Title: **International Relations in Era of Digital Technology: The Change and Implications for African Nations**

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Abstract

International relation in Africa is not isolated from the impact of digital technology rather the wave of digital revolution across the globe has introduced new thinking in the comity of nations. This thinking reflects concern on e-diplomacy as new way for nation-nation engagement. The increasing diplomatic engagement and other international relations through digital technology has brought the world to a global village. In the same vein, the preponderance of digital technology as a tool for international interactions and relations among States, International institutions, organisation (governmental and non-governmental) and leaders than ever have increased their participation and knowledge sharing in global discussion. While the benefits of digitalization of foreign relations include integration, improved access and inclusiveness, the developing nations especially African nations are confronted by two major changes. The first is the change for transformation and constructive engagement in comity of Nations and the second is fear of change and displacement among actants.The paper notes that, Africa's international relations and diplomacy is hanging on dagger drawn relationship of progressive and conservative interests. It concluded in recommendation that African nations should adopt the option of going progressively digital and align to compete in contemporary international affairs rather than sticking to conservation tradition of international engagement and remain a substantial inequality in global affairs.

Introduction

The world is made-up of many States that operate interdependently sovereign across the globe. These States are characterised by variety of people and culture. The process and efforts by which these States, engage each other to address issues of common interest and concern is known as International Relations. States, which operate under the instrumentality of national governments as directed by the State Leaders, are the most important actors in international relations. While they are strongly conditioned, constrained and influenced by non-state actors the pattern of international engagement by state and non-state actors in international relations are strongly shaped and directed by digital technology.

The emergence of digital technology has lead to significant changes in social, economical and political relations of the modern society. Access to digital information and control over it contributes to the provision of diplomatic services by States. This profound and well organized use of digital communication technology by the information haves empowers the provision of diplomatic services electronically. This reflects concern on e-diplomacy as new way for nation to nation engagement. The preponderance of digital technology as a tool for international interactions and relations among States, International institutions, organisation (governmental and non-governmental) and leaders than ever have increased their participation and knowledge sharing in global discussion.

To this end, the option of exploring the potential of digital technology is examined as alternative tool for invigorating international engagement and diplomacy.

The application of digital technology in service delivery traces its origin to “the invention of the World Wide Web (Internet) in 1989 and a hyper –text languages for global

information sharing, by Tim Barners –lee in Geneva". This technological breakthrough brought about various forms innovations in international relations and diplomacy including electronic delivery strategy. This strategy otherwise referred as digital or electronic (E-) governance concerns itself with the automation of the current way of delivering services to the public as well as citizens feedback. It is all about carrying out responsibilities using digital technology as a collaborative transaction and process required functioning effectively and economically, promoting innovation and competition in a bid to improve the quality of diplomatic services with other countries.

In the view of World Bank (2001), e-governance is information and communication technologies that transform relations with citizens, the private sector and / or other government agencies so as to promote citizens empowerment, improve service delivery, strengthen accountability, increase transparency, or improve government efficiency. (htt://www.world bank.org/datawai2003). In another perspective, Abramson and Meaus, (2001) defines e-governance as the electronic interaction, transaction and information exchange between the government, the public (citizens and business) and employees. UNPA &ASPA, (2001) notes that, e-governance is the public sector's use of the most innovative information and communication technologies, like the internet, real-time textual and voice-chats, video-conferencing and online cooperation tools, such as shared documents, calendars and databases, or collaborative document drafting Platforms, to fully enable the functional collaboration of globally scattered individuals, organizations and branches.

Considering these, Digital governance is considered significant and has potentials of enhancing nations' participation by inputting into foreign policy provisioning

mechanisms that address state challenges and satisfies diplomatic interest. The use of electronic input and output analysis that illustrates international engagement as provided by digital technology is referred as internet engagement. The internet engagement models are grouped into three interface mechanisms; ***Government-to-Citizen (G2C), Government-to-Business (G2B), and Government-to-Government (G2G***).

Our concern in this study is the *Government-to-Government (G2G*) interface mechanism. Government-to-Government (G2G) is transactional and interactional in relationship between government and its agencies and other foreign (nations) countries. In these webs of relations, government interacts and depends on other governments/states to effectively deliver services and allocate responsibilities. This single access point of (G2G) enable governments to share databases, resources and skills that promote diplomatic services.

Along this thought, Hirst and Norton (1998) notes that electronic delivery strategy encompasses three critical transformations; internal, external and relational. Internal transformation refers to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of internal functions and process of government by interrelating different departments and agencies. Thus, information can flow much faster and more easily among different governmental departments, reducing processing time, paperwork bottlenecks and eliminating long, bureaucratic and inefficient approval procedures. It equally facilitates storing and collecting data, reduction of labour costs and information handling cost and the speed and accuracy of time processing.

Externally ICTs open up new possibilities for government to be more transparent to citizens and business, giving access to a greater range of information collected and generated by government.

Relationally, ICT adoption may enable fundamental changes in the relationships between the citizens and the state, and between nation state, with implications for the democratic process and horizontal integration of services can be realized, enabling the integration of information and services from various government agencies to help citizens and other stakeholders get seamless. (Ndou 2004, http://www.ejisidie.org).

The role of digital technology in international relations and diplomatic services manifested in May 2007 when the first two virtual embassies – those of Maldives and Sweden – were launched .The action raised opportunities of the Internet to the governments. As Costae (2007:171) notes "the Internet and the world wide web has reached the point when nobody can afford to ignore it, at their own loss". International relation in Africa is not isolated from the impact of digital technology rather the wave of digital revolution across the globe has introduced new thinking in the comity of nations. This thinking reflects concern on e-diplomacy as new way for nation-nation engagement. The increasing diplomatic engagement and other international relations through digital technology has brought the world to a global village. In the same vein, the preponderance of digital technology as a tool for international interactions and relations among States, International institutions, organization (governmental and non-governmental) and leaders than ever have increased their participation and knowledge sharing in global discussion.

The gap created as a result of imbalance in the use of digital technology is changing the nature of Africa's international relations from initial emerging strong nations at independence to a bulk of backsliding nations. This changing nature therefore deserves attention especially as African nations are becoming more dependent on developed

countries to acquire digital equipment including manpower that enhance the digital participation of African nations in comity of nations. As such, our concern therefore is, to examine African nation- states particularly Nigeria, in the use and application, gaps.changes and prospects of digital technology to power the link and communication required for international relations and diplomacy in the face of globalized world. Let us start by discussing the characterization and trends of digital technology, otherwise known as Information and Communication technologies (ICTs)

2. Digital Information and Communication Technology (ICTs):Character and Trends

Information and mechanisms for delivering it are lifeblood and strength of the body politic. This hinges on the fact that some information exchanges and transmission occur in various forms through rich and sophisticated channels.The emergence of digital technology is the most recent and influential channel that no doubt triggers and facilitates changes in the way states (governments) organizations and individuals mobilize, and express their opinions, show case policies and deliver services to the society and citizenry. Achieving this to great extent is the internet, which powers the explosive growth in connectivity as well as enhances the shrinking costs, maximize speed, broadening reach and eradicating distance in information dissemination. The internet does it through various characterization and trends.

2.1 Instant and Direct Communications

The most significant and visible power of digital technology globally is the achievement of instant and direct communication due to invention of internet. The internet through the World Wide Web (WWW) promotes electronic mail (e-mail) services. The trend since

nineties reveals the vast prospect of electronic messaging. By this innovation, messages be it long or short are easily sent in almost real time to one or more recipients simultaneously. This as Royal Pingdom (2010) notes, is the convenience that has also changed the habit of communications through messages, making the users to often downsize the content to few sentences or words even, while raising the common volume and frequency of e-mail message communication to the level of almost 250 billion e-mails exchanged daily around the globe. Unlike the e-mail communication, the use of instant messengers and further voice and video calls over the Internet – such as Skype – has become common low-cost option for real-time communication. Mobile devices that access Internet and allow for voice, video and short messages (SMS) communications – whose number is expected to surpass one billion by 2013 (Resource Shelf, 2010) – are making the world easily and thoroughfully connected.

2.2 Information Access and Sharing

The ability to send, receive and share messages instantly or at convenience is one of the major breakthroughs of digital technology. This process as powered by internet is a system of interlinked information in text, visual or audible form. The avalanche of internet search engines such as Yahoo!, Google and others has further strengthened the process of web search, exchange and receipt of information. Also the emergence of online communities and networks created the possibility to publicly process certain information through open debates and knowledge-exchange by social groups. The most fashionable and innovation in this category for building online communities are the social networking platforms (SNP) such as Facebook,twitter.In this, the personal profile of a user is created and can easily get connected to friends and colleagues to receive automatic

updates on their lives, browse through their personal posts and photos, share comments and messages among themselves, inform them on personal daily updates through a personal status, join groups of likeminded people or become fans of celebrities, raise money for public good causes or other issues of interest.

2.3 Learning and collaboration

In addition to the innovation of easy access to information and its sharing, the emergence of online communities/environment as created by the Internet has enhanced learning, communication, easy collaboration, and documents sharing. The online learning (e-learning) allows persons to enroll anytime and anywhere as well as study at self-pace. More so, groups, lecturer-student and student-student interaction easily allow access and exchange of reading materials and resources at very low cost and sometimes free. This online opportunity prompts trainings and builds professional capacities of the individuals at most convenience with little or no travel costs. In the same vein and besides an e-mail distribution list, online collaborative platforms commonly offer members to share documents among themselves, to leave short messages on a virtual board, virtual classroom, chat room and the like to brainstorm on issues of concern and interest.

The opportunities arising from Internet powered learning processes have enabled many emerging professional communities to utilise customised social network platforms that include a combination of diversity of blogging, microblogging, forum and chat discussion and messaging tools. One particular concept that has become widely accepted model of collaborative work is wiki: a type of a website that allows users to easily create pages, edit the content and create link between pages containing related content, thereby introducing non-linear structures. Wikis are commonly used for community websites

which require collaborative updates, corporate intranets for structuring and linking information, collaborative research work and knowledge management systems. Wikipedia, a world-wide publicly accessible and editable encyclopaedia, is certainly the most well known example of an edited wiki structure of a mass contribution scale – it is available in over 200 languages and contains about 15 million articles (Wikipedia, 2010).

The characteristics and trends associated with ICTs as discussed reveals how significant and the potential of Internet in driving service delivery and solving problems confronting humanity at individual, organizational and state-state levels. As a follow up, the next section focuses on theoretical framework that analysis how the characteristics and trends drive cyber culture in international relations.

3. Digital Technology and International Relations: Theoretical Analysis

The practices and applications of digital technology in international relations in both developed and developing countries show that, it is a powerful means indeed to deliver better quality diplomatic and foreign services. The full range of innovations of digital technologies applied in provision of services at international engagement include proliferation of fax machines, beepers and mobile phone,email,intranets and computers. Among these "email communication are particularly important for strengthening one on one communication and group networks within established political organizations, as in the corporate world, and local community as well as linking citizens and governments" (Neuman ,R et al 1999).Besides, the application of internet in international relations has been profound in areas of information sharing, access and collaboration. While these make the nature and trends of Digital technology, the theoretical underpinnings that

explain the burgeoning of digital technology and its application for service delivery especially as it reflects on international relations and diplomacy is explored.

3.1 Theoretical Framework: Analysis and Linkage to International Relations

The evolvement of digital governance is not associated with any "grand theory" that explains its circumstances or factors that influence its emergence. This stems from the fact that digital technology is perceived from different perspectives by organisations or the persons applying it in government or business. As a result, explanation to the rise and impact of digital governance has attracted a variety of deeply contested thesis. The explanation starts with the position of Developmental thesis. This thesis attributes the emergence of digital governance to sprouting of post industrial information society. The outcome is the rise of knowledge economy associated with the shift in labour force from agricultural and manufacturing industry towards the service sector, and the parallel shift in resources from the importance of raw materials and financial capital toward information know-how.

On the alternative, the technological thesis argues that the developmental explanations to the rise of digital governance do not explain why developing countries such as India, Brazil and Taiwan moved ahead of most post Industrial societies in digital governance. To this extent, Technological thesis interprets the rise and adaptation of digital governance as a result of political and social organisations responding to the uses of information communication technologies that are at least autonomous from socio-economic development. This perspective hinges on the assumption that technologies shape the society more than society shapes technologies. In the word of Norris

(1999:106) “technological development directly influences how far political organizations can go to provide online services and information indirectly produces greater incentives for political organization to do so, as the general public becomes wired”

On the contrary to developmental and technological thesis, is the democratic perspective to the rise of digital governance. This thesis argues that new technologies allow greater transparency in policy making process, wider public participation in decision making and new opportunities for interaction and mobilisation in election campaigns. Given that known of these thesis explains in all ramifications how digital governance can stimulate international relations, diplomacy and offer diplomatic services, this study adopts **Actor-Network Theory (ANT)** as an explanatory framework of analysis.

Actor Network Theory (ANT), also known as enrolment theory or the sociology of translation emerged during the mid-1980s; primarily with the work of Bruno Latour (1987), Michel Callon (1986), and John Law (1992).ANT is also broadly referred as the Social Shaping of Technology (Williams and Edge, 1996). ANT is a conceptual frame for exploring collective sociotechnical processes, whose spokespersons have paid particular attention to science and technological activity. ANT suggests that the work of science is not fundamentally different from other social activities. ANT privileges neither natural (realism) nor cultural (social constructivism) accounts of scientific production, asserting instead that science is a process of heterogeneous engineering in which the social, technical, conceptual, and textual are puzzled together (or juxtaposed) and transformed (or translated).

At the root of this theory are the ‘actor’ and ‘actant’ who form relationships with each other. The ‘actor’ in this theory refers to the agency of nonhumans (machines, texts, and hybrids, among others). Actors are combinations of symbolically invested “things,”“identities,” relations, and inscriptions, networks capable of nesting within other diverse networks.

The ‘actant” is any agent, collective or individual, that can associate or disassociate with other agents. Actants enter into networked associations, which in turn define them, name them, and provide them with substance, action, intention, and subjectivity. In other words, actants are considered foundationally indeterminate, with no a priori substance or essence, and it is via the networks in which they associate that actants derive their nature.

By this, the ANT network is conceived as a heterogeneous amalgamation of textual, conceptual, social, and technical actors and actants. The actors represent ‘digital technology’ while the actants represent the state agents. Therefore the ANT includes within it, components of, hardware and software, the people who designed these artifacts, the people who have built and assembled them and the large groups, organizations, and bodies that maintain these networks. ANT, therefore, is theory that provides the elements that are used to understand and reconstitute the social space. This framework operates on an interactive relationship based on nested level of analysis; international, national, institutional and individual.

The international analysis focuses on how macro level socio-economic and political environment determines the diffusion of the internet within the country and its application for state – state or, state-international organization/institutional relations. This

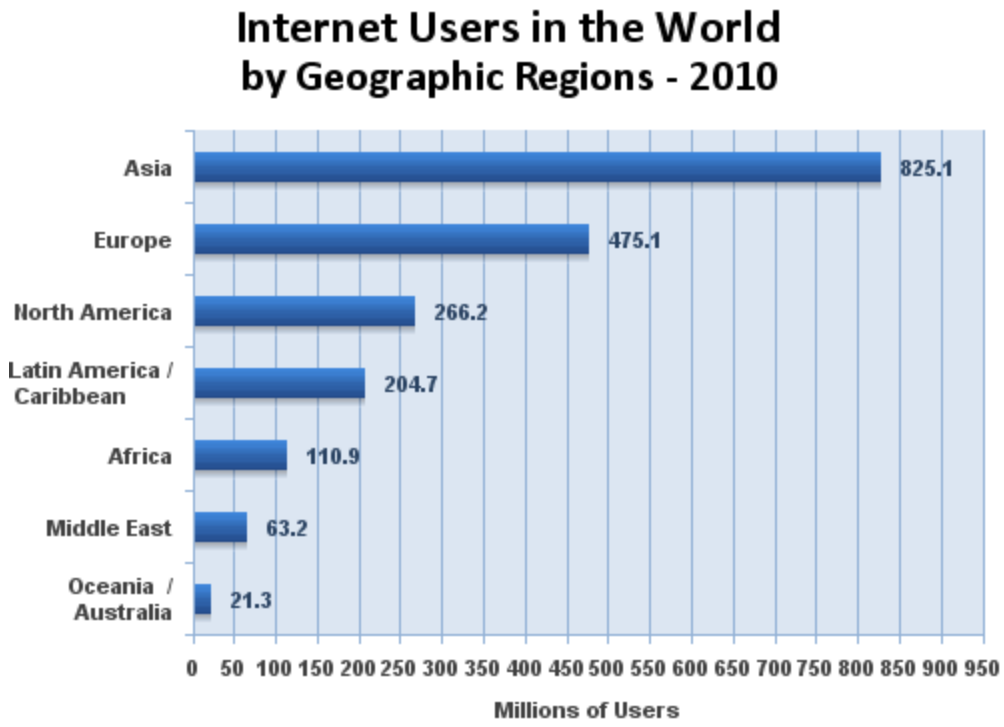
level provides structure of opportunities mediating between state and state, citizens and state or institutions using digital information and communication and technologies by governments, citizens and civic societies. The network of relationship between actors and actants examines the motivation that determines who participates within the virtual system. The ANT aptly explains and illustrates how the actors and actants link and reflect international relations and services especially how Embassies and Diplomats apply internet and associated digital devices to network as well as achieve common purpose and interest in international scenes. All these form a systematic vicious cycle of input and output of internet engagement required in delivering international and diplomatic services. It can therefore be said, based on the overriding relevance and application that the ANT adequately illustrates the internet as a social phenomenon rather than technological tool. At this point, we examine Africa's international relations and diplomatic services in the era of digital technology.

4. Africa, Digital Technology and International Relations: Analysis of Usage and Applications

In the study of Whitney (2009) an average internet user of the whole humanity spends about 13 hours a week online exchanging e-mails, browsing websites, blogging, tweeting, spending time in social networks or virtual worlds, downloading and uploading movies and documents, sharing photos, taking e-learning programmes or shopping. Other applications in this digital age involve constantly upgrading personal, political and business bonds. Digital Government services further allow citizens to obtain personal documents, access public information or even vote virtually are listed high on national development strategy plans. Digital signatures are gradually replacing conventional ones

allowing for complete digitalisation of paperwork like contracts, certified financial reports or court documents. Financial transactions are largely conducted using ICT, while purchasing goods via Internet results with retail e-commerce spending as high as 900 million US dollars for a single day (Comscore, 2010).In all, actants in international relations are at the centre of using most if not all of these digital devices to deliver foreign and diplomatic services. However, let us examine the users of this emerging mechanisms and tools in the world.

The Internet World Stat (2010) puts internet user at 1,966,514,816 billion people. Out of this population, 825.1 million of which from Asia, 475.1 million from Europe, 266.2 million from North America , 204.7 million from Latin America/Caribbean, 110.9 million from Africa, 63.2 million from middle East and 21.3 from Oceania. Going by this population, the virtual community becomes the most populated more than any country. The graphic tables below show the internet users across the world by geographical regions distribution and details of internet users in Africa.



Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm
Estimated Internet users are 1,966,514,816 on June 31, 2010

INTERNET USAGE STATISTICS FOR AFRICA 2010

AFRICA	Population (2010 Est.)	Internet Users Dec/2000	Internet Users Latest Data	Penetration (% Population)	User Growth (2000-2010)	% Users in Africa
Algeria	34,586,184	50,000	**4,700,000**	13.6 %	9,300.0 %	4.3 %
Angola	13,068,161	30,000	**607,400**	4.6 %	1,924.7 %	0.5 %
Benin	9,056,010	15,000	**200,000**	2.2 %	1,233.3 %	0.2 %
Botswana	2,029,307	15,000	**120,000**	5.9 %	700.0 %	0.1 %
Burkina Faso	16,241,811	10,000	**178,200**	1.1 %	1,682.0 %	0.2 %
Burundi	9,863,117	3,000	**65,000**	0.7 %	2,066.7 %	0.1 %
Cameroon	19,294,149	20,000	**750,000**	3.9 %	3,650.0 %	0.7 %
Cape Verde	508,659	8,000	**150,000**	29.5 %	1,775.0 %	0.1 %
Central African Rep.	4,844,927	1,500	**22,600**	0.5 %	1,406.7 %	0.0 %
Chad	10,543,464	1,000	**187,800**	1.8 %	18,680.0 %	0.2 %
Comoros	773,407	1,500	**24,300**	3.1 %	1,520.0 %	0.0 %
Congo	4,125,916	500	**245,200**	5.9 %	48,940.0 %	0.2 %
Congo, Dem. Rep.	70,916,439	500	**365,000**	0.5 %	72,900.0 %	0.3 %
Cote d'Ivoire	21,058,798	40,000	**968,000**	4.6 %	2,320.0 %	0.9 %
Djibouti	740,528	1,400	**25,900**	3.5 %	1,750.0 %	0.0 %
Egypt	80,471,869	450,000	**17,060,000**	21.2 %	3,691.1 %	15.4 %

Equatorial Guinea	650,702	500	**14,400**	2.2 %	2,780.0 %	0.0 %
Eritrea	5,792,984	5,000	**250,000**	4.3 %	4,900.0 %	0.2 %
Ethiopia	88,013,491	10,000	**445,400**	0.5 %	4,354.0 %	0.4 %
Gabon	1,545,255	15,000	**98,800**	6.4 %	558.7 %	0.1 %
Gambia	1,824,158	4,000	**130,100**	7.1 %	3,152.5 %	0.1 %
Ghana	24,339,838	30,000	**1,297,000**	5.3 %	4,223.3 %	1.2 %
Guinea	10,324,025	8,000	**95,000**	0.9 %	1,087.5 %	0.1 %
Guinea-Bissau	1,565,126	1,500	**37,100**	2.4 %	2,373.3 %	0.0 %
Kenya	40,046,566	200,000	**3,995,500**	10.0 %	1,897.8 %	3.6 %
Lesotho	1,919,552	4,000	**76,800**	4.0 %	1,820.0 %	0.1 %
Liberia	3,685,076	500	**20,000**	0.5 %	3,900.0 %	0.0 %
Libya	6,461,454	10,000	**353,900**	5.5 %	3,439.0 %	0.3 %
Madagascar	21,281,844	30,000	**320,000**	1.5 %	966.7 %	0.3 %
Malawi	15,447,500	15,000	**716,400**	4.6 %	4,676.0 %	0.6 %
Mali	13,796,354	18,800	**250,000**	1.8 %	1,229.8 %	0.2 %
Mauritania	3,205,060	5,000	**75,000**	2.3 %	1,400.0 %	0.1 %
Mauritius	1,294,104	87,000	**290,000**	22.4 %	233.3 %	0.3 %
Mayotte (FR)	231,139	---	**---**	---	---	0.0 %
Morocco	31,627,428	100,000	**10,442,500**	33.0 %	10,342.5 %	9.4 %
Mozambique	22,061,451	30,000	**612,500**	2.8 %	1,941.7 %	0.6 %
Namibia	2,128,471	30,000	**127,500**	6.0 %	325.0 %	0.1 %
Niger	15,878,271	5,000	**115,900**	0.7 %	2,218.0 %	0.1 %
Nigeria	152,217,341	200,000	**43,982,200**	28.9 %	21,891.1 %	39.6 %
Reunion (FR)	822,986	130,000	**300,000**	36.5 %	130.8 %	0.3 %
Rwanda	11,055,976	5,000	**450,000**	4.1 %	8,900.0 %	0.4 %
Saint Helena (UK)	7,670	n/a	**800**	10.4 %	n/a	0.0 %
Sao Tome & Principe	175,808	6,500	**26,700**	15.2 %	310.8 %	0.0 %
Senegal	14,086,103	40,000	**923,000**	6.6 %	2,207.5 %	0.8 %
Seychelles	88,340	6,000	**33,900**	38.4 %	465.0 %	0.0 %
Sierra Leone	5,245,695	5,000	**14,900**	0.3 %	198.0 %	0.0 %
Somalia	10,112,453	200	**106,000**	1.0 %	52,900.0 %	0.1 %
South Africa	49,109,107	2,400,000	**5,300,000**	10.8 %	120.8 %	4.8 %
Sudan	41,980,182	30,000	**4,200,000**	10.0 %	13,900.0 %	3.8 %
Swaziland	1,354,051	10,000	**90,000**	6.6 %	800.0 %	0.1 %
Tanzania	41,892,895	115,000	**676,000**	1.6 %	487.8 %	0.6 %
Togo	6,199,841	100,000	**356,300**	5.7 %	256.3 %	0.3 %
Tunisia	10,589,025	100,000	**3,600,000**	34.0 %	3,500.0 %	3.2 %
Uganda	33,398,682	40,000	**3,200,000**	9.6 %	7,900.0 %	2.9 %
Western Sahara	491,519	---	---	---	---	0.0 %

Zambia	12,056,923	20,000	**816,700**	6.8 %	3,983.5 %	0.7 %
Zimbabwe	11,651,858	50,000	**1,422,000**	12.2 %	2,744.0 %	1.3 %
TOTAL AFRICA	**1,013,779,050**	**4,514,400**	**110,931,700**	**10.9 %**	**2,357.3 %**	**100.0 %**

Source: Internet world Stat (2010)

The African table on internet users puts Nigeria at 43,982,200 representing the highest percentage of 28.9% of the entire population in Africa. Against this background, it is imperative that Nigerians and their governments extensively use digital technology in different sectors more than any other country of Africa, probably because the population. Nigeria's profile in Technology Development Indicator as adapted from ITU (2002) and UNDP (2003) studies show that Digital technology growth rate ratio stands at 0.33 per every 100 inhabitant which own personal computers (PCs). Digital initiative in Nigeria is traced to Obasanjo regime of 1999, when Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) was properly constituted (Vanguard 2/10/02) to promote and regulate digital policy in Nigeria.In March 2001, the ministry of science and technology established a National IT development Agency (NITDA) to serve as a bureau for implementation. The NITDA embarked on number of projects that aim at contributing to ICT development in Nigeria. Some of these projects include public service network (PSNet), Mobile Internet Unit (MIU) and Human Capacity Development. The federal government of Nigeria in addition, took the following steps to address her IT policy, liberalizing the sector by licensing Global System for Mobile communication (GSM) in August 2001.In April 2003, the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) organised the e-Nigeria conference with the following objectives;

-Transformation to citizen-centred, simple, moral, accountable, responsive and Transparent (SMPRT) governance.

- Strategies for IT policy implementation
- Security issues
- Legal issues creating enabling environment for IT development
- Sectoral applications of IT, education, health management, transportation, finance, commerce and national civil registration.
- Launching of the mobile internment unit (MIU).

In the light of these, a good number of Ministries, Department and Agencies of the Federal Government of Nigeria today have conveniently embraced digital governance. The outstanding agencies include;

- National Youth Service Corps (NYSC online)
- West African Examination Council (WAEC) direct
- Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB)
- Automated system for Customs Data (ASTCUDA)
- National Examination Council (NECO)
- Post-cash of Nigeria postal service
- Nigerian Immigration and Foreign Relations

On the other hand, several African countries are equally excelling in application of digital technology in service delivery. Be that as it may, let us discuss the contributions of digital technology in international relation services and engagement in Africa.

4.1 Digital Technology in International Relation and Diplomacy: The Contributions

The United Nations Convention of 1986 in Vienna designated the functions of Foreign Mission as; representing, protecting national interests and nationals, negotiating, ascertaining political conditions and reporting back, and promoting friendly relations, as well as consular work if needed. While these are traditional roles in international relations and engagements, Rana (2002a) suggests that contemporary professional diplomacy might be better defined by promotion, outreach, negotiation, feedback, and management and servicing. If the later assertions are reflections of the changing pattern in today's international relations, there is need to embrace the ICT and particularly Internet to increase participation of actants as well as have wider coverage of the missions with both the representatives and stakeholders and other interested parties of the host country and others.

The practice of digital governance allows for active engagement of states, international institutions and citizens in sharing information faster and conveniently at any time in the service provisioning. The input –output feedback mechanism involved has reduced the frequent collection of data, travel costs and allowances associated with manual handle of service fees and charges. In his research, Ndou (2004) observes that, if developing nations appropriately apply e-government initiative, it will reduce the number of inefficiencies in processes by allowing file and data sharing across government department. This contributes to the elimination of mistakes from manual procedures, reducing the required time for transactions. It is note worthy that cost of running administration has been on the rise and application of e-initiatives has capacity of providing cheaper administrative cost than monetization policy of administration costs.

The OECD argues along this thought and notes, that strengthening relationship between citizens could improve the quality of services by allowing government tap wider sources of information, perspectives and solution to meet the challenges of policy making under conditions of increased complexity (OECD, 2001).

Specifically, the online community enabled by internet has widened space for multi stakeholder participation in debates, suggestions and influences in international affairs. The expanded and all-encompassing discussions especially online have raised awareness of general public and injection of variety of personal opinions that ultimately shape general public opinion and policy direction on various global and local policy issues, ranging from environment via terrorism to health to sports and economic to political crisis. By this activation, governmental institutions, international organisations, business alliances, non-government organizations, media, professional communities and academic institutions, and even individuals have all become directly or indirectly critical stateholders, diplomats and negotiators in global affairs.

In furtherance, the boundary between traditional stakeholders in international relations and diplomacy is shrinked by digital technology. This is glaring as actants in international and global affairs have grown beyond the domination and control of Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and their agents due to growing and emerging multidisciplinary interests in global issues and challenges. The multi-sectoral approach empowered citizen and non state accreditated persons and agents to feature agenda in international affairs and seek redress from different perspectives. In this benefits and maximization of ICT potentials are the youth, who are using their vast knowledge of the new technologies as vanguard to take part in decisions and actions that shape the world at large.

Other categories of people exploiting usefulness of digital technology are the older and career but government agents who now negotiate and advocate online to complement conventional in-situ meetings. Also the preponderance of ICTs by low and high in our society has forced a paradigm shift that allows and change the mind set of traditional international relation and diplomatic agents to acknowledge citizenry as participants thereby combining top- down approach and relation with more emphasis in bottom-top approach. The two-way communication and interaction, such as individual e-mails and personal blog posts with comments, increased information flow and share among partners further illustrates the opportunities of digital technology. As Costae (20007:175) notes that the "ever thinner dividing line between internal policy and international affairs"enables a locally well-networked non-government organizations (NGO) and advocacy groups took advantage of the cyber culture of bottom-up structured open dialogue and create strong mutual partnership.

While the pessimists doubt the potential of digital technologies for reshaping international relations especially in access, flow and exchange of information, the avalanche of new actants, emerging issues and changes pose challenges before states ,organizations and individuals both in developed and developing. In this regards,we turn to Africa, because as this paper earlier notes, Africa ranks 5^{th} with 110.9 users out of seven continents in internet use and access before Middle east and Oceania rank that 6^{th} and 7^{th} respectively. The ranking is not a challenge rather the gap between the developed countries and Africa is the challenge. The gap is very wide, threatening and creating 'digital divide' between developed countries and African nations. This challenge sets the tone for next discussion that focuses on the 'change' digital technologies have brought

before Africa. In the same the implications for Africa in international relations and diplomacy is subsequently examined.

5. The Change, Implications and Prospects

The information revolution has brought two major changes into dynamics of Africa's international relations and diplomatic services. The first is the ***change for transformation and constructive engagement*** in comity of Nations and the second is ***fear of change and displacement*** among actants. The implication is that, Africa's international relations is hanging on dagger drawn relationship of progressive and conservative interests. In the same vein, two options are before any African State; the first is going progressively digital and align to compete in contemporary international affairs. The second option is to stick to conservative tradition of international engagement and remain a substantial inequality in global affairs.

Exploring the implications of the two options, we note as follows, that option one is associated with contribution of digital technologies earlier discussed in this paper. The option two, is the focus of this section and its implication is a the challenge of digital divide which further pushes African nations to remain unequally yoked with international actants in addition to the multiple burdens of poverty, disease and ignorance that ravage African citizenry.

The digital divide signifies the gap between information haves and have-nots including splits along racial, gender and class lines. In addition, Norris (1999), notes that the concept of *digital divide* is a multi-dimensional phenomenon encompassing three distinct aspects; *global divide* which refers to the divergence of internet access between the industrialized and developing societies. The *social divide* concerns the gap between

information rich and poor in each nation and *democratic divide* signifies the difference between those who do and do not use digital technology to mobilize and participate in public life. The danger of Africa sliding into to the group information have- nots is noted by the UN Development Report (1999) that productivity gains from information technologies may widen the chasm between the most affluent nations and those that lack skills, resources and infrastructure to invest in information society. In this case, if Africa fails to undertake conscious and pragmatic efforts to catch up with the new trends in internet and embrace e-governance, it will drop from third worlds and become the fourth world.Furthermore,if resistance to change halts the ascendancy of African nation and players into the main bowl of international affairs, Africa will become an underclass of info-poor and increase their marginalization in a world where basic computer skills are becoming essential for survival, communication and interaction.

In conclusion, it is given that African nations are classified along other countries of the South as information have-nots, due to dependency on the North for desirable information. To this end, lots need to be done to address the cause of unequal diffusion of digital technologies. As a strategy for achieving this, there is need for deliberate policy to obliterate the fear of uncertainty and displacement among the conservative traditional state stakeholder in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Foreign missions .In addition, a deliberate policy of all African missions to operate and offer services online should be pursued and achieved so as to encourage further digital engagement by those who hitherto are pessimistic of the power of Internet. As a follow up, those lacking digital skills should be assured of job security while on mandatory training to acquire ICT knowledge and apply same for diplomatic and international services.

However, the prospects of African nations engaging developing countries digitally at equal relation is no doubt a difficult task but it is an achievable vision if political leaders have the will and right values to further improve on the standard of education at all levels. Essentially, digitally driven education is a panacea for catching up with the information gap between North and South in the world. As every other analysis on digital divide demonstrates, Africa has to improve and achieve economic transformation to get integrated into the hub of international relations and engagement.

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