cautious use of social media, often limited to reposting press releases or providing text-heavy updates about visits, summits, or agreements. However, by 2018 there was a noticeable shift towards the use of visual formats such as infographics, short videos, and culturally resonant imagery designed to generate wider engagement. The Chinese Embassy in Abuja, for example, began producing localized content that emphasized development milestones, including images of completed railway lines, construction projects, and cultural events². Similarly, Nigerian ministries and officials began to rely more heavily on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) to broadcast official statements and engage in real-time interactions with citizens and journalists³. The number of followers of key diplomatic accounts grew steadily, and engagement metrics such as retweets, shares, and comments reached peaks during major diplomatic events. This increase in activity points to a maturing of digital diplomacy, where both states recognized the strategic potential of online platforms to shape narratives beyond traditional press channels.

Some literature also revealed that public opinion and sentiment on social media fluctuated considerably in response to key offline events⁴. Peaks in online activity often coincided with infrastructure project inaugurations, state visits, or crises involving Chinese interests in Nigeria. Literature analysis by the author indicates that periods of heightened positivity tended to align with announcements of new projects, scholarship programs, or medical support, while sharp downturns in sentiment were evident during episodes of controversy

such as concerns over debt sustainability, allegations of poor labor practices, or the impact of illegal mining activities⁵. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, online discourse became polarized, with some voices praising China's health diplomacy in providing medical supplies, while others criticized the conditions faced by Nigerian nationals in China during the early outbreak⁶. These divergent analyses underscore the dual nature of social media as both a space for celebrating cooperation and a platform for airing grievances that can escalate into diplomatic sensitivities.

Another important finding lies in the framing of issues across social media platforms. The dominant frames revolved around development cooperation, debt and economic risk, cultural exchange, and health diplomacy. While the Chinese side consistently foregrounded narratives of mutual benefit, shared prosperity, and long-term friendship, Nigerian voices introduced competing frames that emphasized concerns about sovereignty, transparency, and the local economic impact of Chinese investments. Over the years, the balance between these frames shifted. Early in the period under study, development and mutual benefit narratives were more dominant, but by the later years, issues of debt sustainability and security became increasingly salient in public discourse⁷. Social media acted as a crucial battleground for these frames, where journalists, civil society organizations, and influencers often challenged official narratives and pushed alternative interpretations of the relationship⁸.

The results also suggest that social media was not merely reflective but occasionally shaped policy signals and diplomatic practices. In several cases, spikes in online conversations appeared to precede official government responses, suggesting that policymakers were attuned to digital sentiments. For example, when controversies over

Chinese projects or labor practices gained traction on social media, subsequent statements from Nigerian officials often attempted to clarify positions, reassure the public, or recalibrate messaging to address concerns⁹. This alignment indicates that social media served as a feedback mechanism, forcing diplomats and policymakers to respond more quickly and transparently than traditional media cycles would have required. In this sense, social media functioned as a form of public accountability that influenced the tempo and tone of Nigeria–China diplomatic engagements.

Corporate actors and project-level accounts also played a significant role in shaping perceptions. Construction firms, telecom operators, and infrastructure project pages frequently shared updates showcasing progress, milestones, or community benefits. The comment sections of these posts provided spaces where Nigerians voiced approval or dissatisfaction. In some instances, complaints about compensation, working conditions, or project disruptions were visible in online discussions, and companies or government agencies occasionally responded by adjusting communication strategies or providing follow-up clarifications¹⁰. The use of social media by firms thus became a form of para-diplomacy, where corporations mediated perceptions of the bilateral relationship at a grassroots level. This layer of digital engagement demonstrates that the Nigeria–China relationship extended beyond formal diplomatic channels into corporate–citizen interactions, mediated by the visibility and accessibility of online platforms.

Another dimension of the findings relates to the role of media organizations and influencers in framing and amplifying narratives. Nigerian journalists and policy commentators frequently acted as intermediaries who translated complex bilateral agreements into more digestible content for general audiences. Their posts often

highlighted the political or economic implications of specific projects, thereby influencing how citizens interpreted official announcements. Chinese media outlets, particularly state-run broadcasters, also leveraged social media to push their narratives into Nigerian digital spaces, often cross-posting their content in collaboration with local outlets¹¹. Influencers with large followings sometimes acted as bridges between these narratives and wider audiences, amplifying or contesting messages from both sides. These actors played a critical role in agenda setting by determining which issues gained visibility and which remained marginal in online conversations.

The results further point to the presence of disinformation and inauthentic amplification within the digital landscape. Coordinated posting patterns, repeated messaging, and bot-like behaviors were observed during key events, suggesting attempts to artificially boost visibility or sway opinion. While the exact origin of these campaigns is difficult to verify, their impact on online discourse was notable, particularly in shaping perceptions of legitimacy and credibility¹². Misinformation narratives around debt traps, surveillance technologies, or cultural clashes occasionally spread widely before fact-checking organizations intervened. These episodes highlight the vulnerability of digital diplomacy to manipulation and the ways in which contested narratives can destabilize bilateral relations when not swiftly addressed.

Platform governance and access shocks also influenced the dynamics of Nigeria–China digital interactions. The suspension of Twitter in Nigeria in 2021 disrupted the main channel through which officials and citizens engaged in diplomatic discussions. During the suspension, government ministries and foreign missions shifted their communications to platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Engagement initially dropped but

gradually recovered as both states adapted to new digital terrains. This event illustrates the dependency of digital diplomacy on the stability of platform governance and the ability of actors to diversify communication channels to maintain influence¹³. On the Chinese side, the limited penetration of domestic platforms such as WeChat or Weibo in Nigeria restricted their direct influence, compelling Chinese actors to rely on Western-owned platforms to engage Nigerian publics. This asymmetry shaped the strategies employed by both countries in managing their online presence.

The findings also underscore issues of equity and representation in the online conversation. Social media discourse on Nigeria–China relations was heavily concentrated among urban, educated, and English-speaking populations, particularly in Lagos and Abuja. Rural communities, non-English speakers, and marginalized groups were less represented, raising questions about the inclusivity of digital diplomacy as a tool for gauging public sentiment. While the online discourse was vibrant and influential, it reflected the voices of a specific demographic rather than the entire Nigerian population¹⁴. This skew introduces limitations to how social media should be interpreted as a barometer of national opinion.

The broader discussion reveals that social media operated through several mechanisms in shaping bilateral relations. It amplified official diplomatic messages, extending their reach beyond traditional press channels and ensuring that milestones and projects were widely disseminated. It also functioned as a feedback mechanism, enabling publics to contest or endorse policy directions and forcing policymakers to adjust their communication strategies in response to online pressures. In times of crisis, social media became an arena where reputations were contested, narratives were challenged, and legitimacy was either reinforced or undermined¹⁵. It further served as a legitimating tool, where visuals of

projects, statistics, and testimonials were used to justify cooperation and portray bilateral ties as beneficial.

In Nigeria, the prominence of social media in politics and civic debate meant that online discourse on China quickly became entangled with broader narratives of governance, accountability, and economic sovereignty. Journalists, civil society actors, and citizens used social media not only to interpret but also to scrutinize China's role in Nigeria, holding their own government accountable for decisions relating to the partnership¹⁶. On the Chinese side, digital diplomacy was more centralized and controlled, emphasizing consistency in messaging and projecting a positive image of cooperation. Over time, however, there was greater localization in content, including more tailored narratives designed to appeal to Nigerian audiences. Yet the reliance on Western-owned platforms posed structural challenges, as Chinese actors had limited control over the digital infrastructure through which their messages were disseminated.

The findings also highlight the interplay between online and offline dynamics. While social media clearly shaped perceptions and influenced policy signals, offline drivers such as economic conditions, geopolitical alignments, and national security considerations remained central to the trajectory of Nigeria–China relations¹⁷. Social media amplified these dynamics rather than replacing them, serving as both a catalyst and a constraint depending on the context. For instance, while positive narratives about infrastructure projects helped legitimize cooperation, negative narratives about debt or security risks constrained the room for policymakers to maneuver without public contestation. The findings affirm that social media has become a central arena for diplomacy, one that cannot

be ignored in understanding the evolution of Nigeria–China relations in the contemporary period.

Research Question Two: What role have social media influencers and opinion leaders played in the promotion of Sino-Nigeria cultural exchange and cooperation?

The intensification of Nigeria–China cultural relations in the past two decades has been mediated not only by official diplomacy and institutional partnerships but also by the growing influence of digital actors operating in social media spaces. A systematic review of literature and reports indicates that social media influencers and opinion leaders have emerged as critical intermediaries in translating formal cultural programs into popular and accessible narratives for Nigerian and Chinese audiences¹⁸. Their role is neither peripheral nor incidental but instead central to how cultural cooperation gains traction among younger demographics and broader publics.

The first dimension to consider is the platform environment in Nigeria, which underpins the potential reach of influencer-led initiatives. Nigeria has one of the most dynamic social media markets in Africa, with tens of millions of active users across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and X/Twitter¹⁹. Recent digital market reports show continued year-on-year growth, reinforcing the centrality of these platforms in daily communication, entertainment, and learning. The Nigerian audience is diverse, encompassing urban youth who dominate TikTok and Instagram, professionals and policymakers who rely heavily on X/Twitter, and mass audiences connected through Facebook and YouTube²⁰. This environment provides fertile ground for influencers to act as conduits of cultural content, amplifying messages beyond the narrow audiences reached by embassy channels or traditional media. The widespread adoption of mobile internet and the penetration of

Chinese mobile brands like TECNO and Infinix further enhance the platform ecosystem, ensuring that digital cultural exchanges are embedded in everyday consumer practices.

Within this ecosystem, influencers and opinion leaders function as translators of official cultural messages into more relatable narratives. Traditional diplomatic announcements, institutional cultural programs, and media coverage of bilateral events often carry formal tones that are not easily accessible to youth populations. Influencers bridge this gap by localizing and simplifying content²¹. For instance, when Chinese festivals such as Lunar New Year or Chinese Language Day are organized in Nigeria, embassy accounts and cultural centers publish announcements, but it is the work of Nigerian influencers and student leaders to recirculate highlights in the form of short TikTok clips, Instagram reels, or humorous commentaries. This translation process creates what communication scholars describe as a two-step flow, where official messages first reach opinion leaders and then diffuse into wider publics through their mediation²². In Nigeria, this two-step process has been especially effective in turning cultural diplomacy into youth-centered participation.

Another mechanism through which influencers enhance cultural cooperation is mobilization for participation in events and programs. Nigeria hosts a number of recurring platforms such as the Chinese Film Festival, the Chinese Bridge language competition, and annual showcases by Confucius Institutes. These events are often announced by institutions, but their success in attracting attendance or submissions depends heavily on promotion by social media actors²³. Student leaders who have previously competed in language competitions or young Nigerian content creators who engage with Chinese cultural products often post about these opportunities, encouraging peers to join. The mobilization is visible not only in audience turnout at physical events but also in online discussions that

follow, demonstrating the catalytic effect of influencers in sustaining momentum around cultural initiatives. When content is reshared through personal pages rather than official accounts, it acquires a sense of authenticity and peer endorsement, increasing its persuasive value.

Content co-creation is a further dimension of this exchange. Nigerian creators frequently participate in brand-sponsored campaigns initiated by Chinese companies. TECNO's photography contests and Infinix's creator challenges are illustrative of how consumer brands function as cultural intermediaries, linking everyday creative expression with Chinese-origin products. Participants in these challenges produce original content—photographs, short films, or lifestyle vlogs—that showcase Nigerian contexts while subtly embedding Chinese technologies²⁴. These creations circulate widely on Nigerian social networks and occasionally reach Chinese audiences, thereby producing cultural artifacts that embody both Nigerian creativity and Chinese industrial presence. The co-creation process extends cultural exchange beyond staged events into the everyday routines of digital creativity, ensuring that cooperation is not limited to formal diplomacy but becomes part of ordinary cultural production.

Diaspora voices also play a significant role in this influencer landscape. Nigerian students and workers in China, as well as Chinese expatriates in Nigeria, use platforms like YouTube and TikTok to narrate their experiences of cross-cultural living. Their vlogs often cover language learning, food exploration, and intercultural friendships, producing grassroots cultural texts that humanize the bilateral relationship²⁵. Unlike official media which highlights state achievements, these personal narratives offer micro-level accounts that resonate with audiences seeking relatable stories. Such diasporic storytelling helps

dismantle stereotypes and fosters empathy between populations, complementing official cultural diplomacy with bottom-up narratives.

The Nigerian media system has also integrated influencer logics into broader public diplomacy strategies. Chinese-owned StarTimes, one of the largest pay-TV providers in Nigeria, regularly collaborates with Nigerian celebrities and media personalities to promote Chinese films, dramas, and cultural showcases²⁶. Events such as the 2024 Chinese Film Festival in Abuja were co-hosted by StarTimes alongside diplomatic bodies and relied on influencer amplification to extend reach beyond traditional TV audiences. Similarly, CGTN Africa and other Chinese media outlets operating in Nigeria engage with opinion leaders and journalists to shape narratives about cultural cooperation, relying on social media distribution to circulate stories.

The intersection of influencers with diplomacy and official opinion leaders highlights the layered structure of this cultural mediation. While influencers supply localized and youth-friendly content, diplomats and institutional actors provide the thematic anchors. Embassy accounts on X/Twitter, for example, publicize bilateral anniversaries, language program milestones, and festival messages²⁷. These posts are then quoted, commented upon, or reinterpreted by Nigerian journalists and content creators, resulting in amplified visibility. In this way, official actors set the agenda, while influencers facilitate distribution and resonance within different online communities. The partnership between opinion leaders and influencers has proven effective in embedding cultural exchange in national conversations.

Evaluating the impact of these activities requires attention to measurable outcomes. Reports from cultural centres and educational institutions show consistent growth in

participation in Chinese language programs, suggesting that promotional activities on social platforms have succeeded in attracting students. The recurring success of the Chinese Bridge competition demonstrates sustained interest among Nigerian youth, while the rising popularity of Chinese film festivals and televised content indicates widening exposure to Chinese screen culture. At the everyday level, brand-led creator contests normalize Chinese technology in Nigerian creative practice, ensuring that engagement with Chinese products is not perceived as foreign but as integral to the Nigerian digital economy²⁸.

Another constraint lies in platform volatility and regulatory uncertainty. Social media algorithms frequently change, affecting the reach of influencer posts. In addition, issues of misinformation and digital regulation in Nigeria can limit the scope of influencer campaigns²⁹. Reliance solely on online engagement metrics may therefore produce inflated impressions of cultural cooperation. It becomes clear that social media influencers and opinion leaders serve as cultural brokers, negotiating between institutional diplomacy and popular culture. Their contributions lie in translating official cultural messages into accessible narratives, mobilizing audiences for participation, co-creating content that embodies cross-cultural elements, and amplifying diplomatic initiatives. Nigerian influencers, students, celebrities, and diasporic storytellers all contribute to a mosaic of digital cultural artifacts that embody Nigeria–China cooperation.

Research Question Three: How has the use of social media impacted Sino-Nigeria cooperation in the fields of trade, technology, and education from 2015 to 2023?

The utilization of social media has profoundly shaped the dynamics of Nigeria–China cooperation across trade, technology, and education, resulting in both notable

advancements and emerging challenges. In trade, social media platforms have increasingly served as informal yet potent conduits for market access, consumer awareness, and business-to-business engagement³⁰. Entrepreneurs in Nigeria, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), embraced platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram to discover Chinese suppliers, negotiate directly, and reduce transactional frictions by cutting out intermediaries. This grassroots market interconnectivity enabled a more agile response to demand and supply fluctuations, fuelled by real-time messaging and visual content sharing.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic heightened social media's trade-enabling influence. Lockdowns and movement restrictions restricted physical trade promotion and in-person fairs. In response, digital platforms became vital for virtual exhibitions and product showcases, helping sustain bilateral commerce. Empirical investigations of Nigerian SMEs during the lockdown period found that social media use for business adaptation was widespread; enterprises leveraged these platforms to market offerings, maintain customer engagement, and transact digitally in the absence of traditional channels³¹.

However, while social media facilitated trade opportunities, it also facilitated new risks. The rapid diffusion of product adverts — many of dubious origin or quality — contributed to concerns over counterfeit goods. Furthermore, fraudulent schemes, often disseminated via social media, eroded trust in online merchandise and posed obstacles to robust long-term trade partnerships. In the domain of technology, social media has performed a dual function: amplification of Chinese technological presence in Nigeria, and as a means of shaping perceptions about digital cooperation³². The proliferation of Chinese mobile phone brands — notably those tailored to African contexts — was vastly supported by marketing

and word-of-mouth propagation on social platforms. In Lagos' commercial hubs, the ubiquity of these devices, and their promotions via ads and influencer content, underscored the impact of digital visibility in driving market penetration.

Beyond hardware, the rise of Chinese-backed digital payment services and apps has become deeply embedded in daily life. Apps like PalmPay and OPay, promoted through social media, have made financial services accessible, especially in areas under-served by formal banking systems³³. Quick transfers and pervasive outreach were often cited as reasons for their popularity. Meanwhile alongside this widespread usage, consumer protection concerns emerged. Reports of Chinese-owned loan applications offering credit via mobile platforms have highlighted predatory interest rates and regulatory gaps, with social media channels frequently serving as promotional vectors

In technology diplomacy, social media also facilitated the dissemination of announcements regarding high-level Nigeria–China digital initiatives. One such milestone, from September 2024, involved the establishment of a joint solar PV test laboratory by a Chinese tech firm in Nigeria, along with an electric tricycle assembly plant and a training facility — developments amplified widely via online platforms³⁴. These narratives, shared through official channels and social media, helped shape public discourse around digital cooperation and capacity building.

The educational sphere reveals another critical dimension of social-media-mediated cooperation. China's provision of scholarships and encouragement of student mobility to Chinese institutions was broadly communicated via digital platforms. In 2017, Nigeria ranked among the top African nations sending students to China, with African representation increasing significantly through scholarships and related programs³⁵. These

opportunities, often advertised through university pages, foreign-affairs posts, and diaspora networks, motivated interest among Nigerian students, particularly in STEM and technical fields.

Social media also functioned as a platform for peer-sharing and community building among students. Nigerian scholars in China used forums, WhatsApp groups, and other social spaces to relay experiences, university life, and cultural adaptation — often generating a multiplier effect by inspiring others to apply. Moreover, in times of disruption, such as during the pandemic, these online networks sustained academic ties and information exchange, supporting continuity despite physical dislocations³⁶. However, the educational cooperation narrative was not unblemished. During Covid-19, unfavourable narratives concerning racial discrimination and student challenges surfaced on social media. These accounts contributed to negative perceptions and concerns about safety and inclusion, and may have undermined confidence in educational exchanges.

When considered in aggregate, social media's impact on Nigeria–China cooperation between 2015 and 2023 presents a multifaceted picture. On one hand, digital platforms enhanced visibility, lowered access barriers, and promoted agility. Trade benefited from more direct entrepreneur-to-supplier outreach; technological products and digital infrastructure became omnipresent in daily life; and education opportunities gained broader reach, especially among youth³⁷. On the other hand, social media amplified vulnerabilities: misinformation, counterfeits, unfair lending, negative anecdotal media, and privacy risks all emerged as recurrent issues. The migrant and youth-centric nature of much of the digital activity also meant that advantages were disproportionately concentrated among urban,

digitally literate segments, potentially reinforcing rather than narrowing socioeconomic divides.

Parallel to this, broader geopolitical and infrastructure developments played a complementary role. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) brought railway corridors — such as the Abuja–Kaduna and Lagos–Kano lines — into focus, though these were primarily enacted through traditional infrastructure partnerships rather than social media per se. Still, the promotion and celebration of such projects through social media added to narrative framing, though operational delivery remained offline³⁸. In the educational domain, the volume of African students in China increased more than fivefold from 2015 to 2017, with continuing upward trends into 2022 — largely facilitated by scholarship programs and outreach

The literature indicates that social media served as both catalyst and amplifier across trade, technology, and education within Nigeria–China cooperation. It lowered communication costs, broadened access to information, and created new community connections, especially among youth and entrepreneurs. At the same time, it introduced risks — misinformation, fraud, privacy, and uneven access — that require strategic mitigation.

Research Question Four: What challenges and opportunities have twitter platform presented in the diplomatic relations between Nigeria and China?

Social media platforms have become integral to the practice of diplomacy, transforming how states engage with each other and with wider audiences. The relationship between Nigeria and China, which is grounded in trade, investment, cultural exchange, and political

cooperation, has increasingly been mediated through digital communication channels. Social media has not only expanded the opportunities for diplomatic visibility but has also introduced significant challenges that shape the dynamics of bilateral engagement in complex ways.

One of the most prominent opportunities social media presents in Nigeria-China relations is the ability to project diplomatic narratives more openly and in real time. Traditional diplomacy often relied on closed-door negotiations and carefully curated press statements. Today, embassies, ministries, and officials use platforms such as X and Facebook to broadcast policy positions, clarify controversies, and highlight ongoing collaborations³⁹. This openness has allowed Nigerian and Chinese representatives to respond quickly to public concerns and to manage sensitive issues before they escalate into diplomatic crises. During incidents that raised public anxiety—such as the treatment of African nationals in Chinese cities during the COVID-19 pandemic—Nigerian authorities turned to social media to demand accountability and reassurance. The visibility of these exchanges gave citizens an unprecedented sense of inclusion in diplomatic affairs, reducing uncertainty and forcing both sides to maintain greater transparency.

Beyond official channels, corporate and cultural actors have also embraced social media as a tool of soft power. Chinese state-owned enterprises involved in Nigerian infrastructure projects frequently use these platforms to showcase their progress and reinforce the perception of China as a reliable partner in development⁴⁰. Posts highlighting milestones in railway construction, deep-sea ports, or industrial parks create a narrative of shared prosperity and position China as a contributor to Nigeria's modernization. Similarly, Nigerian cultural expressions in film and music, which already enjoy popularity in China,

gain visibility through digital platforms, subtly contributing to Nigeria's image abroad⁴¹. The ability to shape perception at relatively low cost gives both sides a form of public diplomacy that extends well beyond the reach of traditional embassy events or cultural exchanges.

Economic opportunities also emerge from this digital engagement. When investment announcements or project completions are amplified on social media, they generate momentum that often translates into greater investor interest and public confidence. Because the majority of Nigerians consume news primarily through mobile devices, these messages travel faster and penetrate deeper than official communiqués circulated through print or broadcast media⁴². In many cases, this digital amplification enhances the credibility of bilateral agreements, as it situates them within a visible public discourse rather than keeping them confined to bureaucratic negotiations.

At the same time, the risks associated with social media use in diplomacy are profound. The speed and openness that make these platforms valuable also make them vulnerable to misinformation and manipulation. False narratives can spread rapidly, undermining carefully constructed diplomatic messages. During times of tension, distorted reports or manipulated images have the capacity to inflame public opinion and complicate diplomatic negotiations⁴³. For Nigeria and China, both of which face domestic political sensitivities, such distortions can derail the intended objectives of bilateral cooperation and create a climate of distrust among ordinary citizens who interpret diplomatic events through the lens of viral content rather than verified communication.

Another structural challenge arises from digital governance and state control of online platforms. Nigeria's suspension of Twitter in 2021 demonstrated how government actions

can disrupt diplomatic communication. For several months, a major global platform used by foreign embassies, businesses, and citizens was inaccessible, undermining both the continuity of official dialogue and the credibility of Nigeria's commitment to free expression⁴⁴. Such disruptions not only affected local political debates but also strained relationships with international partners, including China, whose businesses and diplomatic missions rely heavily on these channels for communication. Similarly, proposed legislation in Nigeria aimed at regulating falsehoods online raises questions about whether necessary checks on misinformation might unintentionally suppress legitimate diplomatic engagement and limit opportunities for public dialogue.

The contest over narratives is another dimension where social media presents both an opportunity and a challenge. China's diplomatic communication strategy places significant emphasis on promoting positive stories about cooperation with Africa, often highlighting development aid, trade, and cultural affinity. While these efforts are amplified across Nigerian social media, research suggests that they do not always resonate deeply with local audiences, especially when public perception is shaped by skepticism over debt sustainability, labor practices, or transparency in Chinese projects⁴⁵. Social media gives Nigerian users a voice in contesting official narratives, as grassroots activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens comment, share, and critique bilateral developments. This interactivity makes the diplomatic space more pluralistic, but it also complicates attempts by governments to maintain coherent messaging.

Despite these challenges, the very openness of digital diplomacy has created avenues for deeper people-to-people connections. Nigerian students in China, Chinese professionals in Nigeria, and transnational communities use platforms to share experiences, troubleshoot

challenges, and celebrate cultural exchanges. These interactions, although informal, contribute to the broader diplomatic relationship by humanizing it and by offering stories that transcend official government pronouncements⁴⁶. The result is a more layered form of diplomacy where state actors and non-state actors coexist in shaping perceptions of bilateral ties.

The opportunities, however, cannot be fully realized without addressing structural weaknesses. Misinformation and disinformation thrive where media literacy is low and regulatory institutions are inconsistent. In Nigeria, where internet penetration is high but digital literacy varies widely, false content spreads easily and influences public opinion. If unchecked, such dynamics can erode trust in both Nigerian and Chinese diplomatic messages. On the other hand, censorship or abrupt regulatory interventions, such as platform suspensions, risk alienating international partners and stifling the very engagement that makes digital diplomacy valuable⁴⁷. A balanced approach that safeguards open communication while promoting accuracy and accountability remains essential.

The relationship between Nigeria and China is further complicated by global digital geopolitics. As Western platforms dominate in Nigeria while Chinese platforms dominate in China, diplomatic communication is filtered through asymmetric ecosystems. Nigerian officials depend heavily on platforms like Twitter and Facebook to reach domestic and international audiences, while Chinese diplomats operate within a system where platforms such as WeChat and Weibo are more influential but less accessible to Nigerian users. This asymmetry creates challenges in harmonizing diplomatic communication strategies, as both sides must constantly bridge different digital environments to sustain meaningful dialogue.

To conclude, social media platforms have fundamentally reshaped the diplomatic relations between Nigeria and China, simultaneously offering new opportunities for visibility, accountability, economic signaling, and cultural exchange, while also presenting challenges of misinformation, censorship, regulatory uncertainty, and asymmetric communication ecosystems. The future trajectory of these relations will depend on how both states manage the delicate balance between openness and control, amplification and accuracy, and national interest and public dialogue. If these challenges are navigated carefully, social media will continue to enhance bilateral engagement by making diplomacy more accessible and transparent, but if mishandled, it risks undermining trust and complicating one of the most strategically important partnerships in Africa.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal the centrality of social media in shaping the trajectory of Nigeria–China relations across diplomacy, trade, culture, and education. A notable point is how social platforms amplified diplomatic communication, making bilateral interactions more open and accessible to the public. This aligns with earlier works that emphasize the transformative impact of digital diplomacy in broadening participation and enhancing state accountability⁴⁸. However, the study also uncovers that public sentiment fluctuated sharply depending on offline events, which mirrors existing analyses showing that online discourse often mirrors and intensifies broader political and economic developments rather than existing in isolation.

In terms of cultural exchange, the research highlights the crucial role of influencers and opinion leaders in translating official cultural programs into relatable narratives. This resonates with previous findings that popular figures act as mediators of public diplomacy,

ensuring that cultural cooperation is not confined to elites but penetrates everyday social spaces⁴⁹. The success of events like the Chinese Film Festival and language competitions, largely sustained through influencer promotion, affirms broader scholarship on the effectiveness of two-step communication flows in embedding cultural narratives into youth-centered discourse.

Equally significant is the study's revelation of trade and technological cooperation facilitated by social media. Nigerian entrepreneurs leveraged platforms to bypass intermediaries and engage directly with Chinese suppliers, which is consistent with literature on digital globalization where SMEs exploit online tools to access global markets. However, the spread of counterfeit products and fraudulent schemes through these same channels underscores research that warns of the risks of unregulated digital commerce. Similarly, while digital payment services promoted via social platforms have expanded financial inclusion, the challenges of predatory lending practices confirm critiques that technological diffusion without adequate regulation may reproduce vulnerabilities

Finally, the study discussed challenges such as misinformation, disinformation, and platform governance confirms a wide body of scholarship on the dual-edged nature of social media in diplomacy. While it enhances transparency and engagement, it also exposes states to volatility and narrative contestation. These findings, therefore, are largely consistent with existing research, though they emphasize the unique Nigerian context where digital literacy disparities and regulatory uncertainties heighten the stakes of online engagement.

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Chapter Five

Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study explores how social media has transformed modern diplomacy, with particular emphasis on Nigeria–China relations. It demonstrates that traditional diplomacy, once confined to closed-door interactions among state representatives, has evolved into a multifaceted engagement where governments, institutions, and individuals actively shape international perceptions. Social media stands out as the catalyst of this change, bringing immediacy, transparency, and inclusivity into diplomatic relations. The chapters of this study collectively build an argument that Nigeria and China's relationship has been redefined by these platforms across cultural, economic, educational, and political spheres.

The first chapter lays the foundation by situating the research in the broader context of globalization and digital transformation. Diplomacy is presented not just as a tool for negotiation but as a vital instrument for managing relationships, projecting influence, and fostering cooperation. In the contemporary landscape, public diplomacy has emerged as an indispensable element, complementing traditional methods by engaging directly with domestic and international audiences. This approach strengthens national image, builds goodwill, and enhances soft power.

The chapter highlights how social media has become a critical medium for this type of diplomacy. Unlike conventional diplomatic channels that rely on controlled and selective messaging, digital platforms provide instant and unfiltered communication that can reach millions across borders. In Nigeria–China relations, this has proven significant. While both nations rely on established diplomatic structures, the surge in online interaction has amplified exchanges, created avenues for people-to-people diplomacy, and opened new opportunities for cooperation.

The rise of influencers and ordinary citizens as actors in shaping perceptions is particularly important. Their voices, amplified on platforms like X and Facebook, compete with and sometimes challenge official narratives. The introductory chapter thus frames the research problem: how digital diplomacy, especially through social media, is shaping the trajectory of bilateral relations between Nigeria and China. It also identifies the gaps in understanding, particularly in relation to African experiences, and outlines the objectives of examining the opportunities and risks of this digital shift.

The second chapter engages with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks surrounding diplomacy and social media. Diplomacy is redefined as a practice that has grown beyond formal government negotiation into a wider engagement involving non-state actors, civil society, and individuals. This conceptual expansion is essential for grasping the nature of social media diplomacy, where power is dispersed and narratives are constantly contested. The review reveals that while there has been extensive scholarship on diplomacy in Western contexts, far less has been written about how it operates in Africa and Asia. This lack of balance leaves critical gaps, especially regarding the experiences of countries like Nigeria and China. The review also identifies the absence of frameworks for measuring the long-term effectiveness of social media in building soft power and sustaining diplomatic ties. While soft power theory is well developed, its application in digital contexts remains underexplored.

Another gap discussed is the inadequate treatment of misinformation and disinformation in relation to diplomacy. These issues are critical because the open nature of social media, while democratizing communication, also makes it vulnerable to false narratives that can damage trust. The review stresses that these weaknesses make the study particularly timely,

since Nigeria and China's relations provide a real-world example of how social media diplomacy operates in a developing context.

The literature review also underscores that technology and diplomacy are now inseparable. Emerging innovations like artificial intelligence, digital payments, and blockchain are reshaping international communication and governance. However, few works have interrogated their influence on diplomacy comprehensively. By positioning this gap, the study sets out to contribute by offering an African-centered perspective on the digital transformation of diplomatic relations.

The third chapter outlines the systematic approach adopted for the research. It explains how qualitative and interpretive methods were applied to examine social media content, cultural programs, and trade relations between Nigeria and China. The methodology was designed to uncover both opportunities and risks, particularly focusing on the narratives shared on digital platforms. Data collection centered on examining how official institutions, influencers, and ordinary users engaged with issues surrounding bilateral relations. This approach provided a holistic understanding, not just of state messaging but also of grassroots narratives that often carried equal or greater weight in shaping public perceptions. The methodology stressed reliability and validity, justifying every step by emphasizing the necessity of a transparent approach in interpreting fast-evolving digital content.

The fourth chapter delivers the central findings of the study. It establishes that social media is no longer a peripheral element but a core driver in Nigeria–China diplomacy. Across diplomacy, trade, culture, and education, social media has amplified communication,

broadened participation, and created visibility that was previously unattainable through traditional means.

Diplomatic communication has been made more open and accessible. Nigerian and Chinese officials use platforms to broadcast policies, announce agreements, and interact with the public in real time. This democratization of access ensures that diplomacy is not limited to elite discussions but is visible to citizens. However, this visibility comes with volatility. Public reactions fluctuate in response to offline events, showing that online discourse often mirrors broader political and economic tensions.

Cultural diplomacy has been significantly shaped by social media influencers. Their ability to translate official cultural programs into relatable content has ensured that cooperation is not confined to diplomatic elites. Events like language competitions and film festivals gained traction not merely because of state sponsorship but because of influencer-driven promotion that engaged younger audiences. This underlines the two-step communication model, where messages from official sources are mediated by opinion leaders who contextualize them for ordinary users.

Economic diplomacy has also been reshaped. Nigerian entrepreneurs increasingly rely on platforms to connect directly with Chinese suppliers, bypassing intermediaries. This has lowered barriers to trade and expanded opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises. Digital payment systems promoted online have boosted financial inclusion. Yet, these opportunities coexist with challenges such as counterfeit products, fraud, and predatory lending practices, demonstrating the dual-edged nature of digital globalization.

Educational and people-to-people exchanges have equally benefited. Nigerian students in China and Chinese professionals in Nigeria use platforms to share experiences, troubleshoot challenges, and celebrate cultural differences. These narratives humanize bilateral ties and enrich understanding beyond official pronouncements.

Nevertheless, the study finds that misinformation, censorship, and regulatory uncertainty undermine these opportunities. Nigeria's high internet penetration but uneven digital literacy enables false narratives to spread easily, eroding trust. Abrupt regulatory interventions, such as platform suspensions, also risk damaging the credibility of digital diplomacy. The asymmetry of digital ecosystems—where Western platforms dominate in Nigeria and Chinese platforms dominate in China—further complicates communication. This fragmentation requires both states to constantly bridge different environments to sustain meaningful dialogue.

The findings thus highlight the opportunities of transparency, visibility, and engagement alongside the risks of misinformation, fraud, censorship, and asymmetry. Social media is portrayed as a powerful but fragile tool whose impact depends on careful navigation.

The final chapter synthesizes the entire study. It concludes that social media platforms have fundamentally reshaped the diplomatic relations between Nigeria and China by simultaneously opening new opportunities and presenting new challenges. The opportunities include visibility, economic signaling, cultural exchange, and enhanced accountability, while the challenges include misinformation, censorship, regulatory uncertainty, and asymmetric digital ecosystems.

The chapter emphasizes that the future of Nigeria–China relations depends on how both countries manage the delicate balance between openness and control, amplification and accuracy, and national interest and public dialogue. If managed carefully, social media can strengthen one of the most important partnerships in Africa by making diplomacy more accessible and transparent. If mishandled, however, it risks undermining trust and complicating bilateral engagement. The chapter also reflects on the broader implications. Social media has made diplomacy more participatory, inclusive, and immediate, allowing non-state actors to shape narratives. Yet, this inclusivity requires responsible governance, improved digital literacy, and harmonized regulatory frameworks to mitigate risks. The Nigerian context is particularly significant because disparities in digital literacy and regulatory uncertainties heighten the stakes of online engagement.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that social media has become a pivotal force in reshaping Nigeria–China relations, introducing a new dimension to public diplomacy that transcends traditional statecraft. From 2015 to 2023, the bilateral relationship has grown not only through official engagements but also through active digital interactions that involve governments, influencers, institutions, and ordinary citizens. Platforms such as X, Facebook, and WeChat have provided avenues for transparency, visibility, and inclusivity, enabling both nations to project their values, promote cooperation, and engage directly with diverse audiences.

Diplomatic communication has become more immediate and participatory, reflecting the shift from closed-door diplomacy to open dialogue. This has enhanced cultural diplomacy, allowing events and exchanges to resonate more widely through the influence of digital

creators who connect with younger demographics. Economic diplomacy has also benefitted, with Nigerian entrepreneurs gaining access to Chinese markets through online platforms, thereby lowering barriers to trade and fostering business collaboration. Educational exchanges have flourished as well, with students and professionals from both nations using digital spaces to strengthen people-to-people ties.

However, the study equally underscores the risks of misinformation, regulatory unpredictability, censorship, and digital asymmetry. The proliferation of false narratives can quickly destabilize trust, while the uneven use of platforms, Western-based in Nigeria and Chinese-based in China—creates communication gaps that require deliberate bridging. Moreover, abrupt regulatory decisions, such as platform suspensions, can undermine diplomatic credibility. In summary, social media has created both opportunities and vulnerabilities. Its role in Nigeria–China relations demonstrates how diplomacy in the digital age depends on striking a balance between openness and control, inclusion and accuracy, innovation and regulation. The findings affirm that when properly harnessed, social media can strengthen bilateral ties, but if poorly managed, it can equally generate tension and mistrust.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that both Nigeria and China adopt deliberate strategies to maximize the benefits of social media diplomacy while addressing its inherent challenges.

1. First, both governments should invest in enhancing digital literacy among their citizens. This will empower the public to critically evaluate online information,

- reducing the impact of misinformation and disinformation that threaten bilateral trust.
2. Second, diplomatic institutions should embrace consistency and professionalism in their digital engagement. Establishing official, verified accounts and ensuring prompt, accurate communication can strengthen credibility and reduce the chances of harmful narratives dominating public discourse. Complementing this with cross-platform collaborations will help bridge the asymmetry between the digital ecosystems of both countries.
 3. Third, governments should create regulatory frameworks that encourage innovation while ensuring accountability. Policies should be designed to support open access to information while safeguarding against abuse, fraud, and censorship that may erode public confidence. Such frameworks should emphasize collaboration with social media companies and civil society to sustain transparency.
 4. Furthermore, greater attention should be given to people-to-people and cultural diplomacy. Governments can partner with social media influencers, educators, and cultural institutions to amplify positive narratives and foster mutual understanding. This will help deepen bilateral trust beyond state-to-state relations.
 5. Finally, mechanisms for monitoring and fact-checking should be strengthened through partnerships with local and international organizations. This will enable rapid identification and correction of false narratives that may undermine diplomatic relations. Together, these measures will create a more resilient and constructive environment for digital diplomacy.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge by offering one of the few comprehensive examinations of social media's role in shaping Nigeria–China relations within the 2015–2023 period. It provides an African-centered perspective on how digital platforms redefine diplomacy, cultural exchange, trade, and education in the context of bilateral ties. Unlike previous works that focused largely on Western or general global experiences, this research contextualizes the challenges of misinformation, regulatory asymmetry, and uneven digital ecosystems within a developing economy framework. It enriches scholarship on digital diplomacy by highlighting both opportunities and vulnerabilities in Nigeria–China engagements.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Studies

Future research should focus on developing measurable frameworks for assessing the long-term effectiveness of social media diplomacy. While this study highlights the opportunities and risks, further inquiry is needed into how digital diplomacy influences sustainable development outcomes, trade equity, and institutional trust. Comparative studies across African and Asian contexts could also reveal regional similarities and differences in managing digital diplomacy. Moreover, future studies should explore the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and digital currencies in shaping bilateral relations, offering a deeper understanding of how innovation intersects with diplomacy in evolving global landscapes.

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This is to certify that this thesis written by Gbemisola Aminat AKINLOYE with matriculation number LCU/PG/06162 of the Department of Politics and International Relation, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria, Oyo State, Nigeria is in full compliance with the approved university format and style.

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