

Digital Diplomacy: Advancing Digital Peace-Building with AI in Africa.

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Introduction

Data from Statista (2024) analysed that Southern Africa boasted the highest internet penetration rate in Africa in January 2024, reaching approximately 73.1 percent, surpassing the global average. In terms of users, as of January 2024, Nigeria led Africa in internet users, with over 103 million users, while Egypt ranked second with over 82 million users. Mobile devices were the primary source of web traffic in Africa's leading digital markets, with 86.2 percent of web traffic in Nigeria originating from smartphones. These trends highlight the significant growth and potential of Africa's internet landscape, driven largely by mobile connectivity and increasing access to digital technologies. Statista (2024) further projected that Africa's internet user base could grow significantly in 2024, with an expected addition of 337.3 million users, reaching a record high of 1.1 billion users by 2029. This implies that the ongoing digital transformation presents a tremendous opportunity for advancing peacebuilding initiatives across the continent. By harnessing the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI), African nations can leverage digital diplomacy to facilitate dialogue, address and mitigate conflict drivers, and build a more peaceful future. This paper attempts to address three major questions:

1. How has previous digital tool(s) promoted digital diplomacy in the context of democracy especially as we approach the new election period in Africa and globally?
2. What are the limitations of traditional digital peace and technology culture in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusivity?
3. How can we utilise Artificial Intelligence (AI) to overcome the limitations and promote more inclusive civic engagement within African communities?

Discussion

- 1. How has previous digital tool(s) promoted diplomacy in the context of democracy especially as we approach a new election period in Africa and globally?**

Digital diplomacy refers to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for diplomatic purposes. This includes online platforms for dialogue, social media engagement, and leveraging data analytics to understand conflict dynamics. Previous digital tools have played a significant role in promoting diplomacy in the context of democracy, particularly as Nations gear up for elections, at least national elections are expected in 64 countries in 2024 (Ewe, 2023), as well as the European Union, which all together represent almost half the global population, as such, the effectiveness of digital tools in promoting diplomacy within democratic contexts is noteworthy.

Uwa and Ronke (2023) emphasised the profound impact of modern technologies on peace, security, and development in Africa. The researchers outlined how digital platforms such as social media, websites, and mobile apps facilitate information dissemination about electoral processes, voting rights, and democratic principles, thereby educating citizens domestically and internationally. Moreover, Helbing, Mahajan, Fricker, et al. (2023) highlighted that the digital tools enable direct engagement between governments and citizens, fostering transparency, accountability, and participation in the democratic process. These platforms also facilitate international cooperation and observation during elections, enhancing credibility and stability in the region. Additionally, in times of electoral disputes or conflicts, digital communication allows swift coordination and resolution efforts, contributing to crisis management and conflict resolution. Lastly, digital diplomacy enables countries to globally promote democratic values and human rights, shaping international perceptions and diplomatic relations through advocacy for free and fair elections and democratic governance.

2. What are the limitations of traditional digital peace and technology culture in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusivity?

Digital peace and technology culture have the potential to mitigate bias present in traditional governance and peacebuilding systems (Albrecht, Fournier-Tombs, & Brubaker, 2024), however, there is lots of evidence that reveal its limitations. Imran (2023) claimed that although digital technologies have the potential to foster peace and inclusivity, there remains a substantial digital gap. Traditional digital peace building tools have introduced cybersecurity risks, including hacking, data breaches, and cyberattacks. For example, in a series of elections from 2015 to 2023, Nigeria experienced series of electoral related cyberattacks, starting from the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) website (Abimboye, 2015) to the gubernatorial elections in both Osun and Ekiti states in 2022, where the INEC Result Viewing Portal (IReV) was attacked (Ufuoma, 2022), and again attacked in 2023 during the presidential election (Michael, 2023; Sibe & Kaunert, 2023). Hence, malicious actors have consistently shown that the vulnerabilities in the digital systems could be exploited to disrupt peace-building initiatives, spread misinformation, and undermine trust in digital platforms, posing significant challenges to digital peace and stability.

Additionally, Litre, Hirsch, Caron, et al. (2022) pointed out that Africa's multicultural and multilingual landscape presents significant obstacles that impede the effectiveness of conventional peace-building methods. Language barriers, cultural disparities, and differences in digital literacy persistently obstruct meaningful communication, collaboration, and community engagement, thereby diminishing the inclusivity and efficacy of digital peace endeavours. Despite the substantial potential of digital technologies in fostering peace and inclusivity alongside traditional methods, overcoming these challenges is imperative to fully harnessing the benefits of digital peace initiatives and ensuring that digital technologies positively contribute to global peace and stability.

3. How can Artificial Intelligence (AI) be utilised to overcome the limitations and promote more inclusive civic engagement within African communities?

The race to advance AI technologies, exemplified by ChatGTP from OpenAI, Gemini from Google, and others, has persuaded everyone of the potential breakthroughs across diverse domains. In the context of democracy and peacebuilding, AI could be a potent force for good. Studies have shown the extent of how AI can be applied in digital diplomacy efforts. These include early conflict warning systems (Rød, Gåsste, & Hegre, 2024), promoting inclusive dialogue (Yetişensoy & Karaduman, 2024), countering disinformation (Lohani, 2021), peacebuilding narratives (Alavi et al. 2022). To truly address the limitations of traditional digital peace efforts and promote inclusive civic engagement within African communities, it's imperative to scale beyond research studies and implement practical solutions. Developing accessible and culturally sensitive digital tools is essential for the effective utilisation of AI-powered digital diplomacy. African nations must take the lead in creating their own solutions and applications tailored to their unique needs and challenges. This approach fosters local ownership, ensures cultural sensitivity, and addresses specific regional concerns. Introducing solutions like DemoChat is a step towards achieving these goals.

DemoChat: A Digital Diplomacy Tool for Digital Peace Building in Africa.

DemoChat is an innovative AI-enabled digital solution designed to revolutionise civic engagement by breaking down barriers, promoting inclusivity, and empowering citizens to participate more actively in democratic processes. Leveraging the power of AI, DemoChat will facilitate seamless communication between governments, organisations, and citizens, ensuring that everyone has a voice in decision-making. At its essence, DemoChat will harness advanced AI algorithms to tackle significant challenges in civic engagement and peace building, including language barriers, accessibility concerns, and limited outreach methods. With its sophisticated language translation and localization features, DemoChat will guarantee that information and resources are readily available to citizens in their preferred languages, irrespective of linguistic diversity. Additionally, DemoChat will monitor social dialogues and propose peace icons to the involved parties during conversations. Instead of potentially escalating dialogue with words, DemoChat will suggest subtle icons aimed at fostering intelligent peace-building dialogue among all parties involved.

Furthermore, DemoChat will function as a multifaceted tool for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It will operate as a conflict early warning system by employing AI algorithms to analyse extensive social media data and news reports. Through this analysis, DemoChat can detect early indicators of brewing tensions or potential violence, enabling proactive interventions to prevent conflicts from escalating. Also, DemoChat will promote inclusive dialogue by utilising AI-powered chatbots to facilitate constructive conversations among diverse communities and stakeholders. These chatbots will be equipped to translate languages, answer

questions, and provide a secure environment for open communication, fostering understanding and cooperation. DemoChat will contribute to peace building efforts by leveraging AI to analyse historical data and media coverage. By identifying and countering negative narratives that perpetuate conflict, as well as developing positive narratives that advocate for peace and reconciliation. In this regard, DemoChat will play a vital role in shaping narratives and promoting a culture of peace within communities.

DemoChat will also be built to play a crucial role in countering disinformation by utilising AI to combat the spread of misinformation and hate speech online. By identifying and flagging fake news, DemoChat will be enabled to fact-check and promote responsible use of social media platforms, mitigating the potential for conflict escalation. Additionally, DemoChat will contribute to cybersecurity and online safety efforts by employing AI to detect and prevent cyberattacks. As digital engagement grows, so does the risk of cyber threats that could disrupt peace processes or propagate misinformation. Through its AI-powered capabilities, DemoChat will help to safeguard online platforms and promote a secure environment for digital civic engagement.

Additionally, DemoChat will utilise personalised outreach and engagement methods, utilising data analytics to customise communication based on individual preferences and interests. By offering tailored information and assistance, DemoChat will promote inclusivity and motivate citizens to participate actively in civic matters. Additionally, DemoChat will cultivate a sense of community and belonging among users, facilitating collaboration, discussion, and collective action. Through its social networking capabilities and community forums, DemoChat will encourage citizens to connect, exchange ideas, and collaborate in addressing shared challenges.

One of the standout features of DemoChat, will be its user-friendly interface and accessibility features, designed to accommodate diverse needs and abilities. Whether through voice recognition, screen readers, or text-to-speech capabilities, DemoChat will ensure that citizens with disabilities can fully participate in democratic processes without barriers. Furthermore, DemoChat will monitor social media platforms and analyse public sentiment to gather feedback, identify emerging trends, and gauge public opinion on civic issues. This real-time data analysis will enable governments and organisations to adapt their strategies, respond to citizen concerns, and foster meaningful dialogue with the community. DemoChat will be built to shape the future of civic engagement and peace building in Africa and beyond.

Conclusion

Africa's digital revolution presents a unique opportunity for peace building efforts. By harnessing the power of AI-powered digital diplomacy, African nations can overcome traditional limitations. This approach fosters inclusive dialogue, addresses conflict drivers, and empowers citizens to participate in building a more peaceful and prosperous future. While research has explored the potential of AI in digital diplomacy, from conflict prevention to fostering inclusive

dialogue, the true impact lies in practical application. Moving beyond theoretical studies, Africa can leverage AI-powered digital diplomacy by developing accessible and culturally sensitive tools. This requires African leadership in crafting solutions that address their unique needs. Initiatives like DemoChat exemplify this approach, promoting local ownership and tackling regional challenges head-on.

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