

**THE ROLE OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN REGIONAL
INTEGRATION: A CASE STUDY OF KENYA'S RELATIONS WITH
OTHER EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY MEMBER STATES (2012 –
2020**


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DECLARATION

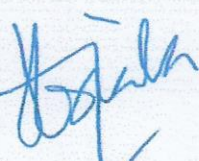
I declare that this research project is my original work and has not been presented in any other University for an academic award.

Sign  Date: 07/11/2022

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APPROVAL

This research project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the official University Supervisor.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Fredrick Z. Onyango and Nereah L. Onyango. Thank you for your constant and reliable support, prayers and love. Your assurance kept me going. I am because you are.

To my dear daughter, Hawi Ayiera. Thank you for your continuous encouragement and love. Your curiosity about my studies gave me the inspiration to do my best. May blessings follow you all the days of your life.

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To God be the glory.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CET	Common External Tariff
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of States and Governments Meeting
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
EAC	East African Community
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organisations
KAM	Kenya Association of Manufacturers
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NSAs	Non-State Actors
NTBs	National Trade Barriers
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
RIAs	Regional Integration Agreements
RTAs	Regional Trade Agreements
SADC	Southern African Development
SMS	Short Message Service
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
US	United States

ABSTRACT

Diplomacy has been evolving to remain relevant with the current issues being faced by the states. Globalisation and technological advancements have birthed a new kind of diplomacy, digital diplomacy, which has the potential to promote regionalism in blocs. However, the impact of digital diplomacy in promoting regionalism is not established and that is why this research was carried out. This study is aimed to examine the extent to which the usage of social media by the Kenyan government in its conduct of intra-EAC relations has impacted the relations between Kenya and its EAC neighbours. Also, it aimed to examine the extent to which the usage of social media by the non-state actors in intra-EAC cross-border transactions has impacted the relations between Kenyan and its EAC neighbours. The literature review identified that regional integration has levels for its full achievement. It starts with promoting free trade, then having a customs union, and later a common market is created, this will pave way for an economic union and finally, the governing entities of the member countries can settle on having a political union. It also confirmed that the main concept of shifting to digital diplomacy is because communication on social media platforms demystifies borders, it is a fast mode of communication that extends to multiple recipients and it is also cheaper to engage the public since technology has infiltrated many parts of the East African region. The study adopted the theory of liberal institutionalism and it employed both exploratory and descriptive research designs targeting government officials and journalists. A questionnaire was used as an interview guide for data collection. The data analysis confirmed the research hypotheses and revealed that Kenya's use of social media has impacted its relations with its EAC neighbours and how social media has had a positive impact on the way that bilateral relations are conducted between Kenya and other EAC states. Besides the ease and promptness in communication through social media, regulations have to be set to control the networks for security reasons and create trust among the users. Among its recommendations, the study suggests public awareness of the use of digital diplomacy as this could aid Kenya's goal of positioning itself as a key member of the EAC as the citizens of Kenya, as well as non-state actors, can help spread government messages for a wider reach. Moreover, such sensitization would help to reduce the possibility of users' exposure to the risks and dangers that lie on social media platforms. These include fake news, phishing, cybercrime and hacking of accounts, among others.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The practice of diplomacy has, over time, changed its tactics to adequately remain relevant in the existing situation and appropriately address the prevailing circumstances (Hocking and Melissen, 2015). The international system has gone through several changes that bring about the demand for flexibility in the practice of diplomacy so that nations may relate and communicate effectively with each other. Developments in the 21st century, such as innovative communication technologies, have greatly influenced the practice of diplomacy (Hocking and Melissen, 2015). Therefore, today's diplomat, in a bid to keep up with the changes, is required to adapt to the new technological modes of diplomacy as it will make it possible for them to effectively advance their diplomatic agenda of representation, negotiation, and communication (Hocking and Melissen, 2015). Advancements in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) resulted in a shift in the practice of diplomacy through the introduction of digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy is the practice of diplomacy using digital tools which may include social media (Manor, 2019). Inevitably, this influenced diplomatic relations, and a wave was accepted – digital diplomacy is now an international phenomenon (Verrekia, 2017). These changes and developments have impacted the implementation of foreign policy and how nations interact with each other and specifically in determining the success of regional integration (Manor, 2019).

The use of digital technologies in the present time is common in many places of employment and it is the same for the practice of diplomacy. The use of digital technologies is a result of globalization, which is the progression of international integration of goods, thoughts, and culture, among other aspects of the international system. It has affected the way nations relate and communicate with others (Ibrahim, 2013). Technological advancement is the main contributor to globalization, for example, through the adoption of advanced telecommunication, such as the use of mobile phone communication and widespread connectivity to the Internet. Consequently, diplomats, today use social media to fill a gap created when face-to-face interaction cannot be accomplished (Fitzpatrick, 2012). Foreign Ministries and diplomats can use social media to influence critical debates and to connect with key target audiences. Developed countries, like the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and New Zealand are using digital diplomacy as a tool to implement public diplomacy. They even designed digital diplomacy strategies to ensure they work towards

meeting their goals (Manor, 2019). Such policy documents include plans for advancing strategies to influence public opinions of their respective countries and promote online conversations on topical issues of diplomatic importance (Manor, 2019).

Social media plays an integral role in executing diplomacy without going through as it was previously before the advancement of technology (Manor, 2019). When discussing digital diplomacy, it is equitable to talk about the adaptation of social media in the integration of regions as a bloc for whatever purpose (Manor, 2019). Several social media platforms are common to a region and they can be good propagators of information from one country to another (Manor, 2019). Digital diplomacy is so much more effective when done through social media platforms because of the large mass of people using these sites for either social, economic, or political gains (Manor, 2019).

The European Union (EU), the largest economic and political regional bloc with 27 member states, adopted digital diplomacy by using social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter (Manor, 2014). It demonstrates the unity of the member states in promoting their common agenda in the digital space, which is now the standard practice in strengthening relations between nations and foreign audiences (Manor, 2014). Further, this reveals the appreciation the EU states have for digital diplomacy and that they value its impact on their union (Manor, 2014). Similar research on the use of digital diplomacy in the EU has also demonstrated the benefits of digital diplomacy to promote unity in regional integration (Manor, 2014).

Studies have shown that in Asia, the regionalism aspect is presented as a ground for competitiveness and so states in the continent use digital diplomacy as a tool for public diplomacy and to demonstrate their soft power (Hall and Smith, 2013). East and South Asian states made heavy investments, not only in their security forces but also in digital diplomacy tools (Hall and Smith, 2013). Such investments were demonstrated by the launch of websites dedicated to their foreign ministries. At the same time, they use social media channels, such as Twitter and Facebook, which are committed to the discussion of foreign policy and push messages to portray states in the best light possible. However, the use of digital diplomacy in Asia has not done much to positively influence regional integration among the neighbouring countries (Hall and Smith, 2013).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the use of digital diplomacy among East African Community(EAC) member states and its impact on promoting unity in the regional bloc. The EAC, like other African regional blocs formed in the post-colonial time, focused on building stronger economic power for the nations involved and increasing their competitive advantage through trade while achieving inter-African cooperation (Higgott and Reich, 1998).

The EAC went through a long period of repetitive challenges and it even disintegrated on some occasions (Mistry, 2000). The history of the EAC dates to the initial regional setup – the East African Cooperation Agreement – which collapsed in 1977 and consisted of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The main reason behind the collapse was ideological differences. Kenya had a capitalist economy; Tanzania was socialist, and Uganda appeared to be sitting on the fence (Mistry, 2000). This was the time of the Cold War and Africa was affected basically because of the level of dependence it had on the Western world. The interference from the developed countries had a negative impact on the EAC as mistrust led to unhealthy rivalry among the member states (Mistry, 2000). It was also a time of heavy political unrest and coups in East Africa. It further fuelled the level of suspicion among the member states and as a result, the unity in the regional bloc became a mirage (Mistry, 2000).

The regional bloc was revived in the 90s by the three original member states, and it evolved into the currently known EAC, which later welcomed other states – Rwanda, Burundi, and South Sudan (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012). The EAC has been going strong in the last 20 years and it is determined to remain that way in the future. The success of regional integration is dependent mainly on cordial relations between member states and conflicts between such states which are often resolved through the practice of diplomacy. The revival of the EAC occurred well before the mainstream adoption and use of digital diplomacy, which is said to have emerged in 2007 (Manor, 2017). According to Manor, digital diplomacy allows states to communicate with other states by using digital platforms and it makes communication between members of a regional bloc quick and timely (Manor, 2017).

Regional initiatives are prevailing, however, there is a need for persuasion, campaigning, and public perception moulding for the public to comprehend and support regionalism (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012). The efforts are deemed to be effective with the

involvement of digital diplomacy, which plays a key role in facilitating a quicker and more sustainable process by increasing awareness and advocating for topics of interest to different sections of the community (Manor, 2017). Digital diplomacy, through knowledge sharing assists in resolving group or individual conflicts, and it is plausible that regional integration intensifies conflict when people fall short of the community's primary intent, which overshadows the goals of the community (Manor, 2017). In some cases, social media conflicts escalate very fast and they have the potential of translating to offline scenes. As a result, more division occurs rather than integration (Manor, 2017).

Since the use of social media, as a tool for digital diplomacy, is a relatively new aspect of regional integration, its level of impact is not yet well established (Manor, 2017). The level of integration is extrapolated from the status of interactions and engagement in the social platforms (Manor, 2017). In recent years, the number of individuals using social media has increased manifold and their online activities go beyond country borders (Manor, 2017). Also, people engage in different activities which relate to business, social, educational, and cultural interactions. With this, transnational integration is expected to be widespread in the region (Manor, 2017).

Analysing the effect of digital diplomacy in such a case becomes cumbersome; therefore, the integration level is based on approximation from the relative impact of social media. While there are still a few more information sector inequities, digital diplomacy needs to provide information about regional problems, educate people, and provide sufficient information to help dispel the lack of trust, doubt, and misconceptions amongst these regional bloc's citizens, thereby fostering the governments' initiatives toward greater integration (Manor, 2017).

Even though digital diplomacy has been practised since around 2007, it is not clear what its impact has been on Kenya's cooperation with the other EAC countries. It is based on this background that this study aimed to examine and analyse Kenya's use of digital diplomacy in the EAC to gain a fuller understanding of the impact of this form of diplomacy in the region.

1.3 Research Questions

The broad research question of this study is does digital diplomacy play a role in regional integration? This study aimed to answer the following specific questions:

- i. How far has the usage of social media by the Kenyan government in its conduct of intra- EAC relations influenced the relations between Kenya and its EAC neighbours?
- ii. How far has the usage of social media by the non-state actors in intra- EAC cross-border transactions influenced the relations between Kenya and its EAC neighbours?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to investigate the role of digital diplomacy in promoting regional integration, with a focus on the EAC. The specific objectives are:

- i. To examine the extent to which the usage of social media by the Kenyan government in its conduct of intra- EAC relations has influenced the relations between Kenya and its EAC neighbours.
- ii. To examine the extent to which the usage of social media by the non-state actors in intra- EAC cross-border transactions has influenced the relations between Kenyan and its EAC neighbours.

1.5 Justification of the Study

1.5.1 Academic Justification

Numerous studies by scholars, such as Jan Melissen, Markus Kornprobst, and Corneliu Bjola, on the impact of digital diplomacy, through the use of social media, on regional integration, focus heavily on other regions such as Western countries. In contrast, the situation in developing countries is under-researched but some studies have been carried out by scholars such as Ilan Manor and Yolanda Kemp Skies.

Further, Manor (2016) observed that digital diplomacy is not limited to Western countries but was also practised by states that form part of the EAC, such as Kenya and Uganda, which have developed digital diplomacy policies. Additionally, that the African Ministries of Foreign Affairs are equally as proficient in the use of digital diplomacy through the use of social media platforms as compared to their peers in the Western countries (Manor, 2019). However, it is not clear whether, through such policy documents, digital diplomacy promotes the unity of the regional bloc. Therefore, this study aimed to fill the gaps in the academic literature on the adoption of digital diplomacy to promote regional integration. Further, the

findings will form a basis for academic debates, knowledge base and further research on the same topic.

1.5.2 Policy Justification

Diplomacy requires dialogue and a continuous flow of information among member states. Hence, through the use of digital diplomacy, a two-way communication platform through which discussions between diplomats and communities are sustainable. However, Kenya has not fully used social media as a tool for diplomacy to solve conflicts in EAC and strengthen trade relations and unity to steer economic development in this region. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs might apply the study findings in setting policies that encourage diplomats to use digital communications platforms such as social networking sites - Facebook and Twitter - to communicate directly with individuals and audiences and ensure that their suggestions and aspirations are reflected in foreign policies, governance and transnational issues. Also, the findings and recommendations of this research will be useful in educating the government and diplomats on the usefulness of digital diplomacy in enhancing regional cooperation among member states.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research was based on the EAC with the focus being on Kenya's relations with other EAC member states. The focus of this study was on Kenya because of the ease of getting information as compared to the time and effort it will take to get the required data for the study for the other EAC member states. Moreover, since data collection required one-on-one interviews, it is only prudent that the study narrowed down to Kenya, the researcher's home country. As Manor (2016) observed, Kenya has demonstrated that, to some extent, it has been using digital diplomacy as a tool for advancing its diplomatic efforts and for furthering its relations with other states through its active use of Twitter for its embassies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The analysis of the adaptation and impact of digital diplomacy to promote unity in the EAC can be viewed effectively from the perspective of one member.

As of 2020, the membership of the EAC comprised the following countries Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Therefore, this study focussed on these specific members even though one more country – South Sudan – joined the regional bloc in 2022. Additionally, in relation to the areas of focus, this study took into account the pillars of EAC's regional integration. These are the customs union, the common market, the monetary

union and the political federation. And for the purpose of this study, the focus was limited to issues relating to the customs union and the common market as the other two are yet to be achieved.

And since the study examined the case of Kenya in the EAC, it will not delve much into how other EAC member states use social media to achieve their digital diplomacy goals. At the same time, it did not take a deep dive into analysing the personalities of the diplomats using social media as a tool for diplomacy. Therefore, it stuck to Kenya's perspective and did not narrow it down to discussing the characters involved, such as the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The study focussed on Kenya's MFA as the primary source of information and, importantly, as it is the hub for diplomatic relations. Further, personnel at the Ministry were resourceful in providing the required information to meet the study's objectives. The researcher anticipated that there would be some challenges in getting information, specifically from government officials, however, this did not have a significant impact on the study. Therefore, the researcher corroborated the data collected with accessible secondary sources.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This section offers an assessment of regional integration, social media and the whole concept of digital diplomacy in East Africa. A theoretical foundation is established in this chapter as it summarizes materials from other researchers. The literature review helps to comprehend the findings and suggestions of other associated investigations. The reviews are used to provide a framework for concepts.

2.2 Literature Review

The reviewed literature focuses on five thematic areas that are appropriate to this study regarding digital diplomacy and regional integration. The thematic areas are regional integration, approaches to regional integration, Kenya in the EAC, the concept of digital diplomacy, and lastly, the nexus between regional integration and diplomacy. The study reviewed literature by assessing regional integration and digital diplomacy from the global, continental, and national perspectives within the context of Kenya in the EAC.

2.2.1 Regional Integration

De Lombaerde and Van Langenhove (2007) describe regional integration as a global phenomenon of territorial systems that aims to improve the connections between the countries involved and gives rise to new structures of relations. They state that the new structures co-exist with states as the members of such organizations and they retain their autonomy. Further, they posit that regional integration bodies should fulfil several functions such as building up trade integration, creating an environment to boost public sector development as well as strengthening the public sector establishments, among other functions.

John McCormick (1999) defined regional integration as the process whereby two or more states decide to work closely with each other with the common goals of achieving peace, economic growth, and stability. He states that integration typically comprises one or more written agreements that define the areas of cooperation extensively. According to McCormick (1999), such integration usually starts with the economic aspect and later develops into political integration. In his book, he explains that economic integration is achieved when different states agree to eliminate trade barriers between them. Such barriers can be tariffs,

quotas as well as border restrictions. Whereas political integration can occur as the economies of the countries in an integration arrangement become unified into a single market and a need arises for the member states to develop common policies for social issues. These social issues are those such as healthcare, education, and employee relations concerns. Further, the culmination of political integration arises when the member states are integrated to a point that they have common foreign policies and even merge their armed forces thereby effectively giving rise to essentially, what can be described as a new country.

According to Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012), regional integration can be referred to in several alternative terms such as economic integration and cooperation. However, they state that it is what arises when countries join a group intending to lessen barriers to trade with other countries in the same group. They further explain that the union of such countries should ultimately boost development and welfare among the member states. Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012), in a bid to offer additional clarification, state that regional integration denotes a union of distinct national economies through different forms of integration. And at the same time, it indicates the steady removal of economic barriers between the said national economies.

Further, Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012) posit that regional integration may be described with a focus on three dimensions. Firstly, from a geographical perspective, the motivation behind the union of several countries is motivated by geographical proximity. Secondly, from a coverage perspective whereby the states are interested and involved in regional activities, such as trade to promote the supply of goods and services among states of similar interests. The third perspective has to do with the level of autonomy a state is ready to surrender, through a form of cooperation which is characterised by the activities they engage in as a group, to create a supranational unit. Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012) in their study add that the basis for regional integration is to enhance cooperation among member states to reduce or eradicate barriers to trade and the movement of people. Further, its foundation is an agreement among member states to coordinate their trade policies to ensure they can increase trade and advance competitiveness while maximizing the welfare of their citizens.

Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012) argue that regional integration is not a new situation in Africa citing that it is the continent with the longest list of Regional Trade

Agreements (RTAs), both past and present and that this may be perceived as an indicator for its poor record of sustaining such regional agreements. They add that one of the most persuasive justifications for regional integration in Africa is the high number of small economies, which if combined, would attract higher foreign investments and advantages to the respective economies. Therefore, they posit that for Africa, regional integration is an important tool for states to attain economic growth.

Trudi Hartzenberg (2011) in her study described regional integration in Africa as a rational response to the challenges faced by a continent with numerous small national markets and landlocked states. This resulted in the rise of many Regional Integration Agreements (RIAs) in the continent with states becoming members of various regional unions – and some even belonging to several such unions. This, she explained, is due to the support from governments for regional integration as, since independence, African states viewed regional integration as a vital tool for their development goals. According to Hartzenberg (2011), the experience of Africa and RIAs has been characterised by ambitious targets, a miserable performance record and few success stories.

2.2.2 Approaches to Regional Integration

According to Jean-Paul Rodrigue (2020), economic integration can be categorized into five progressive levels, all of which are currently present in the international system through the global economy. He explains that with an increase in the level of integration, the complexity of the relationships among the member states equally increases. Rodrigue (2020) states that the first level, which is the least complicated, is free trade. This occurs when members of a regional integration arrangement reduce tariffs, and some are even eliminated. The main aim of such an arrangement is to advance economies of scale and provide an environment of comparative advantages to encourage economic efficiency. An example he gives is the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was between Mexico, the United States and Canada, that gave rise to a trade bloc in North America. Rodrigue states that the customs union is the second level and in such an arrangement, member states agree to permit free trade on products by states in the arrangement and they also agree to have a Common External Tariff (CET) which is applied to countries outside of their union. And he provides the example of the Mercosur, also known as the Southern Common Market – a South American trade union, which was set up in 1991 and its members are Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay.

Rodrigue (2020) states that the third level is the common market where services and factors of production, such as labour and capital are freely moved among the members' states of a regional bloc thereby increasing scale economies and comparative advantages. Nevertheless, each member state can have its regulations, for example, product standards. He cites the example of the Eurasian Economic Space whose members are Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. The next level is the economic union, which gives rise to a single market where all tariffs are removed. Rodrigue (2020) explains that in such a situation, there is free movement of labour and monetary policies are coordinated between the member states. An example he provides is that of the EU and the Euro – a common currency for the member states. Lastly, according to Rodrigue, there is the most advanced level, which is a political union, which is a common government and would result in a significant reduction of the sovereignty of member states. Rodrigue (2020) states that such situations of common governments are only found in nation-states with the structures of a federation with a central government and regions, such as states, which have levels of autonomy. Examples are the US and Germany.

Hartzenberg (2011) states Africa's case is that of linear market integration, most examples of regional integration begin with the aim of creating a free trade area, which is then followed by the formation of a customs union, an economic union and ultimately, the goal of establishing a political union. Hartzenberg (2011) cites the examples of the Southern African Development (SADC) and the EAC, which illustrate Africa's history with regional integration which replicates the implementation of the linear integration model often linked with ambitious goals. Again, she notes that Africa's record of regional integration is not remarkable and questions whether the linear market integration approach is suitable for dealing with the challenges that hinder regional trade.

According to Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012), the history of economic and political integrations can be traced to pre-colonial times. In that period, several kingdoms in many parts of Africa, and their territories, stretched beyond the modern-day boundaries of numerous African states. Therefore, the people and their cultures were integrated, and this created a conducive environment for trade and ease of movement of the factors of production. Further, Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012) opine that the colonisation of Africa serves as a setting for the continent's current economic and political integration status. They go on to cite the case of protectorates under the British Empire as they were administered jointly, in what they describe as an aim to reduce administrative costs. This paved the way for

the post-colonial governments, particularly in East, West, Central and Southern Africa to initiate various forms of regionalism through free trade, free movement of factors of trade, and common currencies. And in Southern Africa, a customs union was even formed. However, Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012) note that as time went by, there was a reduced push for a more established economic integration in Africa as a good number of the independence leaders thought cross-border institutions would dilute their sovereignty and create a new form of recolonisation. Despite this, Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung, and Kerr (2012) state that leaders who stood for the economic and political unification of Africa, such as Kwame Nkrumah brought together his fellow independence leaders and after a while founded the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), in a note published in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* (1963), many African countries had just got their independence from their colonisers and were focussing on economic development. At the same time, the states were dealing with some challenges such as a lack of skilled and trained manpower, inadequate managerial skills, low capital resources, and poor infrastructure. Therefore, African states were forced to look beyond their national borders for new markets and this created the necessity for common markets or economic integration in the continent.

2.2.3 Information Communication as a Protagonist of Integration

Development is void when information concerning development is non-existent (Deco, 2019). Conversely, data stays meaningless until it is communicated. There is a critical requirement to convey the appropriate information, at the appropriate time, and to the appropriate individuals. The trinity of information, development, and communication is so intertwined and interdependent that none of the three elements can exist alone (Makunyi, 2015). Thus, in the process of economic development, African governments must pay close attention to their rural populace to ascertain both their policy decisions and their communication requirements.

Effective public communication demonstrates the government's competency and also fosters increased visibility and enlightened popular involvement (Makunyi, 2015). The communications strategy was intended to make the EAC more tangible than speculative; to position it as a proactive, people-centred ideal image that would drive the brand of a wealthy,

safe, and unified East Africa. Additionally, the effort aims to guarantee that all EAC residents, their legislative representatives, and other policymakers are acquainted with the brand, have a favourable opinion toward the EAC, and are actively involved in its operations and the integration process in general (Deco, 2019). Regional relations, like national politics, have always been predicated on this concept. The apparatus, which ranges from parliamentary legislation to findings by select committees, is structured to generate enormous media attention to increase the answerability of the government to the public and, eventually, to engage them in giving an opinion on the positives and negatives of the matters at hand. While this remark seems to point out the obvious, the EAC secretariat seems to be at a loss on this point. This understanding may have prompted the EAC's information and public relations office to declare in September 2009 the body's intention to create and execute five-year information and communications strategy (Deco, 2019).

The EAC needs robust information, education, and communication plan to expedite the integration process. The EAC heads of state agreed at an Extra-Ordinary Summit held in Dar es Salaam on 29-30 May 2005 that the regional integration process would be based on public knowledge and involvement (Deco, 2019). Citizens' engagement in public affairs and the political process is highly reliant on the amount of information available in the public gallery. This communication is important in shaping a citizen's interest in public issues (Deco, 2019). There is a connection between citizens' interest in public affairs and their access to the media, such that their degree of interest in public affairs is inversely proportionate to their level of access or interaction with the media (Makunyi, 2015).

Communication success is contingent upon the successful integration of many critical communication components. If properly handled inside the EAC domain, this integration will ultimately influence the views of the bloc's stakeholders. Though communicators are fully aware of the strategic problems that must be addressed, they seldom execute communication initiatives holistically (Deco, 2019). This virtually imperceptible deployment of the communication strategy demonstrates the need of conducting an assessment of the function of a successful communication strategy in expediting the integration process. John asserts that fewer people see the possibilities inherent in a community's complete integration. The first step in attracting citizens' attention to any regional issue is to pique their interest in their own country's problems (Makunyi, 2015). Thus, a national broad-based discussion over a state's participation in regional issues such as regional integration is very difficult if the

debate includes an indifferent populace or one that has historically concentrated on narrow political beliefs (Deco, 2019). Thus, independent of the other factors of the EAC integration process's effectiveness, such as labour, capital, and the flow of goods and services, access to information is among the most important. This is because the EAC populace views information and knowledge as critical to their understanding of the EAC and what the integration process entails. Communication does play a significant role in participative methods (Makunyi, 2015).

As a result, the beginning must be based on the existence of genuine wants and issues for development to have any meaning for the people who are in desperate need of it (Deco, 2019). Effective communication is an ideal vehicle for grassroots involvement. Rural regions, urban slums, and other disadvantaged sectors lag far behind in terms of genuine development. Residents living in the aforementioned peripheries, in particular, must be allowed to articulate their true needs. This has been hampered by either their insufficient involvement in development initiatives designed to address their demands or by the bottom-up communication methods used (Makunyi, 2015).

2.2.4 Kenya in the EAC

Ogot and Kieran (1968) state that the EAC was initially formed in 1967, after years of discussion and consideration among its members were Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. At the time, it was identified as the East African Cooperation. According to their book, they state that the formation of the Cooperation took place as each country was working on thorough and progressive plans to significantly raise the growth rates of their respective economies. Ogot and Kieran (1968) opined that the union was made possible by the history of the three states, which dates way back to the 1900s when Uganda had a customs collection point set up in Mombasa. The scholars add that during this time, each country had development plans that focused on boosting the industrial activities of their economies, which like was the case in other African countries, had been dominated by non-Africans due to colonization (Ogot and Kieran, 1968).

According to Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012) the setting up of the Uganda customs collection point in Mombasa resulted in the formation of the Customs Union between Kenya and Uganda in 1917, and Tanzania, then known as Tanganyika, joined the Union in 1922. Consequently, it gave rise to several regional offices and services such as the

East African Railway, and the East African Posts and Telecommunications Corporation, among many others (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012).

Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012) argue that even during the formation of the EAC, the ideological differences among the member states, which was the main cause of the split, were apparent but they kept hope alive that the unity of the regional body would stand the test of time. And in a bid to explain the reasons behind the split of the EAC, Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012) state that the breakup of the EAC happened at the time of the Cold War, and Africa was affected basically because of the level of dependence it had on the Western world. And that at the same time, post-colonial Africa was going through its transition to sovereignty against the backdrop of the Cold War (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012). According to the scholars, there were several setbacks to the continent as several African states were involved in proxy wars as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the US – who were the propagators of the Cold War and were using African states to serve their interests – who were competing to appear as the more vital supporter of African countries, which were fighting to gain their independence (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012).

According to Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012), the 1977 breakup of the EAC did not affect the historical connections Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania enjoyed as it was built on a robust economic foundation. And it was during the 1991 Commonwealth Heads of States and Governments Meeting (CHOGM) held in Harare, Zimbabwe, that Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania agreed to revitalize the EAC (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012). Further, in 1993, the Agreement for the Establishment of the Permanent Tripartite Commission for the East African Corporation was signed by the member states (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012). Additionally, the scholars explain that in 1996, the Secretariat of the East African Cooperation was launched in Arusha, Tanzania (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012). In 1999, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania signed the Treaty for the Establishment of the EAC, which breathed new life into the regional bloc and the treaty came into force in 2000 (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012).

Drummond, Wajid and Williams (2014) posit that the member countries remain dedicated to regional integration that includes economic, political and social aspects. Also, they are working toward building a political federation and this resulted in the endorsement of the

2005 Customs Union Protocol and the 2010 Common Markets Protocol (Drummond, Wajid and Williams, 2014). Further, they have adopted the Monetary Union Protocol, which confirmed that the focus on a monetary union is underway (Drummond, Wajid and Williams, 2014).

According to the EAC website as of March 10, 2021, the pillars of EAC are customs union, common market, monetary union and political federation. Also, it confirms that the progression towards attaining an East Africa Federation is being accelerated to ultimately build an influential and maintainable East African political and economic bloc.

2.2.5 The Concept of Digital Diplomacy

According to the 1961 United Nations (UN) Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, communication is the cornerstone of diplomacy and this is anchored in various clauses. For example, Article 27(1) provides that the host country has a duty to allow and shield unrestricted communication with states having missions for their official duties.

Jonsson and Hall (2003) unearthed the word diplomacy as a verb in Greek “diploun” meaning "to double" and a noun in Greek “diploma” which means a formal document that is authored using double leaves put together. Considering this, *diploma* has a key component of communication which in international relations might have a hidden message and a formal paper that consists of fundamental rights to the bearer. Jonsson and Hall (2003) opine that diplomatic communication could effectively be traced from the history of arguments, collecting, sharing, and reporting of information as the main diet for diplomats from time immemorial. Further, this dates to the 14th century, ancient Egypt utilised Amarna letters, which were a variety of cuneiform tablets that comprised intelligence of how Egypt wanted to sustain control over her territory in Asia (Jonsson and Hall, 2003).

In his examination, Nickles (2003) studied the effect of the telegraph on diplomatic communication and established that it enhanced international relations and countered the problem of distance hence creating a window of opportunity for conveying information more quickly than people did through the use of a ship, train and horses. He opined those other innovations that were later introduced were the print press, radio, telephones, television, early generation, and digital computers including satellite. Further, diplomats in the recent world

enjoy a wide variety of communication channels particularly access to the worldwide web using phones and digital computers.

Melissen and Caesar-Gordon (2016) opined that the proliferation of information technology has propelled growth in digital diplomacy normally referred to as e-diplomacy or cyber diplomacy. Further, they asserted that considering the fast-paced technological trend, information technology will continue to evolve (Melissen and Caesar-Gordon, 2016).

Bjola (2019) defined virtual diplomacy as a political, economic, and social relationship that is connected via electric gadgets. He states that it involves the use of modern methods and information transmission modes using the internet and ICT. In his observation, political leaders and diplomats have started appreciating the use of technology to boost international relations and push for their country's interests in contrast with the conventional one-on-one communication approach.

Given this, Nalwanga (2011) argues that as a result of technological diffusion, digital diplomacy has accommodated many players including non-state actors, who can now broaden the global development agenda and thus minimise the dominance in diplomacy by some states. Nweke (2012) asserts that the use of digital diplomacy is limited to countries that send, process, and receive digital information. Ipu (2013) explains that the adoption and use of ICT in diplomacy have changed global communication between foreign states including official envoys globally. Abbasov (2007) indicated that digital diplomacy was introduced when diplomacy began to evolve and comply with communication approaches that employed modern technologies like ICT. Further, he states that digital communication can be dated back to the World Wide Web invention in 1989.

Sandre (2015) argues that virtual diplomacy can be defined as a practice that entails the use of ICT to disseminate information among diplomats and the public. Also, that digital diplomacy gets suggestions from people in diverse occupations with specific worldwide interests hence it is not regarded exclusively as a professional affair.

Lichtenstein (2010) described digital diplomacy as the exchange of tweets for broadcasting, the use of open-ended Short Message Service (SMS), posting on Facebook, and the use of Google and YouTube, to explore online communication platforms. He opined that digital

diplomacy is compared to a new marriage, for example, a union between the MFA and Silicon Valley giants who are charged with the responsibility to promote technology in global trade and relations.

2.2.6 Social Media as a Tool for Digital Diplomacy

Globalisation and technological advancements, such as the use of the Internet, have resulted in the making public of information that was previously considered secret. For example, state information such as foreign policies; was through what was dubbed an information revolution (Nye, 2014). The Internet can be defined as a global information system of interconnected computer networks that is primarily a communications technology as well as a data repository through which information and data are processed and accessed (Kahn and Cerf, 1999). As of April 2020, about 4.57 billion people were using the Internet, which is about 59 percent of the global population, and more than half that number on social media platforms (Kahn and Cerf, 1999). The Internet provides an unrivalled platform filled with opportunities and challenges for communication. The adoption of electronic communications tools, as such social media as a medium for the attainment of diplomacy goals ushered in the concepts of digital diplomacy, also known as e-diplomacy (Manor, 2019).

With the widespread use of the Internet, it is virtually impossible to slow down this development in the practice of diplomacy (Manor, 2019). The impact of these changes on the practice of diplomacy has been the number of actors involved (Hocking, Melissen, Riordan and Sharp, 2012). According to Manor, historically, diplomatic relations focussed on state-to-state relations but today, it is appreciated that there are non-state actors who are very influential and impactful in the practice of diplomacy (Manor, 2019). Therefore, the shift from a bilateral to a multilateral approach meant that states were forced to adapt to the changes with their representatives, such as Ministers of Foreign Affairs and diplomats, changing tact in their line of work (Manor, 2019). And while Foreign Affairs ministers and diplomats now share a platform with a wide range of actors and institutions, it is notable that states remain the chief actors in international matters (Hocking, Melissen, Riordan and Sharp, 2012). Government diplomacy, without a doubt, remains an essential aspect in protecting national interests, promoting foreign policy and maintaining international peace as well as security (Hocking, Melissen, Riordan and Sharp, 2012).

Governments use this tool to relay diplomatic messages as well as spark conversations for public discourse on electronic platforms (Manor, 2019). Consequently, there has been a shift from state-to-state diplomatic interaction to state-to-private individuals as well. However, he added that digital diplomacy has its pros and cons. While it gives governments access to reach more people, it makes it difficult for governments to control the information that is in the public domain (Manor, 2019). Also, once information is shared on social media platforms, it is virtually impossible to delete it and act as though it did not happen (Manor, 2019). The digital gap between developing and developed countries has been steadily reducing as more people in developing countries get access to smartphones, and this translates to their access to the Internet (Manor, 2019). From 2013 to 2015 there was an increase of about 24 per cent in smartphone users in developing countries (Bloodgood and Masson, 2018).

As with other technologies, the use of social media, as a tool for digital diplomacy, presents both positive as well as negative traits (Bjola, 2019). According to Bjola (2019), these traits can be used by states for offence or defence. He described the tactical use of social media to spread propaganda or disinformation as “the dark side of digital diplomacy” adding that such use of social media could have significant and grave consequences for the global order (Bjola, 2019).

According to Giusti and Piras (2021), whereas states can use social media as a tool to display their power, they can also use it to give disinformation about other states and in doing so, result in putting the security and sovereignty of the said states at risk. Therefore, states are required to be alert and aware of such risks and should put measures in place to counter the harmful effects of disinformation, misinformation and other negative consequences of the use of social media as a tool for digital diplomacy (Bjola, 2019). Some of the remedies they may consider to counter these dangers are debunking the misinformation, discrediting it or even ignoring the false information (Bjola, 2019).

2.2.7 The Connection Between Regional Integration and Digital Diplomacy

Schiff and Winters (1998) state that regional integration has such an impact on diplomacy that they even classify it as a form of diplomacy. This, they state, is because for a regional agreement to hold water, there must be the basic element of trust and confidence between the member states. And so, signing an agreement with each other creates a link through which

the interaction is improved as they all aspire for mutual benefits brought about by RIAs. The scholars explain that it is assumed that countries that trade with each other are less likely to go to war with each other. Further, given the traditional diplomatic role of preserving peace and security, through the formation of a regional bloc, member states support each other to ward off external threats to member states.

According to Murray (2000), regional integration and diplomacy are not foreign to each other and in Africa, in particular. During the time of the late 1950s to early 1960s, a sequence of All-African Peoples' Conferences were held in a bid to support countries that had not secured their independence to do so and plan for a non-violent uprising in Africa. He explains that these meetings were also geared at securing a forum for which African states were trying to establish a continental body for all member states to build relationships that would help them meet their respective agendas, mostly for development – the OAU. Murray (2000) adds that the OAU was formed and chartered in 1963, and this is a prime example of when diplomatic efforts were put in to save regional integration.

Manor (2018) explained that Kenya, through the MFA, utilises social media, mostly Twitter, to communicate with its citizens, mainly those who are in other countries. It also uses digital platforms to boost the image of the country and to engage with MFAs from other countries and the agility digital diplomacy offers is one that can be appreciated especially during times of crisis. He provides an example of in 2013, when there was political unrest in South Sudan, the MFA ensured there was an official available to specifically interact with Kenyan citizens, who wanted information and support, online. The MFA kept this arrangement on for several days as the fighting went on and the support provided included the evacuation of citizens from South Sudan through emergency flights.

However, he explained that this is an exceptional case as Kenya's MFA mostly engages with its social media followers in situations that are planned and defined, such as scheduled Twitter chats. Manor (2018), in his assessment, determined that Kenya uses social media to influence its agenda by engaging MFAs on Twitter to publicise some information and to voice its position on issues on the global agenda and that Kenya has been using digital diplomacy and it has been beneficial in boosting the country's global image and heightened its media visibility.

2.2.8 The Use of Social Media in the EAC

East Africa is rapidly establishing itself as a dominant economic bloc that cannot be disregarded in the world system (Ogola, Njenga, Mhando and Kiggundu, 2015). The EAC member states' knowledge and awareness of political integration problems continue to be sketchy, with the process perceived as an initiative for the elite; the general population's lack of awareness of integration issues requires immediate attention, especially as it relates to issues like the Common Market opportunities designed to target more persons (Ogola, Njenga, Mhando and Kiggundu, 2015). The integration process is described in detail, as are the obstacles and limitations of the existing awareness and knowledge dissemination system and processes, including minimal interest from members of the press, lack of institutional mechanisms for information distribution and sensitization, and ineffective dissemination instruments (Ogola, Njenga, Mhando and Kiggundu, 2015).

The truth is that alternative sources of information must be developed and exploited, such as adopting new social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and other online platforms, to increase the reach and adoption of regional integration programs (Manor, 2016). Additionally, the necessity for increased frequent information interchange on integration, the publication of regular bulletins on the subject, as well as specialized radio and print media programs on regional integration, would contribute significantly to the process's advancement. The need for a complete communication policy and marketing plan that includes programs for sharing information and boosting confidence, sensitization and mobilization of the public to overcome the worries and anxieties caused by a lack of knowledge (Ogola, Njenga, Mhando and Kiggundu, 2015).

The demand for information demonstrates the importance of the EAC citizenry owning and shaping the federation's processes through public exposure and sharing information; this should be accomplished through the establishment of a robust body charged with sharing information about EAC activities (Kimbugwe, Perdakis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012). A cost-effective communication plan will create and execute a collaborative approach for developing and adopting the marketing and communications strategy.

The necessity of mobilising research teams and promoting advocacy with different stakeholders, the necessity for collaboration amongst EAC governments, and the media as a means of influencing information about the integration process all contribute to the

community's success in overcoming hurdles (Cox, 2018). The basis of the media's role is the belief that by sharing suggestions about regionalism and integration, citizens will gain a greater awareness of the benefits of the larger community, which will result in increased awareness among the general public and as a result, increased knowledge of the EAC culture (Ogola, Njenga, Mhando and Kiggundu, 2015). As a disseminator of integrationist ideas, the media may assist start integrative tendencies and raise knowledge about the process, which will ultimately result in an accepted regional identity (Cox, 2018).

The media has been recognized as important in accelerating regional integration and delivering advantages to all EAC people. It is not enough for the media to take a peripheral position by infrequently reporting on chief activities organized by EAC bodies and associated agencies; the issue is to make sure grassroots are involved and to articulate matters of concern to individuals and groups in society across all East African countries (Ogola, Njenga, Mhando and Kiggundu, 2015). This is regarding the reality that if an East African conscious experience is to be developed at the local level, social media must first join in. They believe that by incorporating proponents of information with a solid grounding in regional matters and focussing on the realization of the integration plan, we will have made a giant leap. Historically, the media have struggled to provide sufficient time and space to regional integration problems, for example taking deliberate steps to instil East African uniqueness in the populace and describing the integration process's complexity. Journalists in the area should do a critical analysis of data on a variety of regional activities to create discussion on topics other than the federation's regular political reporting.

Shem Bageine, Uganda's Minister for EAC Affairs, previously said that the regional integration project is approaching a crucial stage and that its accomplishment is contingent on public mobilization and engagement, which may be accomplished via the media (Ogola, Njenga, Mhando and Kiggundu, 2015). He mentioned the outcome of agreements on the protocol on monetary union, the draft protocol on good governance, and a regional plan to combat corruption as evidence that EAC member states need to enact legislation guaranteeing press and expression freedoms and promoting a safe working environment for journalists (Cox, 2018). Additionally, the establishment of a regional advocacy body to bring practitioners together to negotiate and pursue their desires in the integration process, as well as the formation of organisations such as the projected East African Media Council, East African Media Society, or East African Media Forum (Cox, 2018).

2.2.9 Summary of Literature Review

A common theme in the writings reviewed on Kenya's membership in the EAC is that several factors have threatened the success of regional integration in Africa and this has been well documented. These include poor infrastructure – such as transport networks and this has dampened the success of the trading of goods (Cox, 2018). Also, the dependency on donors has harmed the continent as states are forced to dance to their piper's tunes at the expense of their allegiances to the regional blocs they belong to and this was a contributory factor to the collapse of the original EAC. However, they have failed to discuss in great detail the factors that unify the EAC member states and their effects on promoting its goals. Furthermore, the scholars largely took the perspective of the EAC member states but did not have a specific focus on Kenya and its relations with the other EAC member states.

However, according to Manor (2016), a sizeable number of researchers have investigated digital diplomacy in developing economies. Considering that this concept is relatively new, there is a compelling need for scholars in Africa to consider exploring this field and thus lead from the front in providing advice to African countries on the importance of the use of digital diplomacy and its impact on regional integration. It is clear that Kenya appreciates the value of digital diplomacy through its combination of social media in its diplomatic efforts (Manor, 2016). However, there is a growing need for scholarly work to delve into the benefits of digital diplomacy from Kenya's perspective. The information will go a long way in explaining the situation in an African context and this is currently not well covered in scholarly works. This study aims to fill the gaps identified.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Liberal Institutionalism

One of the variants of the liberalism theory is liberal institutionalism, which takes the view that world politics is no longer an arena limited to states only, as it had been the position held by realists who hold a state-centric view of the world (Baylis and Smith, 2001). Those who propound the theory of liberal institutionalism, are also known as pluralists as the theory is also referred to as pluralism (Baylis and Smith, 2001). According to Devitt (2011), liberal institutionalism contends that to explain international relations, the focus should be placed on global governance, international organisations, and the ability of international organisations to get states to cooperate with each other. The theory deviates from the realist assumption that

international politics is a scuffle for power in which security issues take centre stage (Devitt, 2011).

Some of the scholars associated with this theory are Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, who opine that the significance of other actors, such as International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), transnational corporations, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should be considered as the practice of international relations considers the presence of various actors (Baylis and Smith, 2001). Keohane and Nye pointed out four major differences between liberal institutionalism and realism – various channels for communications among actors across state borders, consideration is given to all issues with equal measure, no dissimilarity between high and low politics and the waning of military force as a method by which policy is developed (Devitt, 2011).

Other renowned scholars who are linked to this theory are Peter M. Haas, David Mitrany and Karl Deutsch. According to Haas and Mitrany, regional and international institutions, such as the EU and the UN, are necessary partners for states to achieve certain economic and social aspirations and perform functions that states could not perform without their support (Baylis and Smith, 2001). Deutsch studied the history of the evolution of regional integration and viewed it as a process which results in the creation of political communities at the national as well as international levels (Deutsch, 1966).

2.3.2 Assumptions of the Theory

One of the most notable contributions of this theory is the aspect of interdependence, which the scholars who advanced this theory said was a result of globalisation and the interconnectedness of states in the international system (Baylis and Smith, 2001). An argument of liberal institutional theory during the post-war period concerning the state's incapability to manage modernisation paved the way for globalisation (Baylis and Smith, 2001). Globalisation has been defined as the progression of international integration of goods, thoughts, and culture, among other aspects of the international system (Ibrahim, 2013). The theory assumes that, at the time, states would not manage to adapt to new technologies to sustain their sovereignty as it might be threatened by some aspects of modernisation (Ibrahim, 2013).

According to Keohane and Nye, liberal institutionalism assumes that states are the key actors in the international system, but they are not the only important ones (Baylis and Smith, 2001). Also, the theory assumes that all actors in the international system are rational and continuously pursue ways to capitalize on their interests (Baylis and Smith, 2001). Further, as rational actors, states are not troubled by the relative gains of others, instead, they prefer absolute gains for themselves and this creates a situation where they are inclined to cooperate and not conflict with other states (Baylis and Smith, 2001). And with specific reference to international institutions, according to this theory, lack of information among states is the biggest impediment to cooperation and this obstacle can be solved by international institutions (Devitt, 2011). This is because, the theory additionally assumes that international institutions are impartial and promote cooperation among states (Devitt, 2011). Particularly, if the setup of the institution is equally advantageous to the states, such as the EAC, then, they are likely to transfer their allegiances to these institutions (Devitt, 2011).

In reference to the weaknesses of the Liberal Institutionalism theory, renowned International Relations scholar John Mearsheimer made a critique of the liberal institutionalism theory from a realist perspective in his article *False Promise of Institutions*, which was published in 1994. In the article, he opined that the conduct of a state is determined by the relative distribution of power in the international system (Mearsheimer, 1994). Mearsheimer explained that any deviations in a state's relative wealth and power will affect its conduct and subsequently, the dynamics of collaboration with other states (Mearsheimer, 1994). Therefore, states are concerned with relative and not only absolute gains as it affects the balance of power (Mearsheimer, 1994). In his view, states will work together only if they can realistically anticipate achieving more than any other state (Mearsheimer, 1994). Hence, if withdrawing from collaboration or conflict gives greater relative gains than collaboration, a state would opt for conflict (Mearsheimer, 1994).

In relation to this study, the gaps in this theory can be identified by the fact that the theory does not anticipate the risks involved in use of social media as a tool for digital diplomacy, which was brought about by technological advancements that boosted interconnectedness among states (Devitt, 2011). The manner in which this form of communication works exposes information to even more consumers of information beyond the intended recipients.

Therefore, in the event that one state intentionally uses misinformation or disinformation to harm the reputation or position of another state, it would be successful and it would take a lot of effort to reverse the situation. Meanwhile, the damage would be done. In other words, the assumption of the theory that states in a regional bloc would cooperate with each other to achieve their common interests, be it economic, political or social, could easily be affected by a single post on social media.

Therefore, before states can engage in this form of communication to promote a common goal – as the theory would have it – they would have to strongly consider the risks as well and prepare adequately to deal with the dangers they may expose themselves to (Devitt, 2011).

As a result, states are advised to develop robust mechanisms to counter the effects of dangers brought about by the use of social media key among them include training key staff on the use of digital diplomacy, formulation of policies to counter misinformation and disinformation as well as setting up systems to take note of mentions on social media in order to counter false information (Bjola, 2019).

2.3.3 Relevance of the Theory

Unlike realists, liberal institutionalists opined that the waning of state autonomy is not regrettable, but transnationalism and interdependence of states is a phenomenon that must be controlled (Baylis and Smith, 2001). Transnationalism can be defined as a social phenomenon that arose with the increase of interconnectivity of people and states due to globalisation and the reduced value limiting economic as well as social interactions within national boundaries (Devitt, 2011). Therefore, through the formation of institutions such as the EAC, transnationalism and interdependence among states have been promoted and practised. Further, given that the theory recognises the value of transnational cooperation, which is a fundamental aspect of the theory, of states in the international system to resolve common issues affecting states (Baylis and Smith, 2001). In the case of the EAC, there is a judicial body that was formed in 2001 – the East African Court of Justice – through which disputes relating to the union can be heard and resolved. This aims to ensure the union is sustained through recognised methods of dispute resolution.

According to Baylis and Smith (2001), liberal institutionalism was the catalyst for the integration theory in Europe and America. It focused on new actors in the international system such as transnational corporations, and non-governmental organisations and new forms of interaction between states such as interdependence and integration (Baylis and Smith, 2001). It would, therefore, follow that this theory was applied as a catalyst for regional integration in the EAC, thus making it relevant to this study. Further, liberal institutionalism contends that to explain international relations, the focus should be placed on international organisations and their ability to get states to cooperate with each other (Baylis and Smith, 2001). This can be made possible using social media platforms and digital information-sharing platforms, such as radio and television, to advance interaction and cooperation. According to Haas and Mitraný, regional and international institutions are necessary partners for states to achieve certain economic and social aspirations and perform functions that states could not perform without their support (Baylis and Smith, 2001). Therefore, EAC member states can use social media platforms to enhance their cooperation to advance their goal of achieving a monetary union and political federation.

According to Keohane and Nye, liberal institutionalism takes the view that world politics is no longer an arena limited to states only, which is the position held by realists who hold a state-centric view of the world (Baylis and Smith, 2001). Therefore, through the practice of digital diplomacy, other actors are included in diplomatic matters communicated via platforms that may be available to them. These actors include CSOs, INGOs, businesspeople, journalists and even the general public. For example, using social media platforms – such as Twitter and Facebook – and digital news outlets – such as radio and television – by which diplomatic information may be passed for general consumption and results in interaction as well on the mentioned platforms.

According to Deutsch, whose major liberal work focussed on explaining the motivation for political integration, states may get into regional blocs by uniting their separate entities with the “expectations of peaceful change”, meaning such states are not likely to use violence, or force, to resolve any disputes that may arise among them (Deutsch, 1966). His work focussed on domestic politics as well as transnational actors as strong influences on relations among such states (Deutsch, 1966). It is important to note that he defines integration as “a relationship among units which are mutually interdependent and jointly produce system properties which they would separately lack” (Deutsch, 1968).

In the context of the EAC, in his work, Deutsch talks about the transactional theory of integration, which is relevant to this study (Nelsen and Stubb, 1994). He links communication patterns, which he terms transaction flows, to regional integration, and this he refers to as political community formation (Deutsch, 1966). Regarding the communities, of relevance to this study, the focus is on his description of the pluralist security community, which he explains as a unified unit where states come together but retain their legal independence as distinct governments (Nelsen and Stubb, 1994).

Further, he avers that such formation can be confirmed by measuring and scrutinizing the frequency, capacity and content of transactions between the community members and terms this theory as transactional analysis (Deutsch, 1966). The use of this theory will provide insights into the level of interaction among EAC members and it assumes that frequent interaction will result in a close-knit union of community and the reverse to be an indicator of poor relations (Deutsch, 1966). Although the transactional analysis outlines three categories of transactions – these are trade, communications and mobility – this study will focus on the communications aspect. For this study, transaction flows are viewed as communication by EAC member states via the use of social media.

2.4 Research Hypotheses

- i. The use of social media by the Kenyan government in its conduct of intra-EAC relations has led to the improvement of Kenya's relations with its EAC neighbours.
- ii. The use of social media by non-state actors in intra-EAC cross-border transactions has led to the improvement of Kenya's relations with its EAC neighbours.

2.5 Definition and Operationalisation of Key Concepts

2.5.1 The Dependent Variable: Regional Integration in East Africa

Regional integration, like in the case of the EAC, is the joint endeavour between two or more states with shared interests in a common goal, not limited to trade relations and includes political, social, and cultural relations (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012). The presence of cooperation among states working together under the framework of regional integration can be confirmed through the development of policy coordination and harmonisation (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012). It is through cross-border relations that regional integration can be established and enhanced (Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr, 2012).

The study will adopt Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr's definition of transnational cooperation among EAC states. This will be assessed through Kenya's relations with the other EAC member states and for measurement purposes, this study will adopt the progress of the different stages of regional integration – Customs Union, Common Market, Monetary Union and Political Union – as indicators of transactions and the advancement of the EAC. These are demonstrated through Kenya's sharing of information related to economic opportunities, investment opportunities as well trade prospects within the EAC.

2.5.2 The Independent Variable: Use of Social Media Platforms as a Tool for Diplomacy

The innovative application of social media technologies to practice diplomacy and advance foreign policy agendas is known as digital diplomacy and is also known as e-diplomacy (Bjola and Holmes, 2015). Examples of commonly used social media platforms are Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, websites, LinkedIn, and Instagram, among others. Digital diplomacy encapsulates the changes in the practices of diplomacy pre-dating digitization and includes the use of the internet and social media to perform diplomatic tasks (Hocking and Melissen, 2015).

Additionally, according to Karl Deutsch's communication theory, which is also known as transactional analysis, the progression towards regional integration will be brought about by an increase in trade and intensive communication between the member states (Deutsch, 1966). Therefore, if the reverse occurs, the prospect of achieving the integration may be unsuccessful.

This study, consequently, adopts the use of social media as a means to intensify communication among EAC member states to create a closer community. The study will adopt Deutsch's communication theory and this will be assessed through the presence of the government of Kenya on social media, the identification of social media platforms and the rate of its usage, or frequency, by the Kenyan government, the content, purpose or objective of the information shared on social media platforms, the tonality of the messages and how it may have led to the improvement of the relations between Kenya and its EAC neighbours.

2.6 Conclusion

Most of the academic literature reviewed, such as the work by Kimbugwe, Perdikis, Yeung and Kerr (2012), on the history of the EAC focuses heavily on the economic aspects and does not cover much in detail about the underlying diplomatic issues that contributed to the formation of the EAC or how diplomatic efforts contributed to its revival. Similarly, there is not enough academic writing on the diplomatic work ongoing to sustain the relations. Therefore, these are the gaps identified that this study aims to fill through the focus on digital diplomacy in the EAC.

Additionally, the assumptions of the liberal institutionalist theory resonate with several views of this study making it most applicable. First, the theory focuses on international economic relations which are the premise on which the EAC was formed. Through the economic unity of the EAC, member states are highly likely to use the different forms of diplomacy, which is a tool of foreign policy, to interact with other states. Some of the outcomes of the frequent communication on matters relating to trade results are a common understanding of the states involved (Dunne, Murki and Smith 2013).

Secondly, given that the liberal institutionalism theory assumes that individual states focus on chasing their interests and common interests when in a regionalism framework (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2013). Therefore, the individual state can nurture collaboration out of these shared interests (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2013). Therefore, this study aimed to examine the role of digital diplomacy in regional integration and how far Kenya has used the digital platform within the EAC in a bid to promote the unity of the regional bloc. Also, through this study, the researcher hopes to explore the extent of the use of digital platforms as a tool for diplomatic relations in EAC.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This section presents the methods that will be used in carrying out the study. These include the research design, target population, sampling technique, data collection and data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed both exploratory and descriptive research designs. The use of exploratory design was useful for establishing the state and use of digital diplomacy in Kenya with a focus on its use while interacting with EAC member states. On the other hand, descriptive research was useful in determining digital diplomacy as a phenomenon and its adaptation in the EAC. This qualitative research method also used anecdotal evidence and literature on the use of social media platforms as a tool for digital diplomacy, particularly from Kenya's MFA. These approaches, which involved the analysis of data collected through the two research designs, aimed to implement a complementary approach, generalise the findings and present a chance to compensate any for weaknesses that may exist in the two techniques.

3.3 Target Population

The target population of the study primarily consisted of officials from the MFA, the Ministry of EAC and Regional Development. The researcher visited the information desks of these two ministries to find appropriate details about the internal structures. This helped the researcher to identify the most suitable officials she needed to engage to inform this study. Others were local and regional journalists, from leading media houses, who cover news reports on international affairs and business news. Considering the current global pandemic, the researcher opted for an online data collection method – Google Forms – as well as phone calls to conduct the interviews. This was instrumental in data collection with ease and quick follow up. The target population for this study was 30 individuals.

3.4 Sampling Technique

This study relied on purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique. This sampling technique is mostly used in studies that are of a qualitative nature and therefore, it applies to this study (Teddlie and Yu 2007). Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to target respondents based on their line of work and experience on the subject matter of this

study. Therefore, the researcher selected respondents for interviews based on their knowledge, familiarity, and practice of the subject matter of this research. Consequently, the prospective interviewees were expected to be familiar with issues relating to regional integration and digital diplomacy – specifically on the EAC – as well as have a good understanding of foreign relations. Also, the researcher anticipated that this sampling technique would allow her optimal efficiency within the expected limitations of funds, logistics and manpower for data collection.

3.5 Data Collection

The study used both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary sources of data were collected with the help of an interview guide comprising open-ended questions in line with the objective of the study which is the role of digital diplomacy in regional integration in the EAC. Interviews were utilised since the study entails the experiences, behaviour, and attitudes of people thus qualitative type of research was most appropriate for this kind of study.

Secondary data sources included a review of several reports published by the EAC secretariat on the use of technology in the integration process and journals on the subject area. Documented views from stakeholders with expertise and experience in digital integration processes as well as resolutions made by EAC member states were used. This approach gave a historical background and cultural dynamics of digital diplomacy in the EAC.

3.6 Data Analysis

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology. The data were analysed to determine whether the information, which was gathered from the extensive interviews, was related to the study – the research topic, the objectives, and the methodology. Ultimately, the information collected assisted in answering the research questions developed and guided in reaching a conclusion. The researcher used inductive analysis to review the data collected to find out whether it was in line with the study's objectives, as it is the ideal method of reasoning given that this study will rely on qualitative data (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). The information collected in this study was captured, where necessary, by using tables, and pictures. This information also formed the basis for deciding whether the research questions have been answered and the objectives of the study attained.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The researcher adhered to the ethical principles of research. The respondents, whose participation was voluntary, were all well briefed on the purpose of the study and guaranteed the confidentiality as well as anonymity that appertains such an academic study and all the data obtained in the process was strictly for research purposes only. Additionally, all cited work in this study has been properly referenced. In all regard, the researcher was free of bias and ensured that all stipulated research guidelines were followed.

3.8 Conclusion

This study had 30 targeted participants who were journalists and government officials. Only 27 respondents filled and submitted questionnaires of the targeted participants, giving a response rate of 90 per cent. A 90 per cent response rate is relevant as it means there is a 10 per cent non-response rate, which is significant for this statistical analysis (Fincham, 2008). Given this study was based on qualitative data, the researcher categorized and interpreted the data by using content analysis to extract the information most relevant to the research questions, objectives and hypotheses.

The responses from the interviews were sorted and organised according to the thematic areas of the research topic and analysed. This made it easier for the researcher to observe and identify any commonalities and guided the researcher in developing some conclusions. This method of analysis was most ideal for this study as the data collected is from interviews and visual content. Also, it allowed the flexibility to categorise the data for interpretation and present a clear understanding of the said data.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data collected from the field, its analysis, and finalizes with the interpretation of the findings on the use of digital diplomacy among EAC member states and its impact on promoting unity in the East African regional bloc.

Table 4.1: Respondent's Professions

Profession	Target number
Regional Affairs Editor	1
Business Reporter	2
Journalist	1
Foreign Affairs Writer and Subeditor	1
Digital Editor	1
News Editor	2
Reporter	1
Foreign and Diplomatic Editor	1
Digital Sub-Editor	1
Business News Editor	1
Senior Journalist	2
Senior Political Officer	1
Communications Officer	1
Digital Communications Officer	1
Public Relations Officer	1
International Relations Officer	1
Communications and Media Expert	1
Business Advocacy Manager	1
Social Media Manager	1
Foreign Service Officer	2
Public Relations Officer	2
Public Relations and Communications Manager	1
Total	27

Source: Author (2022)

As captured in Table 4.1, there were very few common job titles. This worked to the study's advantage as it provided diverse views from the different positions; hence, the information from the interviews reflected the same diversity. The respondents, who are journalists, work in the following departments: editorial, business desk and digital news. They have a lot of content including digital diplomacy and regional integration news. These departments were deemed valuable targets for getting comprehensive information.

Whereas the government officials were sourced from the following departments communications, public diplomacy, the country's mission abroad, the office of the EAC secretary-general, and foreign, commonwealth and development office. These departments were considered to be handling a lot of matters that involve digital diplomacy and regional integration, therefore, more focus was directed to them.

Also, the respondents had varied years of professional experience in their respective roles. Those with 1-10 years and 11-20 years of experience were 44 per cent and 41 per cent respectively and they were the majority of those interviewed. While 15 per cent of the participants in the study had over 20 years of experience and this came as an advantage to this longitudinal study as the respondents could well speak to the period of the study.

The male respondents made up 63 per cent while the female respondents were 37 per cent. This implies that the sample majority was male since more men are employed in corporate fields and the government. In both categories selected, journalists and government officials, women constitute around a third of the total respondents in each category.

In regard to academic backgrounds, most respondents have postgraduate qualifications – they formed 52 per cent of the interviewees while those with undergraduate and below qualifications took up the remaining 48 per cent. This is an indication that the data collection was spread out to people with various qualifications. It occurred that the frequency of postgraduates is much less than those of undergraduate and below qualifications in journalism. With government officials, postgraduate qualifications were more than undergraduate and below qualifications.

Additionally, in line with the variables for the study, the research established that Kenya has a strong presence on social media – Twitter in particular. Through its communications and ICT sections, the government has set up a number of Twitter accounts to disseminate information via this platform. Also, the study was able to determine the frequency with which information is shared on Twitter and the kind of information posted.

Numerous posts that were identified and analysed in this study were aimed at positioning Kenya's interests for trade and investments in the EAC. Also, they were aimed at positioning the country as an ideal investment hub and economic partner to the other EAC states. The

tone of the messages examined took a positive outlook, aimed at capturing the interest of the readers of the social media messages with the endeavour to promote the pillars of the EAC union, in particular, the Customs Union and the Common Market. The EAC is committed to using the successes of these pillars to propel its ambitions to achieve the remaining two pillars – Monetary Union and Political Union.

4.2 Social Media Usage by the Kenyan Government and Kenya's Intra-EAC relations

The first objective of the study sought to determine the extent to which the usage of social media by the Kenyan government in its conduct of intra- EAC relations has influenced the relations between Kenya and its EAC neighbours. For the purpose of data presentation, the responses to questions relating to the first objective of the study, the data was categorised in the themes of the Kenyan government's use of social media platforms, its conduct of intra-EAC relations has influenced relations with its neighbours.

The respondents were asked to share their knowledge of Kenya's use of social media as a tool for communication with its EAC neighbours. The majority confirmed that Kenya uses social media platforms as a tool for communication with its EAC partners. In their responses, it was interesting to note that they highlighted the various kinds of information Kenya shares via social media. For instance, there were mentions of information relating to the live-streaming of events and citizen engagement campaigns. Also, Kenyan officials routinely share on their social media pages the outcomes of regional integration meetings.

For those working in the media as news reporters or editors, it is a common practice for them to look for news from various sources. The respondents interviewed stated that digital platforms are a good source of news. From time to time, they visit social media websites, such as Twitter, and have on occasion stumbled upon information that they use to develop new stories. And the most common response from journalists was in relation to news information with one respondent stating:

“On several occasions, we have received information in form of press releases and communiques from Kenya to our newsrooms which have kept us up to date with what is happening in Kenya.”

The respondents were further asked about the developments they may have noticed in Kenya's use of social media within the period set out in the study of 2012 – 2020. Given the

fact that the majority of those who participated in the study are active social media users with over twelve years of use, they are viewed as reliable and objective reviewers of the use of Twitter by other users – such as the government. One of the respondents, a communications official with over 20 years of work experience stated:

“Kenya, like many African countries, started using social media platforms such as Twitter to keep up with technology. With time, the level of its use has changed and we can tell it is being used with a more strategic approach compared to its use. For example, initially, we would see sporadic posts and there was not a sense of direct and prompt responses to queries. But this has greatly changed with time. Now they even have sessions to interact with the public, the government handles share news and information in a timely manner and the frequency of posts has increased.”

Additionally, the respondents’ opinions on whether the use of social media platforms as a tool for integration has impacted Kenya's intra- EAC relations. It emerged that various government offices, related to the EAC, use social media platforms for diplomatic purposes and this has positioned Kenya as an important as well as a significant player in the regional bloc. Moreover, respondents stated that social media has linked EAC countries in a manner that those outside Kenya are able to follow what is happening in Kenya and give views on all aspects including politics.

Some respondents confirmed having received information about Kenya’s interaction with the EAC neighbours via Twitter. For some journalists, such information was useful for their reporting on the developments of the regional bloc. Additionally, there noted that there are instances when they are working on a follow-up story and the relevant government offices or agencies are not forthcoming with the relevant information they require. By spending some time perusing through the social media accounts of the offices they sometimes get the details they require. This is especially common in situations where such information is embargoed by the said government offices. This means that news or media outlets are required not to publish the information until a specific time or date.

Additionally, the MFA as well as the Former Cabinet Secretary (CS) for Ministries of East African Community, Agriculture, Industry and Trade Mr Adan Mohammed, who held the position from 2013 to 2022, used the platform to regularly share information about the work it is doing in the region, as captured in *Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3* below.

Figure 4.1: MFA Twitter post¹



Figure 4.2: Kenya's Former EAC CS' Twitter post²



Source: Author (2022)

Figure 4.3: Kenya's MFA Twitter post with a link to a press release³



Source: Author (2022)

Additionally, it was clear that beyond the MFA and the office of the CS in charge of EAC matters, other government offices, as indicated in *Figures 4.4* and *4.5* below, also used

¹ForeignAffairsKenya(@ForeignOfficeKE). Twitter Post. Aug 13, 2019, 8:14 PM. <https://twitter.com/ForeignOfficeKE/status/1161325169178292224>

²Mohamed, Adan, CS (@AdanMohamedCS). Twitter Post. Oct 24, 2018. 2:36 PM <https://twitter.com/AdanMohamedCS/status/1055060547673186305>

³ForeignAffairsKenya (@ForeignOfficeKE). Twitter Post. Oct 18, 2013, 9:40 PM. <https://twitter.com/ForeignOfficeKE/status/391272709851983872>

Twitter to share information relating to Kenya’s work in the EAC with the aim to advance intra- EAC relations while positioning the Kenyan government’s efforts. These indicate that Kenya is purposeful in communicating its social projects as well as developments via Twitter.

Figure 4.4: Kenya Defence Forces Twitter post⁴ Figure 4.5: Kenya’s Ministry of Health Twitter Post⁵



Source: Author (2022)

When asked whether the use of social media as a tool for integration has been practised in the EAC, respondents were not only of the opinion that it has been used as such but also, they stated that it has enhanced interaction among the member states according to their view. Further, they stated that this mode of communication simplified sharing of information and interaction between member countries and also between their citizens while adding that it is a form of communication without borders. The respondent added:

“We are living in a digital age and it only makes sense that communication among EAC member states is done on a digital platform. It also makes sense that the citizens of these countries will seek information they may require via social media because

⁴ Kenya Defence Forces (@kdfinfo). Twitter Post. Jul 4, 2019, 9:08 PM
<https://twitter.com/kdfinfo/status/1146843204249169921>

⁵Ministry of Health (@MOH_Kenya). Twitter Post. Feb 21, 2018, 11:26 PM
https://twitter.com/MOH_Kenya/status/966408795143507968

many people use social media. And in order to reach them, EAC member states have to maintain a presence on social media to sustain this growing need.”

They were also of the opinion that the use of social media as a tool for integration can strengthen the relations between the EAC member states and stated that it can be used to advance business through marketing, online orders and other communications made via social media platforms can potentially break the hurdles of interstate border surveillance. Further, the respondents added that it encourages regular communication between the states and is a platform to tackle common issues such as human trafficking or issues affecting human rights as well as trade and investment opportunities. One such example is the case of the official Twitter account of the State Department for Trade and Enterprise Development under the Ministry of Industrialization, Trade and Enterprise Development.

See the *Figure 4.6* below.

Figure 4.6: Twitter post by the State Department for Trade & Enterprise Development, Ministry of Industrialization, Trade & Enterprise Development with an investment update⁶



Source: Author (2022)

⁶Trade Kenya (@Trade_Kenya). Twitter Post. Feb 8, 2018, 8:28 PM
https://twitter.com/Trade_Kenya/status/961653035389931520

Generally, the responses shared above clearly indicate that the use of social media has propelled the nature of diplomatic relations within the EAC, and specifically in relation to Kenya and its neighbours. This makes it easier to maintain diplomatic relations and improve the levels as well as frequency and consistency of communication between different countries in the region. Kenya's use of social media as a tool for integration was viewed as a positive step, as it works to keep the public informed and engaged with the process.

Although there were some comments to the effect that Kenya could do more in this area, overall, the feedback gave the impression that the use of social media helped to improve Kenya's position in the EAC and that Kenya is viewed as a regional leader in the adoption of this technology.

In response to a question about the frequency of posts shared via Twitter, government officials stated that the rate varies and is determined by several factors such as the events of the day and if there was a major occurrence that required a change in the frequency. However, on average it was stated that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, would post five to eight posts per day on business days. Further, that the posts about information relating to Kenya in the EAC would average seven posts per week.

In regard to the content of the posts or information shared via social media, the officials stated that they were guided by various communication strategy guidelines, which are publicly available on the MFA website as well as the Ministry of ICT. Although they provide for the general use of social media, they are a clear indicator of the government's intention to utilise the platform to promote its agenda. Most posts viewed for this study were in relation to the training of government officials, media updates and announcements about varied trade developments in the EAC, among others.

Additionally, it was clear that social media has had a positive impact on the way that bilateral relations are conducted between Kenya and other EAC states. This is certainly because social media provides an easy and accessible way for members of different countries to communicate with each other. Additionally, social media may also help to promote understanding and cooperation between different countries by providing a forum for information sharing and exchange.

All the government officials agree that they use social media platforms for official purposes which advance its integration efforts. Social media provides an easy and accessible way to share information with a broad audience and the platforms can be used to engage with people and promote dialogue about integration efforts. Finally, the majority of respondents believe that Kenya should promote the use of social media in its relations with EAC states, to build unity and communication within the bloc. There is a consensus that all member states should be involved when using social media for EAC-related purposes.

However, it was noted that the use of social media platforms has its unique challenges and negative effects. Given the fact that it is open for use by anyone who manages to set up an account on a social media platform, it is difficult to restrict the users and even more challenging to manage their behaviour or restrict the information they share out. Also, it was noted that in 2018, the Kenyan government was forced to pull down two key Twitter accounts due to alleged hacking attempts. These were for the President of Kenya (@PresidentKE) and the Presidential Delivery Unit (@PSCU_Digital).

At the same time, it was also noted that the then President of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta suspended his social media accounts on March 22, 2019, and about two years later, he explained that the motivation for his actions was cyberbullying (Kejitan, 2021). This is another major challenge with the use of social media as it is difficult to police the users of the internet. This was an unfortunate outcome for Kenya as President Kenyatta had over three million followers on his Twitter account and was an instrumental source of Kenya's work and developments, which could have positively influenced relations in the EAC (Kejitan, 2021).

4.3 Social Media Usage by Non-State Actors in Intra-EAC Cross-Border Transactions and Kenya's relations with its EAC neighbours

The second objective of the study sought to examine the extent to which the usage of social media by the non-state actors in intra- EAC cross-border transactions, which this study as highlighted above will focus on communication, has influenced the relations between Kenyan and its EAC neighbours.

The researcher investigated the kind of information communicated by non-state actors in relation to Kenya in the EAC on social media. It was evident that some non-state actors that hold positions of authority use Twitter to highlight Kenya's achievements on social media to

their audiences. For instance, the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) is a Kenyan business association whose members are industrialists and provides a common forum for local manufacturing and value-add industrial businesses. Such posts on Twitter create an image of Kenya’s economic and trade opportunities. They also work towards positioning Kenya’s interests in relation to positioning itself as a trade leader in the regional bloc.

A Twitter post made on September 11, 2018, referred to a meeting its representatives held with the then CS for Ministries of East African Community, Agriculture, Industry and Trade Mr Adan Mohammed and the post referenced the trade in the EAC and a discussion about export matters in the region. See *Figure 4.7* below. Similarly, KAM made a Twitter post about its meeting with the then Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of EAC and Northern Corridor Development Mr. Peter Munya to present the Manufacturing Priority Agenda (MPA) 2018 document as well as discuss trade issues within the EAC region. See *Figure 4.8* below:

Figure 4.7: Twitter post by KAM regarding discussions about trade in the EAC.⁸

Figure 4.8: Twitter post by KAM presenting its MPA 2018⁷



Source: Author (2022)

⁷ KAM (@KAM_Kenya). Twitter Post. Sep 11, 2018, 10:57 AM https://twitter.com/KAM_Kenya/status/1039422592929673216

⁸KAM (@KAM_Kenya). Twitter Post. Sep 11, 2018, 10:57 AM https://twitter.com/KAM_Kenya/status/1039422592929673216

Respondents who participated in this study stated such information is of value to those who may not have the opportunity to attend such meetings but the outcomes would impact their businesses or lives in one way or another. In particular, the journalists stated that such posts provide them with news information which positions them as proactive reporters in their respective newsrooms. Meaning, their editors would view them as resourceful members of the newsroom who did not rely on the news desk for assignments. A journalist stated as follows:

“From time to time I spend time on specific Twitter accounts to keep informed of any developments in the EAC as I cover regional news. Often, I come across posts that have vital information that is useful to my line of reporting. I use such information as a resource to reach out to my news sources for more details and at the end of the day; I have a full news story, which I present to my editor. This works in my favour as my editor deems me to be very resourceful and an important member of the team.”

Significantly it emerged that the respondents believe that the use of social media as a tool for integration improved governance in EAC. With reference to Kenya, they stated that beyond strengthening the levels of governance, it also provided an opportunity for accountability by the citizens to the EAC states as social media opened the doors for citizens to readily access information.

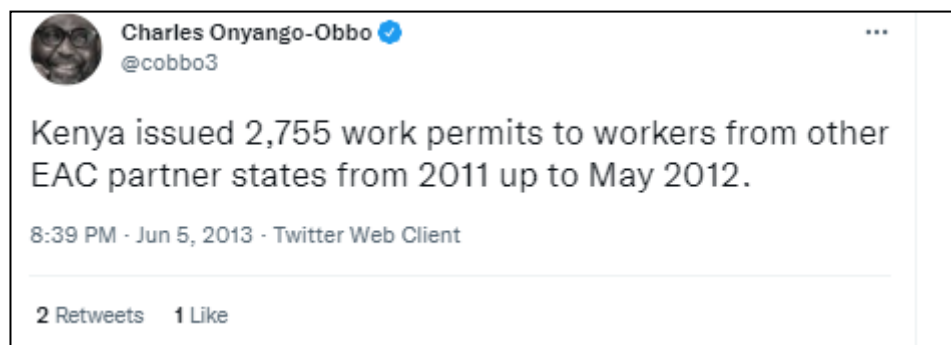
This resulted in governments and the member states being held accountable on the platform and accountability is an integral aspect of good governance. Further, it has been used to make people aware of opportunities or resources available to them from their governments. One of the respondents said:

“The use of social media has broken the barriers to access to information. Information is key to improving governance as the relevant bodies can question when things are going wrong. Also, it is an avenue through which governments in the EAC can share critical information, for example, in a time of crisis such as the height of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020. When you think about accountability, it is important to have a platform where people can express their thoughts and be heard by the relevant authorities. And when such queries are responded to, authorities can encourage public engagement on social media thereby improving the delivery of services.”

This study took cognizance of Twitter posts made by non-state actors who shared information about Kenya in the EAC. Non-state actors play an integral role in the case of Kenya in the EAC as they can aid to propel its position in the regional bloc. News sources can be utilised to Kenya's advantage to advance a certain agenda or to meet an established goal. One is by a senior journalist and editor Charles Onyango-Obbo.

He is considered to be a reliable source of information and a news reporter with decades of experience. Although he is originally from Uganda, Charles has been working in Kenya for decades as a leading news editor. As captured in the figure below, on June 5, 2013, he posted about the number of work permits Kenya granted to workers from its EAC neighbours. This indicates and communicates that Kenya is an ideal location for business and work opportunities in the EAC. Refer to *Figure 4.9* below.

Figure 4.9: Twitter post by senior News Editor Charles Onyango-Obbo⁹



Source: Author (2022)

According to a foreign services officer who participated in the study, they noted that Kenya is using social media not only to engage government offices in its practice of diplomacy but it is also active when it comes to matters of social, cultural and environmental concern. He said that non-state actors, such as NGOs with a regional presence are using social media to showcase the work, they are doing in Kenya with the aim of achieving the same in other EAC countries.

“I have seen projects that we support use Twitter as a forum to display the work they are doing in Kenya to show other EAC countries. In my view, this positions Kenya as

⁹Onyango-Obbo, Charles (@cobbo3). Twitter Post. Jun 5, 2013, 8:39 PM
<https://twitter.com/cobbo3/status/342334773022294017>

a trendsetter and the information is shared with a wider audience as compared to that which can be reached through a project report. Also, at the embassy I work for, we mostly use social media to communicate matters that would be relevant to the audiences using such platforms and I noticed that Kenya curates its messages in a similar manner in order to be effective in its communication while being relevant.”

4.4 Conclusion

This study's results and the information collected from the respondents were sufficient in answering the research questions, meeting the research objectives and confirming the research hypotheses. Additionally, the data showed that Kenya's use of social media has influenced its relations with its EAC neighbours. The data confirmed that Kenya uses social media platforms, Twitter, in particular, to communicate and share information more easily, widely and efficiently between different states as well as with the general public. Kenya has used social media as a tool of diplomacy

to address common issues affecting the member states, such as human trafficking, human rights violations as well as environmental and cultural issues.

Additionally, the data collected demonstrated how social media has had a positive impact on the way that bilateral relations are conducted between Kenya and other EAC states. This is likely due to the fact that social media provides an easy and accessible way for members of different countries to communicate with each other and it has aided in the promotion, understanding and cooperation between different countries by providing a forum for information sharing and exchange. Given that the EAC is working towards a political federation, it is clear that this digital diplomacy is an avenue that positively influences that shared ambition.

All the government officials interviewed for the study agreed that they use social media platforms for official purposes which advance its integration efforts. They opined that social media provides an easy and accessible way to share information with a broad audience and the platforms can be used to engage with people and promote dialogue about integration efforts. Those with a longer work experience at the MFA observed that the introduction of communication via social media has helped breakdown information to the various target audiences and created a forum for interaction.

Further, diplomatic communication via social media has opened up room for non-state actors to add their voices to discussions relevant to them. And Kenya has benefitted from this as it continues to be positioned as a trendsetter in the EAC. There is a general consensus that all member states should be involved when using social media for EAC-related purposes. Also, the EAC can benefit from the use of social media, as a tool for integration, to create awareness of the activities and the importance of cooperation among the general public.

Therefore, based on the responses and data collected, this study concludes that Kenya's use of social media has greatly contributed to a positive influence and improved its relations with its EAC neighbours. Also, that the usage of social media by the non-state actors in intra- EAC cross-border transactions has resulted in improved relations between Kenyan and its EAC neighbours.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In line with the objectives of this study, this chapter focuses on the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations in that order.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This study established digital diplomacy, through the use of social media is influential in advancing Kenya's position in the EAC. The first objective of this study was to examine the extent to which the usage of social media by the Kenyan government in its conduct of intra-EAC relations has influenced the relations between Kenya and its EAC neighbours. The second objective of this study was to examine the extent to which the usage of social media by the non-state actors in intra- EAC cross-border transactions has influenced the relations between Kenyan and its EAC neighbours.

The data and information collected in this study confirmed that the Kenyan government has adopted the use of digital diplomacy through the use of social media and that various government offices and agencies run their respective social media accounts. Further, that this has helped to reduce the gap between the state and its citizen as the channels for communication has been widened.

This increased communication has boosted Kenya's opportunities for economic gains and attracted investors to the country. This has been displayed by the employment opportunities citizens from other EAC states seek in Kenya. Additionally, it was clear that the information Kenya shares on social media, targeting the EAC is varied and touches not only on economic matters but also cultural in promoting the country's image and foreign policy in the region.

Also, it found that the use of digital diplomacy through social media communication is useful in promoting unity among member states of a regional bloc, such as the EAC. Additionally, it confirmed the role of non-state actors in the influence of Kenya's position in the EAC.

This is further resonated with the choice of theory for this study – the liberal institutionalism theory which is extensively covered in the theoretical framework. It posits that states are the key actors in the international system, but they are not the only important ones. The theory also assumes that all actors in the international system are rational and continuously pursue ways to capitalize on their interests.

Moreover, as rational actors, states are not troubled with the relative gains of others, and instead, they prefer absolute gains for themselves. This creates a situation where they are inclined to cooperate and not conflict with other states. However, some scholars have critiqued the theory, arguing that states are primarily concerned with relative and not only absolute gains.

Moreso, the study found that the media has a critical role to play in ensuring that grassroots people are well-informed about the integration process (Macharia, 2019). As non-state actors, the media and leading media personalities were also found to be instrumental in advancing cross-border communication and led to the improvement of Kenya's relations with its EAC neighbours.

Furthermore, the data collected confirmed that increased use of social media in Africa, and East Africa in particular, has boosted people's knowledge of political events, altered views on a national and international level and provided a voice for less renowned individuals in the local and global debate. For instance, Twitter has revolutionized political debate and opened new channels of communication for African people.

Therefore, the media has a crucial role to play in the success of the EAC's integration project. Social media platforms can be used to increase the reach and adoption of regional integration programs. The media can assist in accelerating regional integration and delivering advantages to all EAC people by disseminating ideas about regionalism and integration.

This study was also able to understand Kenya's tactical approach with the information it shared on social media as they are focused on development and mutual gain. Therefore, the EAC states would be interested in maintaining peace in the region and the chance of disagreements and war are minimized. This was further corroborated by the choice of the theory for this study.

5.3 Conclusion

Based on the results from the data collected and the findings of the research, the following conclusions were reached based on the objectives, the research questions, the hypotheses and the theoretical framework of the study. Firstly, it was observed that social media has had a positive impact on the way that Kenya conducts its communication and portrays its image to its EAC neighbours. Further, EAC member states can communicate with each other in an easy and accessible way through social media.

Besides, social media has also helped to increase the reach, adoption and advancement of the regional integration plan. This was in line with the first hypothesis which states that the use of social media by the Kenyan government in its conduct of intra-EAC relations has led to the improvement of Kenya's relations with its EAC neighbours.

Secondly, the study established that non-state actors have a key role in advancing Kenya's messages in the EAC to promote its interests while boosting its relations with the other EAC states. And this was in line with the second hypothesis which states the use of social media by non-state actors in intra-EAC cross-border transactions has led to the improvement of Kenya's relations with its EAC neighbours.

Also, the study confirms the liberal institutionalism theory, which according to Deutsch (1966), talks about the transactional theory of integration and links communication patterns to regional integration, communication success is contingent upon the successful integration of many critical communication components. And if properly handled inside the regional bloc, this integration will ultimately influence the views of the bloc's stakeholders.

This was also confirmed in the study through the data collected from the respondents well as the review of posts on Twitter. And this was confirmed by a respondent from the EAC Secretariat who stated that they use social media to update and inform the public on any important issue and development within the community. So, this has been a tool for linking up within the economic bloc in a fast and effective way.

The study concludes that there is no doubt that social media has changed the way diplomacy is conducted. In the past, diplomacy was mostly conducted between government officials in a bilateral manner though with the advent of social media, diplomacy has become more

multilateral in nature with a wider range of actors involved. This has proved to be both a blessing and a curse for governments as they now have more access to people but less control over the information that is shared. Nevertheless, social media remains an essential tool for digital diplomacy and will continue to play a major role in the conduct of diplomacy in the future.

This study further confirmed that the evolution of social media resulted in its use by diplomats to conduct their business and by governments to disseminate information. Therefore, it changed the scope of international relations and diplomatic relations. In the same context, social media has enabled the quick flow of information without the hindrances and bureaucracies brought about by travelling from one country to another. To this end, Kenya has demonstrated that it has not been left behind in the adoption of digital diplomacy through the use of social media.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on this study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made; public awareness of the use of digital diplomacy would go a long way in educating the users of social media in East Africa, and beyond, on the possible channels for citizen participation in the platform for the purpose of effective communication.

Further, this could aid Kenya's goal of positioning itself as a key member of the EAC as the citizens of Kenya, as well as non-state actors, can help spread government messages for a wider reach. Moreover, such sensitization would help to reduce the possibility of users' exposure to the risks and dangers that lie on social media platforms. These include fake news, phishing, cybercrime and hacking of accounts, among others.

Such sensitization, on the responsible and safe use of social media, can be achieved by the government bringing on board non-state actors, such as the media and NGOs, to hold brainstorming sessions to support its goal in the EAC. Such forums can result in the formulation of social media strategies specific to Kenya's interests in the EAC. Ultimately, this should result in the creation of policies that support these goals.

It is important to note that the use of social media has its challenges and if not well addressed, could pose a major risk to the EAC states. Therefore, Kenya should ensure that the officers in

the ministries and agencies advancing its messages on social media are taken through specialized training to avoid such pitfalls while focusing on promoting the country's foreign policy in the EAC.

Also, Kenya should make a deliberate effort in reaching more people, via social media, to create awareness of the activities and the importance of cooperation. Also, the use of social media in the EAC should be viewed as a common communications platform, as it will promote the unity of the regional bloc, beyond propelling the interests of Kenya in the EAC. This will help to achieve common social goals, for instance, those advanced by human rights and civil society organisations.

Social media is a great opportunity to boost competition and trade among member states. And this is the main purpose of regional blocs. Similarly, it can be used to promote business opportunities for the member states and the citizens by promoting policy integration via member states –such as cross-border transit, tourism, businesses, and common market opportunities, among others.

Additionally, Kenya should increase its investments – in terms of finances, expertise and personnel – in support of this form of diplomacy. At the same time, other EAC states should actively adopt and embrace this form of communication as this would complement Kenya's efforts and it would further cement their common interests. In other words, social media platforms should be used to engage the public in a two-way conversation about the EAC and the integration process. Kenya should leverage social media platforms to provide timely and accurate information about its role in the integration process of the EAC.

Similarly, the EAC should use social media platforms to solicit feedback from the public about the integration process and engage with the public in a dialogue about the benefits of the integration process. Digital diplomacy should be used as a tool to increase the reach and adoption of regional integration programs. The use of digital diplomacy should be increased in order to disseminate information about the integration process and to build confidence among the public. Also, non-state actors such as the media should play a more active role in promoting regional integration and in raising awareness about the benefits of the process.

EAC member states should continue to use digital diplomacy to engage with their citizens, especially those who are in other countries. The EAC should use digital platforms to boost the image of the countries and engage with the MFA from other countries. The EAC should keep up the good work in using digital diplomacy and continue to benefit from the boosted global image and heightened media visibility. The digital gap between developed and developing countries should be taken into account when using social media as a tool for digital diplomacy.

Governments should be aware of the pros and cons of using social media for digital diplomacy and take measures to control the information that is in the public domain. For countries considering the use of social media platforms as a tool for digital diplomacy, hacking, cyberbullying and irresponsible use of social media are major concerns and real dangers.

States should ensure they have adequately understood these and other risks of digital diplomacy and ensure they have the proper protection in place to counter such risks. Hacking could result in unscrupulous individuals taking over the accounts and sharing information, which could be harmful or gravely erroneous, with the aim of posing as the true owner of the account. Such actions could sour relations between states as well as introduce suspicion and ruin cordial engagements.

At the same time, EAC countries have to be aware of the risks of taking their differences to social media platforms as they are not ideal for resolving diplomatic rows. This is because the platforms are open to all users and the comments may be taken out of context resulting in a border conflict. For example, the border issues that arose between Uganda and Rwanda about the Katuna/Gatuna border row resulted in the closure of the border in 2019 and it affected trade as well as the movement of goods within the EAC (Kanamugire, 2022). This diplomatic row was played out on Twitter and it was successfully resolved in 2022 after a series of meetings which involved other leaders from the region (Kanamugire, 2022).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

University of Nairobi: Department of Political Science and Public Administration: The Role of Digital Diplomacy in Regional Integration: A Case Study of Kenya’s Relations with Other East African Community Member States (2012 – 2020).

Interview Guide

My name is Onyango Lillian Achieng, a Master of Arts student at the University of Nairobi in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. As part of the requirements for the award of a Master’s Degree in International Relations, I am conducting a study on “*The Role of Digital Diplomacy in Regional Integration: A Case Study of Kenya’s Relations with Other East African Community Member States (2012 – 2020)*”. I kindly request you for a brief interview to better understand the role of digital diplomacy in regional integration. The information you provide will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and strictly used for the purposes for which it is intended, research.

Interview guide for government officials: Respondents are officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of East African Community and Regional Development

Section A: Demographic information of the respondents

1. Gender: Female [] Male []
2. Age: 18-24 years [] 25-34 years [] 35-44 years [] 45-54 years [] over 55 years []
3. Education level: Undergraduate and below [] Postgraduate []
4. Designation:.....
5. Employed under which Ministry:.....
6. Department:.....
7. How many years have you worked for this Ministry:
1-10 years [] 11-20 years [] over 20 years []

Section B: Kenya in the EAC and its Use of Social Media Platforms

1. Do EAC member states engage Kenya via social media platforms?
2. Does Kenya use social media as a tool for communication in the EAC? If so, what has its impact been?
3. From your experience, do you think the use of social media as a tool for integration can strengthen the relations between the EAC member states? If yes, how so?
4. Has the use of social media as a tool for integration changed the conduct of bilateral relations between Kenya and other EAC states? If so, please explain.
5. Are you aware of digital diplomacy? Yes () No ()
6. Do you participate in conducting any form of diplomacy through the use of social media? Yes () No ()
7. Do you use social media platforms to share diplomatic information aimed at promoting the image of Kenya? If yes, comment
8. Do you think the use of social media has impacted Kenya's position in the EAC?
9. How frequently do you make social media posts specifically about Kenya and the EAC?
10. Do you think social media should be used as a tool for digital diplomacy?

Section C: Kenya's Use of Social Media Platforms

1. In your line of work, do you use social media platforms for official purposes?
2. Which social media platform does the ministry you work for use?
Twitter [] Facebook [] LinkedIn [] Instagram [] Website [] YouTube [] Other []
3. In your view, does Kenya use social media platforms to advance its integration efforts? If yes, share the details. If not, do you think Kenya should adopt the use of social media platforms to advance its integration efforts?
4. Does Kenya have a strategic guide for practising the use of social media as a tool for integration? If yes, is it in the public domain?
5. What is your opinion about digital diplomacy and the use of social media to conduct diplomatic activities?
6. Have you noticed any developments or trends in Kenya's use of social media from 2012 to 2020? If so, share the details
7. In your view, do EAC countries, and Kenya in particular, use social media as a tool for integration?
8. How do you think that the use of social media platforms as a tool for integration has impacted Kenya's intra- EAC relations?

9. Have you ever received information or news about Kenya's work in the EAC via Twitter?
10. In your line of work, how frequently do you share posts via Twitter regarding the government's work in the EAC?

Section D: Recommendations

1. In your view, should Kenya promote the use of social media in its relations with EAC states? If so, what should be done to promote the use of social media? If not, what are your reasons?
2. Do you have any other suggestions or comments?

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS

University of Nairobi: Department of Political Science and Public Administration: The Role of Digital Diplomacy in Regional Integration: A Case Study of Kenya’s Relations with Other East African Community Member States (2012 – 2020).

Interview Guide

My name is Onyango Lillian Achieng, a Master of Arts student at the University of Nairobi in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. As part of the requirements for the award of a Master’s Degree in International Relations, I am conducting a study on “*The Role of Digital Diplomacy in Regional Integration: A Case Study of Kenya’s Relations with Other East African Community Member States (2012 – 2020)*”. I kindly request you for a brief interview to better understand the role of digital diplomacy in regional integration. The information you provide will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and strictly used for the purposes for which it is intended, research.

Interview Guide for journalists- Respondents will be regional journalists, from leading media houses, who cover news reports on international affairs

Section A: Demographic information of the respondents

1. Gender: Female [] Male []
2. Age: 18-24 years [] 25-34 years [] 35-44 years [] 45-54 years [] over 55 years []
3. Education level: Undergraduate and below [] Postgraduate []
4. Designation:.....
5. Media house (optional):.....
6. Department:.....
7. How many years have you worked as a journalist:
1-10 years [] 11-20 years [] over 20 years []

Section B: Kenya in the EAC and its Use of Social Media Platforms

1. How do you think the unity of the EAC can be boosted using social media platforms as a tool for integration among member states?
2. What is your general observation of the use of social media platforms for EAC states to advance their agenda?
3. Are you aware of digital diplomacy? Yes () No ()
4. Do you use social media platforms to share diplomatic information aimed at promoting the image of Kenya? If yes, comment
5. Do you think the use of social media has impacted Kenya's position in the EAC?
6. Do you think social media should be used as a tool for digital diplomacy?
7. What is your opinion about digital diplomacy and the use of social media to conduct diplomatic activities?
8. Have you noticed any developments or trends in Kenya's use of social media from 2012 to 2020? If so, share the details
9. In your view, do EAC countries, and Kenya in particular, use social media as a tool for integration?
10. How do you think that the use of social media platforms as a tool for integration has impacted Kenya's intra- EAC relations?

Section C: EAC News Sources and Interaction

1. Does your media house use social media in its daily professional operations?
2. Which are the major social media platforms that attract many viewers or listeners to your media house?
Twitter [] Facebook [] LinkedIn [] Instagram [] Website [] YouTube [] Other []
3. Do you contact news sources through social media? If so, which platforms do you frequently use?
Twitter [] Facebook [] LinkedIn [] Instagram [] Website [] YouTube [] Other []
4. Have you tried reaching out to any of the EAC member states via social media or digital communications? If so, what was the nature of the query and what was the response?
5. Have you ever received information or news about Kenya's work in the EAC via Twitter?

Section D: Recommendations

1. In your view, should Kenya promote the use of social media in its relations with EAC states? If so, what should be done to promote the use of social media? If not, what are your reasons?
2. Do you have any other suggestions or comments?