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The power of websites in shaping narratives during global health crises: A Study of COVID-19 in Kenya by the US, the UK and China

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a global health crisis that has affected every aspect of life. The role of governments in communicating information and shaping public perceptions during this crisis has become increasingly important. This study examines how the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and China framed the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya through the use of their websites. The study focuses on a comprehensive analysis of the content of the websites of the US, UK, and China, with a specific emphasis on the information provided on the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies used to frame the crisis. The research found that these countries used a variety of strategies to frame the COVID-19 pandemic, ranging from emphasizing the severity of the crisis to promoting their own public health interventions and emphasizing the importance of global cooperation. The results of the study suggest that the US, the UK, and China used different strategies to frame the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya and that these strategies had varying levels of impact on public perceptions and behavior. For instance, the US was portrayed as a global leader in the fight against the pandemic, the UK as a generous donor of the vaccine, and China as a good example in epidemic prevention, control, and economic recovery. These portrayals were likely intended to shape their image and promote their foreign policies and values to the world. In the case of Kenya, the US positioned the country as a regional leader and supported its efforts to improve border and trade management systems. China framed Kenya as a "brother through thick and thin," suggesting the importance it places on African countries and how it leverages these relationships in its foreign policy. The UK portrayed Kenya as the best model for COVID-19 response, providing best practices for other countries. The study highlights the importance of accurate and trustworthy information in shaping public perceptions during global health crises and provides insights into the strategies used by governments to promote their narratives. In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the use of websites as a tool of digital diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, digital diplomacy, websites, US, UK, China, Kenya, global cooperation

Introduction

Digital diplomacy refers to the use of digital technologies, such as websites, social media, and mobile applications, by governments to communicate with each other and with the public (Cull, 2018; Ong'ong'a, 2021) ^[3, 22]. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the significance of digital diplomacy to the forefront, as countries around the world have worked to respond to the crisis and communicate with their citizens (Huang, 2022; Mboya, 2021). The increasing utilization of digital technologies has raised concerns about the impact of false information on public health and safety (Ongonga, 2020) ^[10]. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges for governments, including the need to respond quickly to the rapidly evolving situation and the need to provide accurate and trustworthy information to the public (Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020) ^[10]. Misinformation can have serious consequences during a global health crisis, as it can undermine public trust in the government, contribute to panic, and even lead to dangerous public health behaviours (Oloo, 2022; Vraga *et al.*, 2022) ^[11, 19].

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The role of governments in shaping public perceptions and communicating accurate information has become increasingly critical, especially in the digital age where information can be easily shared and spread (Rawnsley & Rawnsley, 2019) ^[16]. However, despite efforts by governments and other organizations to counteract misinformation, the rapid spread of false information remains a significant challenge, particularly in the context of global health crises. The increasing use of digital technologies has made digital diplomacy a crucial tool for governments to communicate information and shape public perceptions (Bjola, 2022) ^[1]. The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the importance of digital diplomacy in addressing global health crises, as governments around the world have had to take quick action to respond to the crisis and communicate with their citizens.

Websites are one of the most commonly used tools of digital diplomacy, as they provide a platform for governments to communicate information and share their perspectives on global issues (Guess, *et al.*, 2020; Lee, *et al.*, 2015) Guess ^[5] ^{7]}. They have become a platform of trust since they cannot be easily hacked or manipulated by individuals with ill intentions, unlike some social media platforms (Ong'Ong'A, 2022) ^[23]. During global health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, websites become an even more critical tool for governments, as they play a key role in shaping public perceptions and promoting accurate information (Guess, *et al.*, 2020) ^[5]. In this context, the use of websites by governments as a tool of digital diplomacy is of particular concern, as the information provided on these sites can have a significant impact on public perceptions and behavior. As a result, diplomatic actors regard websites as an essential tool for publishing and disseminating diplomatic messages.

For instance, the US has used its website, coronavirus.gov, to provide up-to-date information on the COVID-19 pandemic, including data on the number of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. The site also provides information on vaccine distribution, testing, and mitigation efforts, as well as guidance for individuals and businesses. The UK government's website, gov.uk, has similarly provided information on the COVID-19 pandemic, including data on the number of cases and deaths as well as guidance for individuals and businesses. The site has also been used to provide information on the government's response to the crisis, including its vaccine distribution strategy and support for businesses. In contrast, the Chinese government has used its website, gov.cn, to promote its own narrative on the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing its efforts to contain the virus and the success of its response. The site also provides information on the number of cases and deaths, as well as guidance for individuals and businesses.

On the other hand, framing is a communication tool used in digital diplomacy to understand and analyse the narratives, messages, and language used in digital communication and to evaluate how they shape public opinion and impact international relations (Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020) ^[10]. In the context of digital diplomacy, framing analysis helps diplomats and policymakers understand how digital media and communication platforms can be leveraged to present a certain perspective or agenda, shape public opinion, and influence international relations. For example, by analysing the language and narratives used in social media posts,

digital diplomacy experts can identify how issues such as human rights, democracy, or global security are being framed and discussed online, and how these frames are impacting public opinion and international relations.

By using framing analysis, digital diplomats can identify and understand the dominant narratives and messaging strategies used by other countries and actors, and can use this information to develop their own digital diplomacy strategies (Manor & Crilley, 2018) ^[8]. For example, by understanding how a certain issue is being framed by other countries, a digital diplomat can develop a counter-narrative that reframes the issue in a more favorable light and presents their own country's perspective. Importantly, framing analysis is an important tool in digital diplomacy as it helps diplomats understand the role of digital communication in shaping public opinion and international relations and to develop effective digital diplomacy strategies to advance their foreign policy objectives. As a result, the analysis of the websites of these countries provides insights into the strategies used to promote their narratives and the impact of these strategies on public perceptions.

Therefore, the contribution of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the websites of the US, the UK and China during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya with the aim to examine the information provided on the COVID-19 crisis and the strategies used by these countries to frame the pandemic and sheds light on how digital diplomacy has been utilized to shape public perceptions and communicate information about the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya. The purpose of this study is to examine how the US, the UK, and China framed the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya through the use of their websites, and to assess the impact of these strategies on public perceptions.

The research questions for this study include:

1. What strategies did the US, the UK, and China use to frame the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya on their websites?
2. What can be learned from the strategies used by the US, the UK, and China during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya to improve the quality of information during future global health crises?

Material and Method

A website is a form of a blog that allows an organization to share information to reach a diverse and expanding audience (Lee, Hyung Min, *et al.*, 2015) ^[7]. Organizations that wish to maximize their potential in the ever-competitive market prioritize their websites with the websites' users in mind. The usability of the website makes them essential in the conduct of a study on digital diplomacy. Organizations use the website to serve users who wish to gain knowledge about the organization. The information posted on this website includes the organization's policies, press releases, job adverts, and other bilateral updates if they are diplomatic institutions. Kent and Taylor (2001) claim that a well and strategically designed website can create an opportunity for the organization to establish and engage in a two-way conversation with its public. The website provides the organization's capacity to reach, engage and interact with an audience who are diverse daily. The adaptation of organization websites cut across all sectors, including the diplomacy institutions. Kent and Taylor (2014) ^[18] have

advised that the website should not be limited to content that is rich but should also be user-friendly and easy to navigate with texts given preference to heavy graphics (Taylor & Kent, 2014; Yang & Kent, 2014b) ^[21]. According to these scholars, the interactive website should allow users to peruse site information and provide links to other pages. Based on the above description, the US, UK, and China's websites were purposely selected for this investigation. Scholars have identified websites as an official communication tool for organizations since information published on the website is likely to be credential and verified.

Content Selection from Websites

In order to access the contents from the three websites of these diplomatic institutions, a strategy had to be employed. This study found out that it was difficult to crawl data from these websites since they had security restrictions. Therefore, it resorted to manual extraction of the contents from the websites. This was done first by checking the usability and nature of the layout of the website. The component of the website includes organization information as well as URL leading to specific subsides or blogs. The task here was to find out how to navigate these websites.

Table 1: Number of contents for the study period 2019-2020.

Country Website	US https://ke.usembassy.gov/		China http://ke.china-embassy.org/		UK https://www.gov.uk/	
	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
January	8	5	7	1	1	5
February	1	13	15	1	1	0
March	4	5	17	2	4	3
April	5	4	4	4	2	1
May	3	3	1	16	4	0
June	2	4	4	18	3	1
July	4	5	3	5	1	1
August	2	1	3	4	1	2
September	4	0	7	4	2	2
October	2	5	2	8	3	1
November	6	3	3	6	0	3
December	5	3	2	8	1	5
Total	46	51	68	77	23	24

These websites provide a section where one can filter information from the blogs depending on their needs. For instance, the websites provide information categories on news, speeches, press releases, events and videos. This study was interested in all these aspects except the footage since these components helped to unpack the messages regarding digital diplomacy. Using filters on the websites, the study selected the period between January 2019-December 2020. Four sets of information categories were also filtered, including speeches, press releases, news and events. The table 1 above shows the number of contents provided for the study period. The selection of the contents for analysis was systematically picked in terms of each element in the information category. For instance, two posts were selected for each month. This was purposive to ensure no information from the next segment was considered. For example, in a month where the posts had all four components, whether a press release, news, events, or speeches, they were selected for analysis. For analysis, these generated 48, 72, and 22 samples from the US, UK, and Chinese embassy websites, respectively.

Analysis

Social network analytics were also used to examine websites. This was accomplished through the use of online software to compute and cloud the prominent words on those websites. Word Cloud combines word recognition with the proportional mathematical principle to present words in the form of a cloud. Scholars examined thematic output in professional journals and discovered that keywords that appeared more than seven times in a dataset were overused, this demonstrated the power of the word cloud in text analysis. The number of times a word appears

in the input text is proportional to the number of times it is visualized in a word cloud. The Word Cloud software clusters each word based on frequency, bringing researchers closer to the intended message versus the reality of frequency counts. Word Cloud, in most cases, approximates rather than replicates numerical counts of words. In order to prepare word cloud input terms, certain words were combined and adjusted to fit into the technicalities of the Word Cloud technology. The data from the website was extracted manually following the sampling technique explained above. These data were then pasted into Word Cloud online to textually analyse the most frequently used words in these embassies. In so doing, the study was able to identify predominant patterns in the communication and messaging techniques of these embassies. After the data was input into the word cloud software, the researcher embarked on sorting and cleaning the words that were not making sense. For example, article words like "the, and, with," to mention a few, were removed from the dataset. Numbers and abbreviations were also eliminated. The Word Cloud counted the dominant words and presented them as a word cloud. This technique allowed for the mapping of the social and semantic structure of the dataset. In this study, Word Cloud's use was to effectively assimilate new information and show the topics that these embassies prioritized for communicating with the public.

Findings and results

Case 1-The US embassy framing COVID-19

As can be seen in Figure 1, during 2019-2020 the US embassy posts dealt with health-related issues, which were portrayed as destabilizing Kenya's economic development. It is interesting to note that the embassy focused on framing

posts related to Kenya and Kenyans in general. This means that the US pays more attention to communicating with Kenyans on its website than on other digital platforms. Posts in this category highlight the efforts made by USAID in providing health services, and donations to health facilities in Kenya. Furthermore, posts dealt with the launch of

programs that are designed to reduce acute malnutrition rates in the northern part of Kenya. Such posts argue the need for foreign assistance by enhancing relationships between the private sector, civil society, and the public to create opportunities to accelerate Kenya's self-reliance.



Fig 1: Word Cloud-Framing COVID-19 on US Website posts

US as global leader in fighting COVID-19

The posts also framed the US's "global leadership" in fighting COVID-19. These posts depicted the US as having a long foundation, expertise, generosity, and planning that is unmatched in history while being the largest international investor in the health sector in Kenya. Additional posts reflect on a visa application concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and urge individuals who may have been physically present in China, excluding Hong Kong and Macau, and are experiencing flu-like symptoms to suspend their appointments. It is worth noting that the US alluded to being generous and pragmatic, and as a result, it was one of the first nations to assist the Chinese people when reports emerged from Wuhan of another outbreak and offered technical support to China's CDC. Such posts argue that the US transported about 18 tons of medical supplies to Wuhan and pledged \$100 million to help states fight the pandemic, including an offer to China, which was declined.

Post reported the first COVID-19 case in Nairobi and the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Kenya suspended all public meetings, events, and gatherings. In addition to the above announcement, the US embassy focused on reporting having provided training to health workers in efforts to combat and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 by supporting MoH and Kenya Medical Research Institute (KMRI) to research and develop a medical intervention for infectious diseases such as COVID-19. Furthermore, the US framed posts that are related to donation as Marafiki (friendship) and used this slogan to produce facemasks that it donates to the security

organs in Kenya as a generous donation from President Trump. These donations of facemasks are also outlined as biodegradable, washable, packaged with public health information to educate Kenyans on COVID-19, as well as made in Kenya by Kenyans to support the Kenyan economy. The US similarly represents the distribution and supply of medical products and facilities made by US companies as critical and of high quality around the world.

COVID-19 and freedom of the media and press, security and democracy

It is worth noting that the US embassy focused on assisting the media and journalists to report health-related issues and supporting communication and provision of public health messaging for media, communities, and health workers. Such posts were portrayed as Kenyan journalists and media professionals playing a key role in informing and updating the COVID-19 pandemic. And therefore, they go to great lengths, risking their health to gather data and stories to inform the Kenyan people of the pandemic. Additional posts indicated that the US embassy has been supporting Kenya's media as a critical component of a strong, vibrant democracy and training media professionals in ethical and investigative journalism. Away from the media, the US embassy pays attention to reports on MOUs signed by US agencies with the county governments in Kenya. These MOUs are framed by the US embassy as a shared vision for devolution (UGATUZI), which signifies a joint commitment to Kenya-led development. For instance, such a partnership

is represented as that which provides a framework to guide the new way that the US and county governments do business together, including aligning activities, plans, and budgets; designing new programs and priorities; jointly monitoring and evaluating programs; and working to counter corruption and protect beneficiaries.

Because the majority of the posts portrayed the United States as a leader in assisting Kenya in its fight against terrorism and drug trafficking, donations related to COVID-19 were prioritized to organizations that deal with these issues. For instance, in the case of security, the US framed Kenya as a regional leader, and the US has been supporting its efforts to build better systems for border and trade management. In terms of content, the US website can be classified into three major categories. The first category targets Kenyans and therefore promotes US agencies like USAID as well as other US organizations working in Kenya. The second category focuses on US citizens living in and outside Kenya. Such contents talk about elections and voting in the US, urging its nationals to follow the voting process. The final section focuses on ambassadors, news, and events. This category promotes press releases and travel alerts. The findings presented here indicate that the US website's approach to digital diplomacy is different in

content from that of its Facebook account. The website is used to communicate official information rather than promote US culture. Away from the US embassy's use of the website, it can be noted in figure 4 that the UK embassy in Kenya uses similar words to those on the US embassy website but with different meanings attached to them, as the next section discusses.

Case 2-The UK embassy framing COVID-19

As can be seen in Figure 2, the UK in Kenya prioritized other issues than COVID-19. It is worth noting that the top words included Kenya, British, and then Africa. This implies that the UK embassy tailors its information to the Kenyan audience.

Most of the posts that talked about the British were framed as advising its citizens to take travel advisories and those who needed to be repatriated due to the COVID-19 disease spread in Kenya to take the available flight to London. Interestingly, posts related to COVID-19 are framed and integrated into other programs that the UK government and its agencies implement in Kenya. For instance, posts framed COVID-19 in Kenya as a catalyst to deepen mutual prosperity, cooperation, strategic partnership, and enhance people-to-people pillars.

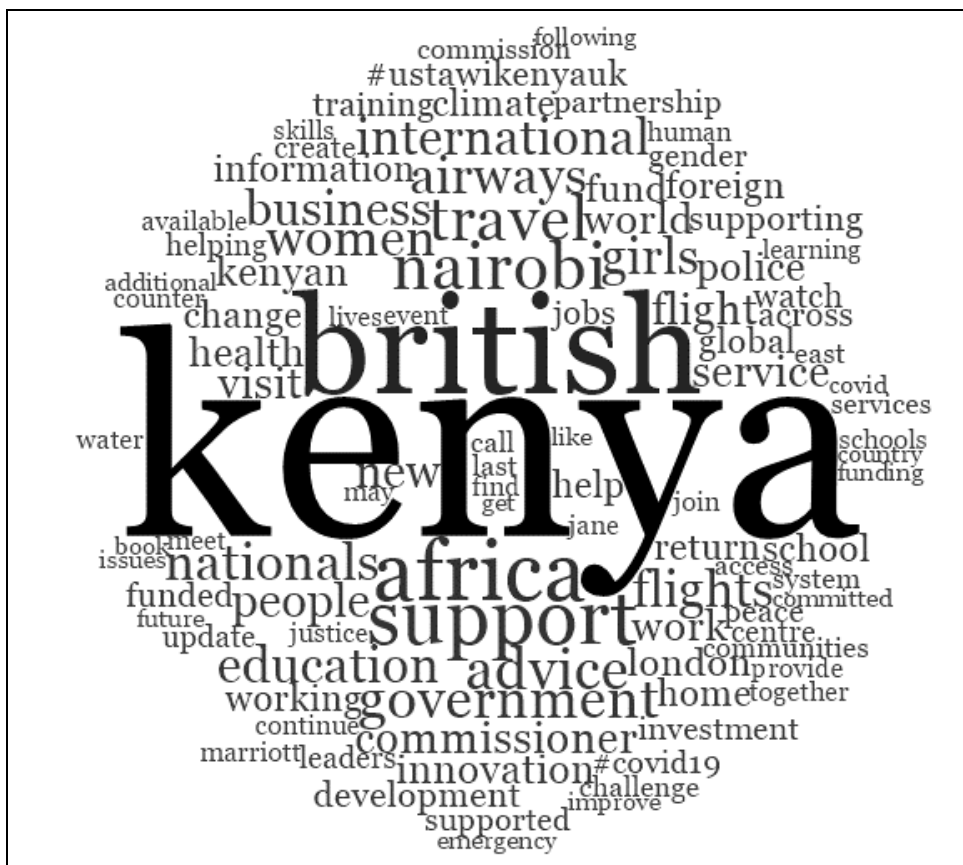


Fig 2: Word Cloud-The UK Framing COVID-19 in Kenya.

UK as the largest donor for COVID-19 vaccine

In addition, the UK embassy framed the visit of the UK Minister for Africa to Nairobi as one of the most senior diplomatic visits during the mid-COVID-19 pandemic to progress the partnership between Kenya and the UK. Such posts alluded to the UK-Kenya relationship as being based on mutual interest and deep respect to promote prosperity, support sustainable development, and work closely to combat the shared challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additional posts portrayed the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as having worsened the global education crisis and resulting in countries experiencing economic contraction. On the other hand, the UK framed the discussion between Kenya's president and Foreign Secretary as a need to respond to international COVID-19 and continue to partner in the trade agreement. Moreover, posts were framed as the UK holding a forum to support funding to boost investment in response to Kenya's post-

COVID-19 economic crisis.

Furthermore, these posts argue that the funding helps to keep supply chains and trade flows flowing to support enterprises in Kenya as they open up in a COVID-19 safe way. Likewise, posts framed the UK-Kenya trade agreement during COVID-19 as the strongest possible platform to expand trade relations in the whole East African Community and provide a major boost for businesses and investors in Kenya and the UK to deliver a much-needed stimulus for economic development to counter the effects of the pandemic. The posts also framed the UK as a champion and the world's top donor to girls' education programs before the strike of COVID-19 and therefore offered girls the opportunity to get out of poverty and exploitation to define their future.

COVID-19 as a threat to humanity and the need for innovative research

Besides, the UK embassy framed COVID-19 as having worsened the vulnerable communities who face dwindling food supplies and called for countries to step up and act to stop the spread of the disease that could cause even more devastation in Africa. Furthermore, posts were framed as the UK supporting innovative scientific research to help Kenyan scientists detect COVID-19 antibodies in visitors to ante-natal clinics, blood donors, and health workers. Additional posts paid attention to stating that the UK is implementing a program to help monitor, understand, and inform the ongoing COVID-19 response in Kenya and offer best practices for similar countries in controlling and responding to the disease. Other posts indicated that the UK has a longstanding record of working with Kenya to prepare for a large outbreak of disease by providing supplies and ensuring healthcare systems are well equipped. The Public Health Emergency Operation Centre, funded by the British, is framed as being at the heart of Kenya's response to COVID-19 through helping in tracing and rapidly responding to cases.

The UK embassy further framed posts on COVID-19 as a threat to everyone around the world and a need for all to work together to defeat the disease. These posts also mentioned that the UK places science at the heart of its support for Kenya during the pandemic, claiming to believe studies conducted to provide robust predictions about the spread of COVID-19 and assist in controlling the disease while contributing to keeping all safe. Additionally, it is also reported to continue to work closely in partnership with the Kenyan government and its citizens to tackle and contain COVID-19, strengthen healthcare, and boost the economy by protecting jobs. Posts that reported on the joint research between the UK and Kenya health agencies were framed as helping support Kenya's government response intending to protect the most vulnerable people and keep society running. Additional posts focused on the UK support by working with KEMRI and the UK University of Warwick to produce a forecast of the pandemic which directly informed MoH decisions through Kenya's COVID-19 modelling review team.

Leaders from around the world forge a path of global cooperation and alliance in the pursuit of the COVID-19 vaccine

Posts that talked about the COVID-19 vaccine were framed as the world's leaders hosting the Global Vaccine (GAVI)

summit to raise funds to inoculate children and support the world's fight against COVID-19. Further, posts reported that funding from GAVI supports health systems to withstand the impact of COVID-19 and helps in maintaining the necessary infrastructure needed to roll out future COVID-19 vaccines on a global scale. These posts, in addition, framed Boris Johnson as having urged the leaders to choose to unite and forge a path of global cooperation and the need to renew their collective resolve to find the vaccine that can defeat COVID-19. Moreover, Jane Marriott, the British High Commissioner to Kenya, is framed as being proud of the UK's long history of engaging with Kenya on vaccines and Kenya as one of the top 20 priority countries. Finally, in this category, posts also framed the UK as remaining the largest donor to the Vaccine Alliance and the launch of the COVAX AMC, an innovative financing instrument to provide access to COVID-19 vaccines for low- and middle-income countries. COVAX was framed as the first building block towards a global mechanism to ensure equitable access to future COVID-19 vaccines.

The analysis of the website content of the UK embassy has revealed that COVID-19 is framed in various ways to elicit interest in the readers, especially the Kenyan audience. The most prevalent word used by the UK embassy in Kenya was "support." Support is a term that defines all the partnerships that the UK enters with foreign nations in the areas of economics, health, education, climate change, and other related interventions, among others. The results from the analysis of the posts from the UK embassy in Kenya are somehow different from those of the Chinese embassy, as Figure 5 below indicates.

Case 3-The Chinese embassy framing COVID-19

The Chinese embassy in Kenya focused on posting information about China more than any other topic on its website. This means that it aims to protect and build its country's image abroad during the pandemic. As can be seen in Figure 3, the prevalent words that the Chinese embassy used include China, Chinese, Kenya, COVID, African, Africa, and countries. Furthermore, importantly, the use of the phrases "cooperation, development, trade, shared community, and people," among others, emerged and was integrated into the communications that the embassy posts on its website. This shows how China places importance on its infrastructure support for African countries. For example, the embassy focuses more on Africa than Kenya, indicating China's focus on African countries to leverage these relationships when seeking favorable political support in various UN positions and issues.

China as a global model for disease control, and economic recovery

Compared to the US and the UK in Kenya, the Chinese embassy in Kenya framed other media that reported on alleged discrimination against Africans in Guangdong, China "*as while countries are combating the COVID-19 pandemic, some media report that there is discrimination against Africans in China*". These posts were further framed to indicate the history of the outbreak of COVID-19 and stress the support both China and Africa had in the fight against the pandemic. Interestingly, China indicates that it won't forget the backing voiced and provided by Africa and its citizens at the crucial stage of fighting the pandemic. Similarly, posts were framed to allude that the severe

epidemic faced by China and African countries has provided an avenue for China and African countries to be more united than ever, therefore demonstrating brotherhood in the period of adversity, and China is doing its best to help. In addition,

under this category, posts report on Chinese authorities claiming that they treat all foreigners in China equally, rejecting differential treatment, and have zero-tolerance for discrimination.



Fig 3: Word Cloud-China Framing COVID-19 in Kenya.

Fight against African discrimination during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The discrimination topic has emerged as one of the hot topics that the Chinese embassy frequently posts on its website. This was because China saw it as important to control the damage that had already been caused in Guangdong. As such, it framed the incidents as countries around the world having taken measures to contain the virus. Therefore, China's urgent task is to stop the further spread of COVID-19 from inside and outside of the country. It claims that in doing so, there is a need for understanding, support, and cooperation from Chinese and foreigners since it attaches great importance to the life and health of foreign nationals in China while rejecting all racist and discriminatory remarks. Such incidents were framed as *misunderstandings* and urged relevant authorities to hasten their way of work, hoping that foreign nationals in China strictly follow local anti-epidemic measures and cooperate and support each other in fighting the pandemic together to achieve a final victory. In addition, posts were also framed as anti-epidemic measures concerning Africans in China. Such posts claimed that countries around the world have taken containment measures to prevent COVID-19 from further spreading, while China achieved remarkable progress through comprehensive, rigorous, and systematic measures but still faced great risks of imported cases and domestic resurgence that put mounting pressure on health facilities.

Likewise, on the allegation of discrimination against Africans, posts were framed to postulate that China and Africa are *good friends, brothers, and partners* where the friendship is confined to the joint effort to seek economic development, national independence, better livelihood, and liberation in the past decades, and therefore, such period-tested friendship, which is treasured by both Chinese and Africans, and *humanity* shines throughout the *darkness* of the epidemic. Remarkably, the COVID-19 crisis was also framed in terms of China and Africa facing the *same tide* of difficulties, enabling their *friendship* to elevate, while China not forgetting the support from Africa during its most difficult time, and giving *love* and *care* to Africans in China, specifically the students. The assistance to Africa as the situation got severe was framed as the Chinese government and its people delivering batches of supplies to convey deep friendship to *brothers* and *sisters*, demonstrating China's fine tradition of mutual support and assistance acclaimed by the African Union and African countries. The Posts reported that such donations included large amounts of face masks, test kits, protective suits, face shields, goggles, forehead thermometers, ventilators, medical use gloves, and shoe covers, and continued to help Africans to the best of their ability.

China's solidarity and cooperation through joint response to COVID-19

Posts, on the other hand, were framed in such a way that

Chinese always see Africans as partners and brothers through thick and thin, and China-Africa friendship is unbreakable because it is deeply rooted in the land, and African friends can count on receiving a fair, just, cordial, and friendly reception in China. In addition, COVID-19 was reported as it knows no borders and a challenge to all mankind that can be defeated through concerted international efforts. Furthermore, posts framed President Xi Jinping as having to host the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity against COVID-19; and posts referring to China and Africa as brothers who will never be separated. Fighting together and defeating COVID-19 with solidarity and cooperation through a joint response to COVID-19, and renewing China-Africa fraternity. Moreover, posts indicated that China was scheduled to construct the African CDC headquarters to deliver the health care initiative adopted at the FOCAC. These posts were also framed as China and Africa's building a community of health for all, and China's pledged to prioritize African countries to benefit from its COVID-19 vaccine development and deployment.

Strengthening silk belt and road cooperation to cushion the impact of COVID-19

Similarly, posts framed the importance of strengthening Belt and Road cooperation to cushion the impact of COVID-19 and prioritize public health, economic reopening, and people's livelihoods. Other posts stated the intention of China to cancel the debts of relevant hardest-hit and under-heavy financial stress African countries by the COVID-19 in the arrangement of interest-free government borrowings. These posts alluded to China's work with the world community to offer these countries more support by means such as further extending the period of debt suspension to help them tide over the current difficulty. Under technological innovation, China's 5G was framed to boost Africa's development and revitalization in such new enterprise formats as clean energy, smart city, and digital economy.

Interestingly, posts that focused on Kenya, portrayed Amb. Zhou said that China had put forward plans to establish a new development pattern in which domestic and foreign markets can boost each other, with the domestic market as the mainstay, bringing about more development opportunities for the world. These posts were framed as the brotherly South-South cooperation between China and Kenya as equal-footed and mutually beneficial. In addition, COVID-19 was framed to represent a prime example of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual assistance in the face of disease. The Chinese embassy framed the China-Africa Meeting on Unity to Counter COVID-19 as striving for new progress in the China-Kenya comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership.

Furthermore, China was also framed as setting a good example for the world in epidemic prevention and control as well as economic recovery. Finally, in this category, the people of China were framed as standing with Kenya, giving tremendous support to Kenyans, which shows the true mark of friendship. Additionally, the partnership between China and Kenya was framed as having augmented the delivery of Kenya's developmental blueprint, Vision 2030, and the Big 4 Agenda, and having confidence that Kenya and China would continue to cooperate and give priority to poverty alleviation and inequality eradication on

the multilateral front. These results from the Chinese embassy website analysis show the consistency of adopting websites as a strategic tool for diplomatic communication. The majority of the content on the website includes press releases as well as meeting and media reports.

Discussions

The objective of this research was to investigate the use of government websites by the U States, the UK, and China during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aimed to evaluate the accuracy and trustworthiness of information provided on these sites, and to understand the strategies used by these governments to frame the pandemic. The research focused on identifying how each country communicated about the pandemic and how their framing influenced public perception and policy decisions.

The study established that the content of each government's website differed from that of their Facebook accounts in regards to digital diplomacy (Zhang & Ong'ong'a, 2021) ^[22]. The website serves as an important tool for strategic communication in diplomatic affairs, with press releases, news, events, meetings, and media reports being the primary content found on these websites (Yang & Kent, 2014a, 2014b) ^[21].

The research revealed that the three countries approached the COVID-19 pandemic in different ways. The US was portrayed as a global leader in the fight against COVID-19. Initially, the pandemic was framed as a distant problem that was unlikely to have a significant impact on the country. As the situation worsened, the framing shifted to emphasize the need for personal responsibility and individual action to stop the spread of the virus, with a focus on individual freedoms and economic concerns. This shift led to debates about the balance between public health and personal freedom, as well as the role of government in controlling the spread of the virus.

In the UK, COVID-19 was initially framed as a healthcare issue managed by the National Health Service (NHS) and other healthcare providers. As the pandemic progressed, the framing shifted to emphasize the need for national unity and solidarity, with a focus on the need for everyone to work together to defeat the virus. This shift led to debates about the role of government in controlling the spread of the virus, and the responsibility of individuals to follow public health guidelines. The UK was depicted as the largest donor of the COVID-19 vaccine.

China, on the other hand, was portrayed as a good global example in epidemic prevention, control, and economic recovery (Ong'ong'a, 2022) ^[23]. COVID-19 was initially framed as a public health crisis requiring a collective response from the government and citizens. This framing emphasized the role of government in controlling the spread of the virus and the need for citizens to cooperate with government measures such as lockdowns and travel restrictions (Castillo & Amoah, 2020) ^[2]. As the pandemic progressed, the framing shifted to emphasize China's success in controlling the spread of the virus and its position as a global leader in the fight against COVID-19. This shift was used to promote China's image as a responsible and capable global power.

The study also investigated the way in which each country positioned Kenya in regards to COVID-19. The US positioned Kenya as a regional leader and supported its attempts to improve its border and trade management

systems. China framed Kenya as a "brother through thick and thin," using the phrase "Africa" in reference to Kenya, suggesting the significance it places on African countries and how it leverages these relationships in its pursuit of favorable political support in various UN positions and issues. The UK portrayed Kenya as the best model for COVID-19 response, providing best practices for other countries in controlling and responding to the disease. Overall, the study's findings revealed that debates over the source and origin of COVID-19 prompted diplomatic actors to attempt to save their image by debunking disease myths. This strategy aimed to ensure a favorable audience, and all parties involved in COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation took advantage of the situation to emphasize their foreign policies and values on digital platforms. Chinese communication was deemed more human, polite, convincing, and tactful compared to other countries. There is still a power struggle with Kenya: China bases its power on the values of economically empowering Kenya through infrastructure support with the goal of promoting and constructing the community of the shared future of mankind, which is China's vision of multilateralism, and uses cultural power as a political tool to counter the cultural hegemony propagated by the US and other western countries to ensure cultural security to advance its interests (Dziewiałowski-Gintowt, 2019; Singh, 2015) ^[4, 17].

Conclusion

In conclusion, by examining the websites of these countries, this study contributes to our understanding of the role of digital diplomacy in addressing global health crises. The findings of this study can inform future research on digital diplomacy and the impact of false information on public health and safety. Additionally, the results of this study can provide insights for governments and other organizations on the effective use of digital technologies to communicate information and shape public perceptions during global health crises. The results of this study can inform future efforts to address the challenges posed by false information and promote the effective use of digital technologies in addressing global health crises. The findings of this study have important implications for governments and organizations involved in digital diplomacy, as they provide valuable insights into the use of websites as a tool for shaping narratives during global health crises. The study contributes to the growing body of research on digital diplomacy and provides a framework for future studies on the role of websites in shaping public perceptions during global health crises.

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