NKUMBA UNIVERSITY

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN IMPROVING PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN UGANDA: A CASE STUDY OF LIRA CITY

BY

AKULLO GLORIA

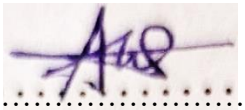
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARD OF THE MASTER OF ARTS IN DIPLOMACY AND GLOBAL STUDIES OF NKUMBA UNIVERSITY

SEPTEMBER, 2025

DECLARATION

The work contained herein is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a diploma or degree in any other institution/ university

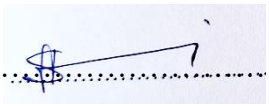
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Date……29/09/2025……

APPROVAL

The work contained herein is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a diploma or degree at any other institution or university.

Signature:  Date: 29/9/2025

Mr. Sebunya Robert

DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to my family for their patience, financial support, and reassurance during my studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would first like to express my deepest gratitude to the Almighty God for enabling me to both begin and complete this research paper despite the numerous challenges I faced along the way. The journey has not been easy, but His support made the load lighter for me to bear.

I also extend my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, whose guidance and support made it possible for me to undertake this research within the stipulated time. Additionally, I want to thank my lecturers for their valuable guidance and for preparing me to undertake this dissertation

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CMC	Computer Mediated Communications
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECU	Electoral Commission of Uganda
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IR	International Relations
MCU	Media Council of Uganda
VICOPs	Virtual Interactive Platforms

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how social media enhances public diplomacy in Uganda, specifically focusing on Lira City. The research aimed to assess social media's role in the political environment, its broader impact on public diplomacy, and the strategies used to influence public discourse.

Employing a mixed-method, cross-sectional design, the study drew on both primary and secondary data. A sample of 123 respondents from various sectors, including media houses, civil society, and the general public, was selected using **simple random and purposive sampling** based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) method. Data from 88 participants were collected via structured questionnaires and key informant interviews.

For analysis, quantitative data was processed using **SPSS** and presented as percentages and tables, while qualitative data underwent **thematic content analysis**. The study's validity was ensured through **triangulation** of multiple data sources, and its reliability was maintained using standardized procedures.

The findings highlight social media's crucial role in disseminating political messages and shaping international perceptions, though they also identified significant challenges like **hate speech** and misinformation. The study recommends improving content moderation through local oversight boards, strengthening ethical standards, and fostering stakeholder collaboration to enhance public diplomacy and address these digital challenges.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This section discusses the study background, problem statement, highlights research objectives both the main and specific ones, the research questions, and study justification is also part of this section and theoretical framework.

1.1 Background to the study

1.1.1 Historical Background

Many countries have embraced digital platforms, including websites, blogs, and social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Weibo, Flickr, and Google+, to project their foreign policy goals positively (Bjola & Holmes, 2015). According to Schwarzenbach (2015), one of the most significant changes brought about by Twitter in foreign policy is the enhanced accessibility to unfiltered information and the opportunity for global participation from individuals across various political and national backgrounds. Additionally, the growing number of mobile phone users in emerging nations has democratized information exchange, empowering citizens and civil society to hold governments accountable for their policies and statements (Gilboa, 2016).

Embassies now frequently use digital communication tools, including Facebook and other social media platforms, with a growing number of ambassadors maintaining an active presence on Twitter (Manor, 2019). However, the effectiveness of these social media accounts varies. In Africa, leaders who have harnessed social media effectively have communicated their agendas to citizens during

pre- and post-election periods, thereby exercising significant influence by engaging them through these platforms (Manning, 2020).

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn have emerged as powerful tools for communication and engagement in today's world. Beyond personal communication and networking, these platforms have become crucial to organizational communication strategies. Governments and diplomats have recognized the potential of social media in promoting their countries, engaging with stakeholders, and shaping public opinion a trend referred to as digital diplomacy or social diplomacy (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020).

Many countries have embraced digital platforms including websites, blogs, and social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Weibo, and Flickr to project their foreign policy goals favorably. Mahesh Senadeera (2023) notes that while social media's role in diplomacy has significantly grown in recent years, its roots trace back to the early 2000s when blogs and online forums began facilitating information dissemination and public engagement.

The concept of *public diplomacy*, describing efforts to engage with foreign publics to advance a country's interests and values, has long been used by scholars to frame these interactions (Snow, 2013). The advent of social media has dramatically transformed public diplomacy, equipping diplomats with dynamic tools to communicate directly with global audiences and shape public opinion. This evolution has given rise to the practice commonly known as *digital diplomacy* or *social diplomacy* (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020; Manor & Segev, 2015).

Historically, the media has played a pivotal role in both conflict and resolution exposing hidden truths while also serving as a vehicle for inciting violence and hatred. Traditional media and its

contemporary counterpart, social media, both fall into this dual capacity. Recent research underscores how social media can open up democratic spaces yet simultaneously destabilize peace especially when platforms are exploited to inflame tensions. For instance, one study documents how social bots exacerbate polarization by flooding networks with negative, inflammatory content, amplifying conflict in online communities (Stella, Ferrara & De Domenico, 2018).

Another highlights the rise of *fear speech*, a subtle but potent form of communication that incites anxiety about targeted groups and can effectively mobilize real-world hostility (Saha et al., 2023).

In Uganda, the 2009 riots triggered by the government's barring of the Buganda King's visit to Kayunga exemplify media's complex influence. The Uganda Broadcasting Council shut down multiple Luganda-language radio stations such as CBS, Radio Two (Akaboozi), Radio Sapientia, and Ssuubi FM citing alleged incitement of violence. Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders, and other press freedom organizations criticized these closures as arbitrary and disproportionate, noting the severe curtailment of free expression and punishing of journalistic voices (HRW, 2010; RSF, 2009). Although some stations later resumed broadcasting, others like CBS remained off-air for over a year, inflicting significant financial and social costs on staff and media diversity (Monitor, 2010; CPJ, 2010).

Public diplomacy in Uganda increasingly benefits from social media, which has become a vital channel for promoting cultural expression and facilitating diplomatic outreach (Kasibante, 2009). The surge in platforms such as Facebook and Twitter has significantly reshaped diplomatic communication, with government institutions and embassies leveraging them for engagement. Media professionals have responded positively to social media's strategic potential in communication (Bulwaka, 2009).

1.1.2 Conceptual Background

The global expansion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the widespread use of social media have introduced new opportunities and challenges for diplomacy. According to Azócar et al. (2018), diplomats now face demands for greater transparency and openness, as well as the need to develop a digitally literate diplomatic corps, all while managing a nation's image and addressing consular emergencies in real-time.

Kennon and Matthew (2009) define public diplomacy as an extension of traditional government-to-government diplomacy. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which consists mainly of formal interactions between professional diplomats, public diplomacy involves engaging with foreign publics to shape and influence their perceptions of a nation.

Public diplomacy intersects with fields such as public relations, international communication, and international relations (Gregory, 2008). Copeland (2009) describes it as involving "outwardly directed activities by national representatives" aimed at finding common goals and areas for collaboration with foreign publics, including the general population, special interest groups, the media, civil society, and business leaders. Branding, advocacy, lobbying, and partnership building are components of public diplomacy.

The internet is viewed as a unique diplomatic tool that governments can use to promote their positions and ideas globally. Christodoulides (2005) suggests that the internet serves as a form of ‘soft power,’ helping governments to build a favorable image in the host state. As such, the internet has become central to public diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy is a key aspect of public diplomacy, representing a nation's cultural identity abroad. The Advisory Council on Public Diplomacy (2005) states that cultural diplomacy is integral to public diplomacy, as it involves the long-term effort to win the hearts and minds of people globally through the promotion of a nation's culture. While significant research has been conducted on American cultural diplomacy, the theoretical connections between cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy remain a relatively underexplored area.

1.1.3 Theoretical Background

The Networked Diplomacy theory: highlights the increasing importance of digital networks that link governments, non-governmental organizations, and the broader public in modern diplomatic practice. Manor and Segev (2020) argue that social media transforms states with limited hard power into influential "supernodes" within global diplomatic networks. This perspective demonstrates how connectivity, rather than material strength, can enhance a country's role in international relations.

The Public Diplomacy theory: is another key lens for understanding the role of social media in diplomacy. Leonard, Stead, and Smewing (2002) describe public diplomacy as encompassing news management, strategic communication, and relationship building. These dimensions emphasize that beyond broadcasting information, states must foster long-term relationships with foreign publics. Joseph Nye (2004) reinforces this approach through his concept of *soft power*, where attraction and persuasion become more effective than coercion in shaping international outcomes. Nye's contributions are particularly relevant in a social media era where images, narratives, and interactions can significantly influence global perceptions.

The rise of social media has also empowered non-governmental actors to play a more visible role in diplomacy. Cull (2011) shows how digital communication platforms extend the reach of public diplomacy to NGOs, individuals, and other non-state actors. Similarly, Nye (2004) and Seo (2009) stress that diplomacy is no longer the exclusive domain of governments; rather, it is a shared space where diverse voices influence international discourse. These perspectives highlight a shift from traditional state-centric diplomacy toward a more pluralistic model of global engagement.

Social media replicates these functions in real time, offering immediacy, interactivity, and broader reach. However, scholars like Schneider (2010) caution that these new tools also carry risks, such as breaches of diplomatic etiquette, privacy concerns, and the spread of misinformation. This suggests that while social media enhances diplomatic engagement, its potential must be carefully managed.

Finally, the historical context is vital in situating these theoretical developments. Geoffrey (1995) notes that President Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" of 1918 represented a turning point toward openness in diplomacy, moving away from secretive statecraft. In the Ugandan context, Gariyo (1992) traces how colonial legislation on media regulation established two distinct traditions of media practice one centered on state control and another on grassroots communication. These historical perspectives highlight that media's role in diplomacy has always been contested and influenced by both international and domestic factors.

1.1.4 Contextual Background

The media plays a pivotal role in nation-building by bridging grassroots communities with those in positions of power, facilitating communication between leaders and their constituents, and connecting the state with society. As the "fourth estate," it serves as a watchdog, holding government

officials accountable. However, instances have arisen where media outlets have been complicit in covering up dishonesty and abuses of power, highlighting the need for vigilance and ethical standards in journalistic practices. (HRNJ-Uganda, 2023).

Technological advancements have amplified the media's capacity to educate, influence, mobilize, and inform the public about various causes (Kem, 2010).

In Uganda, the regulatory body overseeing radio, the Broadcasting Council, has been known to suspend licenses of several Luganda-speaking stations, including Suubi FM, Radio Sapienta, and Akaboozi, and revoke the license of Central Broadcasting Station (CBS), often without prior notice or judicial approval.

The political unrest on September 10 and 11, 2009, which resulted in over 40 deaths, highlighted the tensions between the central government and the Buganda cultural institution. Riots erupted when police obstructed a delegation representing the Buganda kingdom from visiting Kayunga district (Josephat, 2008). The subsequent government-imposed media restrictions and legal actions against journalists seemed to reinforce a pattern of suppressing dissent and controlling information.

Reports indicate that journalists in rural areas faced increasing threats and intimidation while attempting to cover local political issues (Human Rights Watch Research, 2015). Additionally, the discrepancies between national laws, such as the Access to Information Act 2005, and Uganda's international obligations have compounded the challenges. For instance, the crime of “promoting sectarianism” is broadly defined and can lead to severe repercussions, which stifles critical reporting (Human Rights Watch Research, 2015).

1.2 Statement of the problem

Despite increasing internet access, Uganda continues to face a significant digital divide between urban and rural areas. As of early 2023, approximately 24.6% of the population around 11.77 million people had internet access, with urban households enjoying higher connectivity than rural households (NITA, 2022). In urban areas, about 13% of households have reliable internet, whereas only 3.2% of rural households are connected (DataReportal, 2023). This disparity limits the inclusiveness and overall effectiveness of social media-driven public diplomacy initiatives.

The rapid spread of misinformation and propaganda on social media platforms poses a further challenge. False information can quickly circulate, creating misunderstandings and eroding trust in official communications. For example, during the COVID-19 vaccination campaigns in 2022 and 2023, baseless claims on WhatsApp and Facebook alleging foreign conspiracies led to lower vaccination uptake, particularly in rural communities (JDC-Uganda, 2023). Without robust mechanisms to detect and counter misinformation, public diplomacy efforts risk being undermined.

Ugandan government officials and diplomats also face limitations due to insufficient skills and training in strategic social media use. Enhancing digital literacy and providing targeted training on digital engagement and strategic communication are essential to fully leverage social media's potential for public diplomacy (ISOC Policy Brief, 2024; Cull, 2013).

Moreover, the government's approach to social media often lacks cohesion and strategic direction. Engagement efforts are frequently fragmented and reactive, rather than aligned proactively with public diplomacy objectives, which diminishes the potential for influencing international perceptions and fostering meaningful dialogue (Cull, 2013).

Another significant challenge is the history of internet and social media shutdowns during pivotal political events, such as elections and protests. During the 2021 presidential elections, a five-day internet blackout not only disrupted communication but also cost the economy an estimated USD 9 million (The CFMA, 2025). Such disruptions undermine transparent communication and can damage Uganda's international standing and collectively, these challenges digital divide, misinformation, lack of strategic training among officials, fragmented government engagement, and internet shutdowns constrain the effectiveness of social media in promoting public diplomacy (The Guardian, 2025).

This study therefore explored how social media is utilized to advance public diplomacy in Uganda, with a particular focus on the perceptions of diplomats and the media's role in fostering international relations in Lira City. It examined strategies to strengthen diplomatic ties and identifies pitfalls that should be avoided for more effective and inclusive public diplomacy.

1.3 Research objectives

1.3.1. General objectives

The general objectives of the study assessed role of Social media in improving public diplomacy in Uganda; a case of Lira City.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

i. To assess the role of media in promoting political environment in Uganda

ii. To examine the roles of social media in promoting public diplomacy

iii. To assess the strategies used by social media to influence and improve public diplomacy in Uganda

1.4 Research questions

i. What are the roles of media in promoting political environment in Uganda?

ii. What are the roles of social media in promoting public diplomacy?

iii. What are the strategies used by media to influence and improve public diplomacy in Uganda?

1.5 Justification of the study

The existing literature on media and public diplomacy has predominantly focused on broader impacts on the public rather than the specific role of media in advancing public diplomacy within Uganda. Expanding the scope to include the influence of emerging communication trends, particularly social media, is crucial for a more nuanced understanding of its role in diplomatic practices today.

The study will contribute to the academic literature by providing an in-depth analysis of social media's role in enhancing public diplomacy in Uganda. This is essential as the existing body of research tends to focus on general media roles without a detailed examination of how new communication tools are used in diplomatic contexts.

Findings from this study will offer valuable insights for Ugandan policymakers and public diplomacy officials. By evaluating the current use of social media, the study will serve as a benchmark for assessing and improving the effectiveness of Uganda's diplomatic strategies. It will provide actionable recommendations for designing or refining public diplomacy policies to better align with national interests.

Social media platforms enable the Ugandan government to communicate directly with both domestic and international audiences, fostering greater transparency and trust. By identifying

best practices and strategies through this research, the study will enhance government communication approaches, improving engagement and transparency.

Uganda's history of internet shutdowns and social media blackouts during politically sensitive times raises concerns about freedom of expression and transparency. This study will explore the implications of such measures on public diplomacy, providing evidence-based insights to help policymakers balance security needs with open communication requirements (Rydzak, 2020).

The significant digital divide between urban and rural areas in Uganda affects the inclusiveness of social media-driven public diplomacy initiatives. By highlighting this disparity, the study will advocate for targeted investments in digital infrastructure and literacy programs, ensuring broader participation and benefits from public diplomacy efforts (Balana et al., 2020).

The study will apply and expand theoretical frameworks such as soft power, network society, public sphere, and agenda-setting theories within the Ugandan context. This will enhance understanding of how digital platforms impact international relations in developing countries, contributing to the broader academic discourse.

While there is substantial global research on social media and public diplomacy, there is limited focus on Uganda and the African context. This study will address this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of Uganda’s unique challenges and opportunities, offering case-specific insights valuable to the field.

Social media's role in spreading misinformation poses a significant challenge to public diplomacy. This research will examine the extent of misinformation and propose strategies to counteract it, ensuring the integrity and credibility of diplomatic efforts.

Social media also empowers civil society organizations and grassroots movements, providing platforms for advocacy and engagement. The study will explore how these groups use social media to influence public diplomacy and offer insights on potential collaborations between the government and civil society to achieve shared objectives.

1.6 Scope of the Study

1.6.1 Content Scope

The study aimed to evaluate the role of social media in enhancing public diplomacy in Uganda, with a particular focus on Lira City. Specifically, the research concentrated on media professionalism and various forms of mass media, including broadcast media, digital media, and other communication tools such as email, social media, radio, and television. These were examined as means of promoting public diplomacy and diplomatic relations.

1.6.2 Geographical scope

The research was carried out in Lira City, situated in Northern Uganda's Lango Sub-region. Lira City is geographically positioned at latitude 20° 17' north of the equator and longitude 32° 56' east of the prime meridian. It is bordered by Pader district to the north, Otuke district to the northeast, Alebtong district to the east, Dokolo district to the southeast, Kwania district to the southwest, and Kole district to the west. As the chief town of Lira City, it lies 110 kilometers southeast of Gulu, the largest city in Northern Uganda, and 320 kilometers north of Kampala. The city’s combination of urban and rural characteristics makes it an ideal setting for studying the digital divide and its effects on public diplomacy. Lira City features an active political and social environment with substantial involvement from government agencies, civil society organizations, and the general populace.

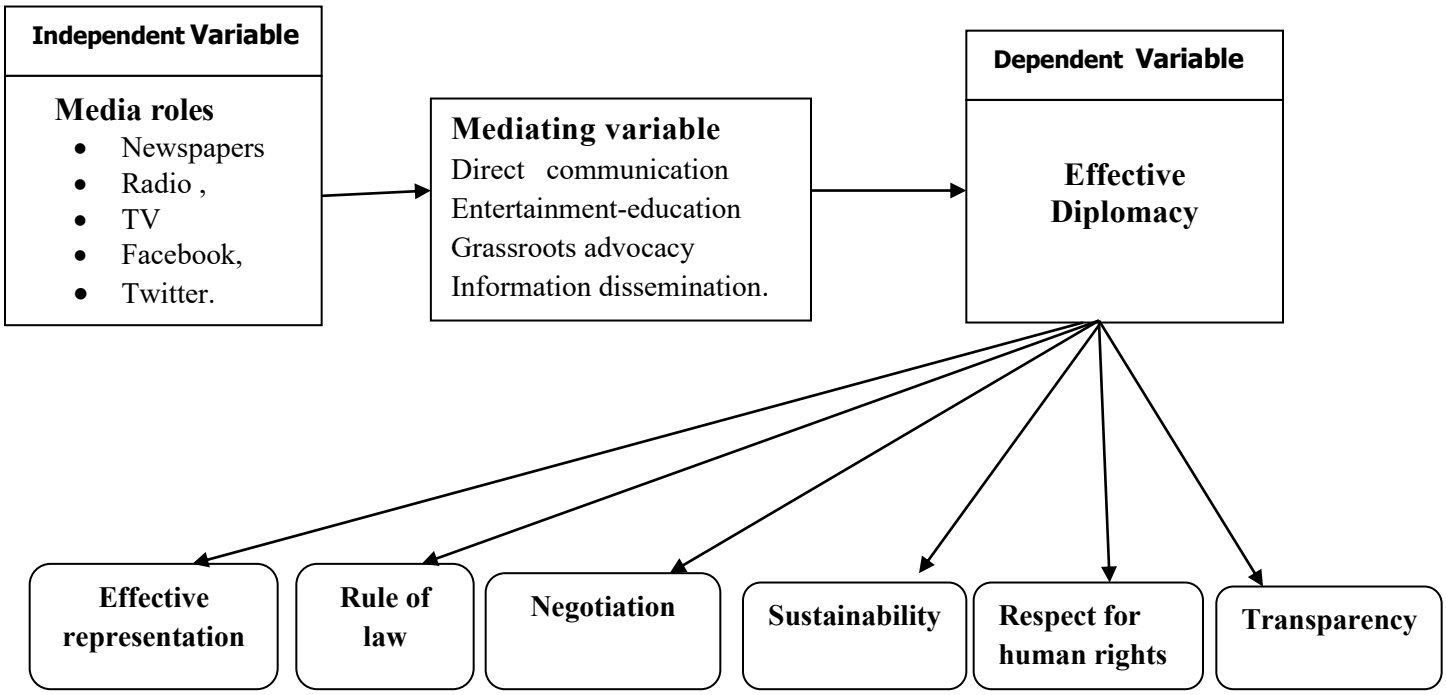
1.6.3 Time scope

The study examined the period from 2017 to 2023. This timeframe was deemed sufficient for observing changes and developments in media and public diplomacy in Uganda. Analyzing data from these years provided a comprehensive overview of trends, significant events, and the evolution of social media practices, offering insightful perspectives into how media and public diplomacy have transformed in Uganda over time.

1.7 Conceptual framework

Figure 1.1 showing the conceptual framework

The diagram below shows the relationship between Media Group (IV) and Effective Diplomacy (DV)



Source: Researcher (2024)

In Uganda, media plays a complex role, acting as both a watchdog that promotes civic engagement and a tool for state propaganda due to government control and censorship. Social media platforms, in particular, have become central to public diplomacy, facilitating two-way communication and amplifying voices that might otherwise be marginalized. The effectiveness of this influence depends on strategies such as grassroots advocacy, "rap news" for entertainment-education, and direct communication between politicians and the public. However, this is countered by the government's use of these same platforms for digital surveillance and control. This dynamic highlights that the media's impact on effective diplomacy is mediated by these competing strategies, as explored by scholars in digital politics and public diplomacy (Shaker & Falzone, 2015; Castells, 2013).

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This section presents literature review relevant to study. It examined theories relevant to study and empirical studies that have been undertaken in relation to the current study.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 The Networked Diplomacy Theory

Networked diplomacy represents a significant shift from traditional state-centric international relations, embracing a "non-hierarchical" approach that includes a diverse range of actors like governments, NGOs, corporations, and individuals. This collaborative model is essential for tackling complex global issues that transcend national borders, such as climate change and pandemics, through flexible, multi-stakeholder networks (Castells, 2013).

Recent literature since 2015 highlights how digital technology and globalization have driven this change. For example, a 2018 study on the digital diplomacy of South Korea and Japan examined how these countries use social media to build international networks and enhance their "soft power" by interacting with foreign publics (Park & Lim, 2018).

Furthermore, the role of non-state actors in global governance has become increasingly prominent. The success of the Paris Agreement on climate change, for instance, was driven not just by state negotiations but by a vast network of environmental groups, businesses, and scientific communities. This trend also extends to "urban diplomacy," where cities and

municipalities form their own networks, like the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, to address shared challenges and influence global policy (Shaker & Falzone, 2015).

The Networked Diplomacy Framework highlights the increasing importance of digital networks that link governments, non-governmental organizations, and the broader public in modern diplomatic practice. Manor and Segev (2020) argue that social media transforms states with limited hard power into influential “supernodes” within global diplomatic networks. This perspective demonstrates how connectivity, rather than material strength, can enhance a country’s role in international relations.

In conclusion the Networked diplomacy, as a concept, lacks a single founder, but it has been significantly developed by several key scholars. Their work, especially since 2015, focuses on how globalization and technology have reshaped traditional diplomatic practices.

For example, Jamie F. Metzl (2001) pioneered the idea that decentralized networks, empowered by the information revolution, are challenging state-centric diplomacy. Similarly, Manuel Castells's (1996) foundational work on the "network society" provided a theoretical basis for understanding how interconnected individuals and organizations are forming a new global social structure relevant to modern diplomacy.

Additionally, Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur (2013) explored the transition "from club to network diplomacy," emphasizing the growing role of non-state actors. More recently, Anne-Marie Slaughter (2017) has championed the concept of a "networked world," where governments, NGOs, and individuals must collaborate to solve global issues.

2.1.2 The Public Diplomacy Theory

The Public Diplomacy Framework is another key lens for understanding the role of social media in diplomacy. Leonard, Stead, and Smewing (2002) describe public diplomacy as encompassing news management, strategic communication, and relationship building. These dimensions emphasize that beyond broadcasting information, states must foster long-term relationships with foreign publics. Joseph Nye (2004) reinforces this approach through his concept of *soft power*, where attraction and persuasion become more effective than coercion in shaping international outcomes. Nye's contributions are particularly relevant in a social media era where images, narratives, and interactions can significantly influence global perceptions.

The theory of public diplomacy has been shaped by a number of prominent scholars and practitioners. Their work has been crucial in moving the field beyond simply "propaganda" and establishing it as a distinct and important area of international relations. For instance Edward R. Murrow **a**s the head of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) during the Cold War, he was often considered a pioneer in the practice of public diplomacy. His work emphasized the importance of truth and credibility, famously stating that "our concern is with the idea and the ideal," and that success can't be measured by a profit and loss statement (Snow, 2013).

Nicholas J. Cull, a leading contemporary scholar, his provided a comprehensive historical and theoretical framework for public diplomacy. He is known for his "taxonomy" of public diplomacy, which breaks it down into five key components: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchanges, and international broadcasting (Cull, 2019).

While not a public diplomacy theorist himself, Nye's concept of **"soft power"** is a foundational pillar of the theory. He defines soft power as the ability to get what you want through attraction

rather than coercion or payment, a core principle of public diplomacy (Nye, 2004). The theory holds that a country's culture, political values, and foreign policies can attract others and ultimately influence them.

Finally Gilboa, (2015) has contributed to the theoretical development of public diplomacy by defining it as a "strategic communication process" that seeks to inform and influence foreign publics. He has also analyzed the role of media diplomacy and the challenges that arise in the digital age. His work in recent years has focused on the impact of digital media and the challenges of a 24/7 news cycle on public diplomacy

The rise of social media has also empowered non-governmental actors to play a more visible role in diplomacy. Cull (2011) shows how digital communication platforms extend the reach of public diplomacy to NGOs, individuals, and other non-state actors. Similarly, Nye (2004) and Seo (2009) stress that diplomacy is no longer the exclusive domain of governments; rather, it is a shared space where diverse voices influence international discourse. These perspectives highlight a shift from traditional state-centric diplomacy toward a more pluralistic model of global engagement.

Social media replicates these functions in real time, offering immediacy, interactivity, and broader reach. However, scholars like Schneider (2010) caution that these new tools also carry risks, such as breaches of diplomatic etiquette, privacy concerns, and the spread of misinformation. This suggests that while social media enhances diplomatic engagement, its potential must be carefully managed.

Finally, the historical context is vital in situating these theoretical developments. Geoffrey (1995) notes that President Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" of 1918 represented a turning point toward openness in diplomacy, moving away from secretive statecraft. In the Ugandan context, Gariyo (1992) traces how colonial legislation on media regulation established two distinct traditions of media practice one centered on state control and another on grassroots communication. These historical perspectives highlight that media's role in diplomacy has always been contested and influenced by both international and domestic factors.

2.2 Review of Related Literatures

In developed countries like the United States, the Department of State utilizes social media to extend its foreign policy worldwide through its embassies, consulates, and other missions (Zhong & Lu, 2013). U.S. diplomats now undergo training known as "21st Century Statecraft" before their assignments, a key initiative launched by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. This initiative aims to integrate network technologies and demographics into diplomatic efforts (Park & Lim, 2014). Essentially, it acknowledges the crucial role of social media in modern diplomacy as an integral part of the diplomatic toolkit.

In Uganda, social media plays a significant role in public diplomacy by fostering cultural expressions and enhancing diplomatic practices (Kasibante, 2009). The recent growth of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter has had a considerable impact on diplomatic activities, as these platforms are increasingly used as tools for public diplomacy in government institutions and embassies (Bulwaka, 2009). For instance, the U.S. Embassy in Kampala has maintained diplomatic relations with Uganda for over 30 years, leveraging social media to advocate for its foreign policies (US Embassy Report, 2016).

As the media landscape in Uganda continues to evolve, understanding the role of social media in public diplomacy becomes crucial for both emerging and established media entities. This chapter provides valuable insights into how social media functions as a public diplomacy tool and its broader implications.

Olubukola S. Adesina (2017) notes that diplomacy has historically been a method through which states seek to safeguard specific or broader interests, aiming to reduce friction and promote cooperation. It remains the primary instrument for achieving foreign policy goals and fostering goodwill. Sotiriu (2015) elaborates that digital diplomacy has been interpreted in various ways, reflecting its multifaceted nature.

Manor and Segev (2015) define digital diplomacy as a nation's increased use of social media to achieve foreign policy objectives and manage its international image and reputation. They argue that digital diplomacy operates on two levels: at the State Department and within embassies globally. This dual approach allows countries to tailor their foreign policies and national messages to local audiences based on historical, cultural, and traditional contexts, thereby promoting their foreign policy objectives and desired image.

Lewis (2014) describes digital diplomacy as the process by which diplomats engage with the public and each other using digital communication tools like social media. Potter (2002) emphasizes that digital diplomacy involves the use of networked and digital technologies, including social media and mobile devices. Hanson (2012) further defines digital diplomacy as the use of new information and communication technologies, such as the Internet, to support diplomatic efforts.

Grant (2004) highlights that diplomacy relies on the experience of diplomatic personnel, their network of missions, the confidentiality of diplomatic communications, and access to foreign decision-makers to provide information and policy advice to their governments.

2.3 The role of media in promoting political environment in Uganda

Globally, the media serves as a watchdog by holding governments accountable through investigative journalism, exposing corruption, and scrutinizing policy. It is also a vital platform for information dissemination and public discourse, enabling citizens to be informed and to engage in political debates (Longdom Publishing, 2023). For example the proliferation of social media has transformed political communication. In the 2016 US presidential election, Donald Trump's use of Twitter to bypass traditional media and communicate directly with the public was a significant factor in his campaign, demonstrating a shift in how political narratives are shaped and how citizens are mobilized (Hong, 2017).

In Africa, the media's role is particularly complex due to a history of post-colonial state control and a recent surge in digital technology. While media can foster political participation, it often operates within a fragile democratic space. The rise of social media has offered a new platform for citizens to voice dissent and mobilize, but this is frequently met with state countermeasures. For instance in many African nations, including Uganda, media plays a dual role. Private and independent media often act as a democratic force, providing a platform for opposition voices and civic discourse. However, state-owned media frequently serves as a tool for government propaganda, suppressing dissenting views and promoting the ruling party's agenda (Chatora, 2012).

Social media has become a key site of political struggle. On one hand, it facilitates grassroots advocacy and protest mobilization, as seen in the 2011 "Arab Spring" and other movements across the continent. On the other hand, African governments increasingly use digital surveillance, internet shutdowns, and social media taxes to control the flow of information and limit political organization (Shakilah & Kazaara, 2023).

Meanwhile Uganda on the other provides a compelling case study of these dynamics. Despite having a seemingly vibrant media landscape with numerous radio stations and private news outlets, press freedom remains heavily contested. For example the Ugandan government has a long history of suppressing free expression through various means, including legal frameworks and physical harassment of journalists. This has led to self-censorship among media professionals (Cohen & McIntyre, 2020).

During political events like elections, media houses often align with either the state or the opposition. State-owned media broadcasts government propaganda, while some private media houses, particularly vernacular radio stations, can become platforms for incitement and hate speech, leading to social unrest (Shakilah & Kazaara, 2023).

When the government shut down social media during the 2021 election, Ugandans used VPNs to bypass the restrictions, demonstrating how digital tools can be used to resist state control and maintain political communication (BBC, 2021).

Media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion through agenda-setting and framing. McCombs and Shaw (1972) introduced the concept of agenda-setting, which refers to the media's ability to influence the salience of topics in the public agenda. They argue that the media doesn’t tell people what to think, but it does tell them what to think about. Similarly,

Entman (1993) discusses how media framing affects the perception of issues by presenting information in a way that highlights specific aspects and influences public understanding.

Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) explore how media exposure affects political attitudes and knowledge. They emphasize that media exposure contributes significantly to shaping voters' perceptions and attitudes toward political issues and candidates. Howard and Parks (2012) discuss the role of social media in fostering political participation and activism. Social media platforms provide tools for mobilizing citizens, organizing protests, and engaging in political discourse, thereby enhancing democratic participation.

Boulianne (2015) examines how social media platforms are used for political campaigns and advocacy. She finds that online campaigns can increase political engagement by providing new avenues for participation and information dissemination. Gans (2004) highlights the role of investigative journalism in promoting transparency and accountability in governance. Investigative journalism helps uncover corruption and abuses of power, thereby holding political leaders accountable

Coronel (2010) discusses the media's watchdog role in exposing political corruption and abuse. The media's ability to scrutinize government actions and policies contributes to a more transparent political environment

Norris (2000) explores the impact of media coverage on elections and political campaigns. She argues that media plays a key role in shaping electoral outcomes by framing political narratives and influencing voter perceptions

Lazer et al. (2018) address the challenges posed by misinformation and fake news. They argue that the spread of false information undermines trust in media and can negatively impact the political environment by distorting public perception.

The media is crucial for defending fundamental human rights, such as freedom of speech, association, and the right to life, which are protected by national constitutions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. By serving as a platform for public discussion and sharing information, the media helps protect these freedoms and can deter human rights abuses. Historical examples, like the media's coverage of apartheid in South Africa and the regime of Idi Amin in Uganda, show that media attention can generate international condemnation of oppressive governments, even if it doesn't always lead to immediate change (Longdom Publishing, 2023).

Hate speech in media, especially during critical events, can lead to the demonization of sociopolitical actors and create uncertainty among citizens, potentially resulting in political disengagement and social fragmentation. Allowing hate speech in public spaces, such as social media platforms, can inhibit constructive deliberation and threaten democratic processes. Regulating hate speech while preserving free expression is challenging, highlighting the need to understand and address hate speech without infringing on free speech rights (Sevasti, 2014).

Hate speech can take various forms, including written text, images, and coded language. Social media platforms offer a cost-effective means to rapidly spread such messages. In developing democracies, economic, social, and political challenges can exacerbate tensions and lead to the proliferation of hate messages. Media literacy is essential in evaluating the

impact of political incitement and addressing social unrest (Parekh, 2012; Matas, 2000). The spread of hate messages through different media formats underscores the need for effective strategies to mitigate their impact.

Social media platforms play a crucial role in promoting transparency and holding government officials accountable. By providing platforms for whistleblowers and citizen journalists, social media helps uncover government corruption and misconduct. For example, the #WhatWouldMagufuliDo campaign from Tanzania resonated with Ugandans, highlighting social media's role in scrutinizing government policies. The "CNN Effect" illustrates how media coverage can influence policy decisions, though its impact is debated (Schlesinger, 2003; Natsios, 2007).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have opened new avenues for political participation and engagement in Uganda. These platforms enable citizens to share information, discuss political issues, and mobilize for causes. During the 2016 presidential elections, social media facilitated voter education and mobilization through hashtags like #UgandaDecides (Tufekci, 2017). Social media has also been instrumental in organizing social and political movements. For instance, the #FreeBobiWine campaign, following the arrest of MP Robert Kyagulanyi (Bobi Wine) in 2018, used social media to mobilize protests and draw global attention to political repression (MacDonald, 2018).

In environments where traditional media may be controlled or censored, social media provides an alternative source of news and diverse perspectives. This has been particularly significant during events like the COVID-19 pandemic, where social media platforms offered crucial updates on government measures and public health (Howard & Parks, 2012; Balana et

al., 2020). Social media helps ensure that a variety of viewpoints are represented, fostering a more pluralistic information environment.

Digital media has transformed political engagement in Uganda, particularly among younger populations. However, government actions such as social media shutdowns during elections highlight ongoing tensions between digital media freedom and state control (Rydzak, 2020). Empirical studies, such as Brisset-Foucault's (2013) research on community radio in Northern Uganda and Semujju's (2013) work on FM radio stations in Kampala, demonstrate how media influences political participation, voter behavior, and post-conflict reconciliation.

2.4 The contribution of media in improving public diplomacy in Uganda.

Globally, the media plays a pivotal role in promoting a political environment by fostering good governance and empowering citizens. By ensuring easy access to information, the media enables citizens to demand accountability from their governments, which improves the efficiency and transparency of public services (Longdom Publishing, 2023).

It's also a crucial tool for public diplomacy, which involves governments communicating with foreign publics to achieve diplomatic goals. Joseph S. Nye (2004) highlights how media platforms, like television and the internet, are essential for leveraging "soft power" to influence others through appeal rather than coercion. The "Al Jazeera Effect," for example, demonstrates how a regional media outlet can reshape global perceptions and diplomatic relations (Seib, 2008).

Similarly, during the Cold War, the U.S. government used media to promote its ideological narratives and counter adversarial propaganda (Puddington, 2000). The rise of digital media and social networks has further transformed this landscape, enabling direct, real-time interaction with global audiences and allowing governments to bypass traditional gatekeepers (Cull, 2009). Social media is now used by diplomatic missions to engage with foreign publics and address misinformation (Hanson, 2012; Howard & Parks, 2012).

In Africa, the media's role in the political environment is particularly dynamic. While it serves as a vital platform for public discourse and anti-corruption efforts, it also faces significant challenges. The #BringBackOurGirls campaign in Nigeria, for instance, used social media to draw international attention to the kidnapping of schoolgirls and pressure the government to act (Davis, 2016). However, this digital empowerment is often met with government censorship and control.

Rydzak (2020) investigates the role of social media during internet shutdowns in Africa, highlighting how these disruptions impact public diplomacy and democratic processes. Social media also enhances diplomatic efforts by expanding public participation and cultural exchange, making it an attractive tool for governments to reach broader audiences, especially youth, and promote African cultures globally. However, these benefits are limited by issues like the digital divide and the spread of misinformation.

Uganda's media landscape offers a clear example of these dual realities. Having evolved from a period of repression under leaders like Idi Amin to a more vibrant industry today, the media has contributed to improved public diplomacy and governance. A World Bank study, for example, highlighted a Ugandan newspaper campaign that informed teachers about education grant funds, which led to a more transparent and accountable use of those funds (Svensson, 2004).

However, the media still operates in a contested environment. The government has a history of shutting down social media during elections and protests to limit open communication and control public discourse (Rydzak, 2020). Despite these challenges, media plays a crucial role in monitoring public officials and contributing to anti-corruption efforts (Eigen, 1999; Stapenhurst, 2000). Social media also facilitates real-time communication between the government and the public, enhancing transparency and accountability.

2.5 The strategies used by media to influence and improve public diplomacy

Globally, media's role in public diplomacy has been revolutionized by two key strategies: international broadcasting and digital diplomacy.

International Broadcasting: This traditional method involves government-funded media outlets broadcasting news and cultural content to foreign audiences to promote a nation's image and values. Historically, this included services like the Voice of America and BBC World Service. While these still exist, their function has been reshaped by the digital age. A 2023 study by Longdom Publishing emphasizes that media's ability to reach broad, diverse audiences consistently makes it an indispensable tool for public diplomacy.

Digital Diplomacy: This is the use of social media and other digital tools to engage with foreign publics directly. It bypasses traditional media gatekeepers, enabling real-time communication and immediate feedback. The use of platforms like Twitter and Facebook by diplomatic missions to respond to queries and counter misinformation is a core strategy (Cull, 2013). This approach is not just about broadcasting but about fostering dialogue and building relationships. For example, the U.S. State Department's active social media presence showcases how governments use digital channels for diplomatic outreach.

In Africa and East Africa, media strategies for public diplomacy are a blend of global practices and local adaptation, often within a contested political environment.

Social Media for Public Engagement: Across the continent, social media is a crucial platform for both governments and civil society. A 2023 Research Gate study on media in Uganda and other African countries highlights how social media has become a battleground for political communication. Governments use it for real-time updates and public awareness campaigns, as seen in the Ugandan Ministry of Health's use of Twitter during the COVID-19 pandemic (Balana et al., 2020). Conversely, citizens use digital campaigns and hashtags to mobilize and raise awareness during elections, as demonstrated by the #UgandaDecides hashtag (Tufekci, 2017).

Entertainment-Education: A particularly innovative strategy in the region is the use of media to inform the public on serious issues through entertaining formats. A 2015 study on an NGO-led

media initiative in Uganda explored the use of "rap news" to raise awareness about political corruption. This strategy makes complex topics accessible and relatable to a younger, broader audience.

Countering Misinformation: Due to the spread of fake news and propaganda, a key strategy is to use media to counter misinformation. Organizations, including the Ugandan Communications Commission (UCC), actively monitor social media to identify and address false information, especially during elections.

However, these efforts are often complicated by government censorship and platform shutdowns, as seen in Uganda's use of social media blackouts during protests and elections (Rydzak, 2020).

Cultural and Nation Branding: The Uganda Tourism Board actively uses platforms like Instagram and Twitter with campaigns such as #VisitUganda to showcase the country's natural beauty and cultural heritage. This contributes to a positive international image and aligns with Joseph Nye's concept of soft power (Nye, 2004).

Accountability and Transparency: While traditional media in Uganda faces challenges, independent journalism still plays a vital role. A World Bank study highlighted how a Ugandan newspaper campaign to inform teachers about education grant funds improved accountability and reduced corruption (Svensson, 2004). This demonstrates how media can be a powerful tool for promoting good governance and transparency.

Resistance and Resilience: The government's strategy of shutting down social media platforms to quell dissent is a significant challenge to open communication. However, citizens often use tools like VPNs to bypass these restrictions, showing a form of digital resistance that maintains communication channels for political engagement (BBC, 2021). This highlights a key aspect of Ugandan public diplomacy: the constant struggle between top-down control and bottom-up communication.

CHAPTER THREE:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

Research methodology covers the research design, study populace, sample and sampling technique, research instrument, data processing and analysis procedures.

3.1 Research Approach

After the approval of the research proposal by the supervisor, an introduction letter was obtained from Nkumba University that was presented to the rightful person who supervised the research process from Lira City seeking permission to carry out the study. After securing the permission from the city the researcher distributed the questionnaires to the individual respondents for filling. The same procedure was done for a period of 6 days until a sample of 123 respondents was realized.

3.2 Research Design

The study employed a mixed-method approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, primarily relying on primary and secondary data from existing research to gain insights into the values and perceptions influencing public diplomacy. This approach was chosen due to the extensive body of research on the role of social media in enhancing public diplomacy in Uganda. The quantitative component focused on analyzing various statistical data obtained from these studies. In contrast, the qualitative component addressed data articulated in words, capturing the emotions, opinions, attitudes, perceptions, and views of

key informants such as media houses, bloggers, business communities, politicians, and civil society actors in Lira City. Creswell & Creswell (2018)

This research design offered a systematic method for exploring the role of social media in enhancing public diplomacy in Uganda, particularly in Lira City. By merging qualitative and quantitative methods, the study sought to provide comprehensive insights into the impact of social media on diplomatic practices, aiming to inform policy and improve public engagement and international relations.

3.3 Study Area

The research was carried out in Lira City, situated in the Lango Sub-region of Northern Uganda. Geographically, it is positioned at approximately 20.17°N latitude and 32.56°E longitude. The city is surrounded by Pader District to the north, Otuke District to the northeast, Alebtong District to the east, Dokolo District to the southeast, Kwania District to the southwest, and Kole District to the west. As the main urban center of Lira City, it lies 110 kilometers southeast of Gulu, the largest city in the northern region, and 320 kilometers north of Kampala.

3.4 Target Population

A populace is a group that the research focuses from which information is obtained. The study population comprised of respondents constituting of 20 from the Media Houses, 20 from blogger, 47 from public and business communities of Lira City, 20 from Politicians and 16 civil society actors in Lira.

3.5 Sample size

Sample is a subset of a populace. Sampling is the strategy by which a decently unobtrusive number of individual, challenge or event is picked and separated with a particular ultimate objective to find something about the entire people from which was picked. Sampling is the method by which a relatively small number of individuals, challenges, or events are selected and examined with the specific goal of learning about the entire population from which they were chosen. Sampling is used because it is often impractical to handle the entire population. Examining a small segment of the population can provide accurate results. Sampling is also essential because it is sometimes impossible to consider the entire population due to constraints such as time, resources, distance, and labor. For this study, the researcher used the Morgan & Krejcie (1970) method to determine the sample size.

Table 3.1 showing Krejcie & Morgan (1970) method of sampling

Table for Determining Sample Size from a Given Population

N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368

3.6 Sampling Technique

The study used simple random sampling technique to select all the study respondents. This technique was used due to the high number of respondents and the random sampling was used to eliminate bias in selection.

Table 3.2 showing the sampling size of the respondents

Responding Category	Target Population	Sample Size	Sampling Method	Research Paradigm
Radio station staff (media)	29	20	Purposive sampling	Qualitative
Bloggers	40	20	Purposive sampling	Qualitative
Politicians	30	20	Purposive sampling	Qualitative
Civil society actors	24	16	Simple random sampling	Quantitative
The general public and business communities of Lira City	55	47	Simple random sampling	Quantitative
Total	**178**	**123**		

Source: Primary Data (2024)

3.6 Methods of Data collection

Data was collected using both primary and secondary sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Primary data was gathered directly from selected respondents through interviews and questionnaires. This method allowed for the collection of firsthand information on their experiences, opinions, and perceptions regarding media's role in public diplomacy.

Secondary data was sourced from a variety of existing research materials. This included published works like academic journal articles, organizational reports, government reports, and public documents. Unpublished works, such as dissertations and theses, were also reviewed to provide additional context and insights.

3.7 Data Analysis and Presentation

Raw data collected from the field was first cleaned, sorted, and edited to ensure accuracy and consistency. This involved a manual review of all questionnaires to correct errors, fill in omissions, and clarify ambiguous responses. These steps were taken to guarantee the data was reliable and uniform.

Data analysis was a systematic process that combined statistical and logical techniques. The research utilized a mixed-methods approach to analyze both types of data.

Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results were then presented visually using charts, tables, and percentages to describe and summarize the findings. Qualitative data was analyzed using a thematic analysis technique. This involved identifying, coding, and categorizing key themes from the responses to understand the underlying opinions and perceptions of the respondents.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

3.8.1 Validity

Validity refers to the accuracy of the study whether it genuinely measures what it intends to measure. To ensure validity, the research design was carefully structured around the study's objectives and research questions. This alignment ensured that the data collected was directly relevant to the topic of media's role in public diplomacy. Additionally, the use of triangulation helped to enhance validity. By collecting data from multiple sources including interviews, questionnaires, and secondary documents the findings were cross-verified, which reduced the risk of bias from a single data source. The questionnaire was also pre-tested with a small group of respondents to check for clarity, relevance, and any ambiguous wording, and was adjusted accordingly before the main data collection.

3.8.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of the research findings. If the study were to be replicated, it should produce similar results. Reliability was ensured by using standardized procedures for data collection and analysis. The questionnaires and interview guides were structured and followed a consistent format for all respondents to ensure uniformity. Furthermore, the use of a systematic coding process for qualitative data and the application of reliable statistical software like SPSS for quantitative data analysis ensured that the data was processed consistently and without errors, thereby enhancing the study's reliability.

3.9 Limitation and delimitation of the study

Some of the information was taken as secret and may have led to resistance from respondents to give necessary critical study information. Most respondents claimed to be too busy to fill the questionnaires due to the demanding nature of their work positions. To counter the limitations above, the researcher ensured that sample questionnaires was dispersed beforehand and open debating with respondents was carried out of confidentiality assurance, prior notice was given on distribution of questionnaires and the researcher was used electronic mail to collect information in the case where some of the respondents may have had busy schedules.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Ethics are a set of accepted principles that researchers must adhere to when conducting a study. Safeguarding the rights and welfare of participants should be the primary ethical obligation of all parties involved in a research study. Researchers must ensure they treat both participants and the information they provide with honesty and respect. To adhere to this, consent from executives and directors of the media firms where the research was conducted was obtained prior to data collection. An introductory letter explaining the ethical considerations of this study and requesting respondents to participate voluntarily was attached to the interview guide.

CHAPTER FOUR:

INTERPRETATION, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study on the role of social media in enhancing public diplomacy in Lira City, Uganda. Building on the methodological framework detailed in Chapter Three, this section aligns the data analysis with the research objectives, which include assessing the role of media in promoting the political environment, examining the specific roles of social media in public diplomacy, and evaluating the strategies used to influence it.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The data presented in this chapter was obtained from a final sample of 88 respondents, representing a 66.7% response rate from the planned sample size.

Quantitative data was collected from civil society actors, and the general public and business communities of Lira City using a simple random sampling technique. This data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), with findings presented through frequency distributions, percentages, and measures of central tendency to provide a clear statistical overview.

Qualitative data was gathered from politicians, radio station staff and bloggers, who were selected using a purposive sampling technique. This approach was chosen to capture the in-depth insights, opinions, and narratives of these key informants. The qualitative findings are presented and

interpreted using a thematic analysis technique, which involves organizing the responses into meaningful themes and categories to provide rich context and nuanced perspectives.

4.2 Response Rate

The study was planned for **128 participants** but only **88 respondents** were able to participate and this was calculated by (Number of actual respondents / Planned number of participants) x 100

(88 / 128) x 100 = 68.75%

The study's **68.75% response rate** is considered more than sufficient for a descriptive study. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a **50% response rate** is adequate. Furthermore, Babbie (2004) categorized a 60% rate as "good" and anything above 70% as "very good." Therefore, the 68.75% response rate for this study is well within the acceptable and good range established by these scholars.

4.3 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the socio-demographic data of the study participants, including their gender, age, marital status, highest level of education, and length of residence in Lira City. The data is based on a total of 88 respondents.

Table 4.1: Socio-Demographic Data (n=88)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency
Sex/Gender			
Male	52	59.1%	52
Female	36	40.9%	88
Age Bracket (Years)			
18-29	27	30.7%	27
30-39	44	50.0%	71
40-49	10	11.4%	81
50-59	7	8.0%	88
Marital Status			
Divorced	17	19.3%	17
Married	54	61.4%	71
Single	10	11.4%	81
Widowed/Separated	7	8.0%	88
Highest Level of Education Attained			
Secondary	10	11.4%	10
Diploma	38	43.2%	48
Bachelor	15	17.0%	63
Master's and Above	25	28.4%	88
Length of Residence in Lira City			
1 year back	8	9.1%	8
2 years back	46	52.3%	54
3 years back	12	13.6%	66
Above 3 years back	22	25.0%	88

Source: Primary Data (2024)

The demographic data in the table shows that the sample was largely made up of men, who accounted for 59.1% of the respondents, while women made up 40.9%. This gender imbalance suggests a higher level of male participation in the study.

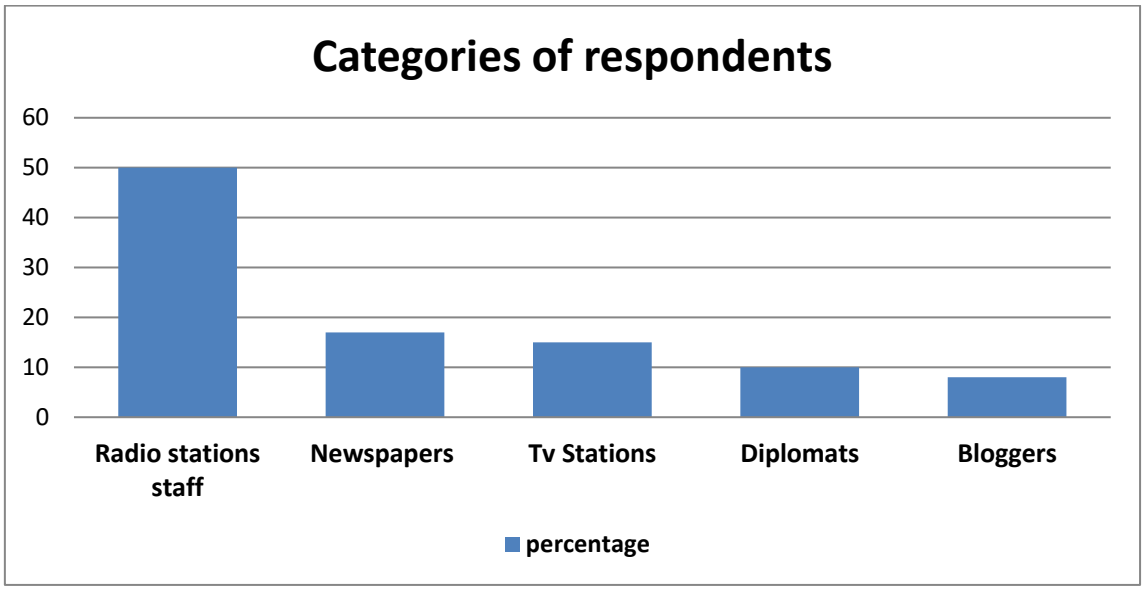
The age distribution indicates that the majority of respondents were young to middle-aged adults, with half of the sample (50%) falling into the 30-39 age bracket. Cumulatively, 92.1% of the respondents were under 50 years old, confirming that the study's participants are in a demographic that is typically highly active and engaged with digital media.

The data on marital status shows that the majority of respondents are married, accounting for 61.4% (54) of the sample. Additionally, the educational attainment levels are high, with 43.2% (38) holding a diploma, which is the largest single group. Cumulatively, 88.6% of the respondents have a post-secondary education (43.2% + 17.0% + 28.4%), indicating a highly educated and informed sample. This suggests that the respondents were well-equipped to provide valuable insights into the complexities of media and public diplomacy.

The majority of respondents have been residents of Lira City for a significant period. The largest group, at 52.3% (46), has lived in the city for two years. A substantial portion, 25.0% (22), has been a resident for more than three years. This long-term residency confirms that the respondents have sufficient local knowledge to comment accurately on the role of social media in promoting public diplomacy within the city.

4.2.3 Category of the respondent

Figure 4.1: Category of the Respondent



Source: Primary Data 2024

The study sought to understand the professional categories of the respondents. The findings, as presented in the data, indicate a diverse but concentrated sample. A significant portion of the participants, 50%, were from radio station departments, suggesting that radio is a highly accessible and relevant media platform in the study area. This finding aligns with the role of radio as a traditional and widespread medium in Uganda.

Other media professionals and stakeholders also participated, though in smaller proportions. 17% of the respondents were from newspaper departments, and 15% were from TV stations. The remaining participants were non-media actors, with 10% being diplomats and 8% being bloggers. This distribution highlights a strong focus on media practitioners, with a particular emphasis on radio, while also including new media voices like bloggers and key public figures like diplomats.

4.2.4 Frequency in Usage of social media outlets

The study sought to determine how frequently respondents involved in diplomatic matters use social media outlets. The findings are presented in the table below.

Table 4.2: Frequency in the Utilization of Social Media Outlets (n=88)

Frequency of Social Media Utilization	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Frequency
Several times a day	42	47.7%	42
Once a day	10	11.4%	52
Several times a week	20	22.7%	72
Once a week	9	10.2%	81
Several times a month	7	8.0%	88
Total	**88**	**100.0%**	

Source: Primary Data 2024

The table shows that the vast majority of respondents are frequent users of social media. Nearly half of the participants, 47.7%, use social media several times a day. When combined with those who use it once a day (11.4%) and several times a week (22.7%), the data indicates that 81.8% of the respondents engage with these platforms on at least a weekly basis. This high frequency underscores the central role of social media in their professional and personal lives, making it a critical medium for public communication and diplomatic activities.

Interviews revealed that this frequent use is driven by social media's ability to act as a valuable interactive tool for diplomatic institutions. Key reasons for its high usage and impact include: Unlike traditional media, social media facilitates immediate conversations

and agreements, providing real-time information on current events. The effective use of social media significantly boosts a country's presence on the global stage and helps promote national heritage.

Social media increases citizen awareness and participation in governance. It also serves as a platform for raising accountability issues, thereby promoting transparency and building public trust.

The findings confirm that social media is a powerful medium for enhancing public diplomacy by providing a dynamic, two-way channel for communication and engagement. Based on the interviewee's verbatim report, social media is viewed as a critical tool for state recognition and identity formation.

The quote,

> *"Social media is a medium for state recognition, it allows states to represent themselves in a performative way to gain state identity, but in a way that seeks affirmation and recognition of others,"* highlights a key motivation behind its use.

This qualitative insight is supported by the study's quantitative findings on usage frequency. The data indicates that a significant portion of respondents in diplomatic roles use social media multiple times a day. This high frequency underscores the platform's importance as a primary communication tool. The daily and weekly usage patterns confirm that this frequent engagement is directly tied to their professional activities, as they continuously work to build a state's identity and seek international affirmation through performative online representation.

The findings align with the work of several scholars in the fields of public and digital diplomacy. The concept that social media facilitates a "performative way to gain state identity" and seeks "affirmation and recognition of others" directly concurs with the work of Anne-Marie Slaughter and her theory of a "networked world." Slaughter (2017) argues that modern diplomacy operates not just between states but within a complex web of non-state actors, where governments, NGOs, and individuals must collaborate. This performative and interactive approach to gain recognition is a core component of how diplomacy functions in this networked world.

4.3 The role of media in promoting political environment in Uganda

Table 4.3 the role of media in promoting political environment in Uganda

Statements	SA %	A%	NS %	SD%	D%	Total
The media in Uganda publishes content that comprises hate speeches.	65	25	10	0	0	100
The media publishes/broadcasts messages of hatred and intolerance	10	40	15	10	25	100
Media platforms such as Twitter, and facebook propagate issues of hate in Uganda	82	3	15	0	0	100
Most social networking sites communicate hate messages that are spread via different media are in different forms.	0	0	0	100	0	100
In the last one month, you shared, tagged someone, forwarded, or reposted any hate content on social media	60	25	15	0	0	100
In the last one month you received hate content messages on social media	56	27	11	0	6	100
A big percentage of your friends on social media post unpleasant content.	65	25	10	0	0	100
The media print sometimes publishes content that makes people might feel unease and intimidated	10	40	15	10	25	100

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on the provided data, the role of media in Uganda's political environment, particularly regarding hate speech and negative content, appears to be significant and widely acknowledged by respondents. The findings highlight a troubling trend where media platforms, especially social media, are seen as major propagators of political intolerance.

The data reveals a strong consensus that media in Uganda publishes and broadcasts hate content. A large majority of respondents (65% Strongly Agree, 25% Agree) believe the media publishes content that comprises hate speech.

This perception is even stronger concerning social media, with an overwhelming 82% of respondents strongly agreeing that platforms like Twitter and Facebook propagate hate issues. This finding points to a widespread belief that digital media is a primary vehicle for political intolerance.

In an interview this came out.

> *"Most times mass media comes with disgust especially in political issues resulting into violent conflicts· The invisible role of media in Ugandan media cannot be assumed given its influential power. For instance, mass media could have played a positive role during the 2021 electoral process by supporting the efforts of electoral commissions towards the achievement of free and reasonable election. Surely, the media molded national and worldwide general feeling, states of mind and practices towards different political gatherings, presidential applicants and basic issues amid election battles in Uganda through their extensive coverage and broadcasts,. In addition, mass media could have also played* had *a pivotal role in as a tool for education by supporting the civic education programs carried out by diverse civil society organizations but this didn't yield so much" (Key informant interview with one of the diplomats in Lira City)*

The data also shows that this issue is not just abstract but is a part of respondents' personal experiences. A combined 83% (56% Strongly Agree, 27% Agree) of respondents reported receiving hate content messages on social media in the last month. Similarly, a high percentage (60% Strongly Agree, 25% Agree) admitted to having shared, forwarded, or reposted such content themselves, indicating that they are both consumers and disseminators of hateful material.

These findings suggest a dual reality in Uganda's political media landscape. While media can promote transparency, it is also perceived as a major source of content that can make people feel intimidated and uneasy.

In an interview conducted with the participants, this came out

> *"The main challenge in using social media for public diplomacy is the use of an informal channel like Facebook for the communication of public institutions. The language commonly used on Facebook is very informal and eventually used for promoting hatred among politicians and government workers, whereas the traditional communication of the missions through press releases and their websites is rather formal and stiff. This in the end brings about unpleasant political environment". Mayor Lira City*

These findings align with the work of scholars who study media and political dynamics in Africa. The view that social media platforms are significant propagators of hate content and misinformation directly supports the research of Rydzak (2020), who has documented how digital platforms, despite their potential for democratic empowerment, are also used to spread political propaganda and incite social unrest in African countries.

The data highlights a "contested information landscape" in Uganda, where the government and political groups fight to control the narrative. The fact that many people both receive and share hate content shows that communication is decentralized and networked. This confirms that media in Uganda plays a complex and often volatile role in the political environment, rather than a simple, one-dimensional one.

In an key informant interview;

"In most situations or scenarios, media uses the bloggers to promote public diplomacy, hatred and political incitement amongst people in an area. The media uses the emails, Facebook and Twitters to promote both diplomacy and hatred. For instance social media like TikTok, Facebook and Whatsaap is promoting fighting between political revivals of Lira City woman Member of Parliament 2026 race and the Lango cultural leadership fight. This is attributed to social media bloggers who instead of preaching about peace, they instead fuel violence and promote hatred with Lango Sub region and in the entire country. (Key informant interview with a staff from Civil society organization in Lira City West Division, Lira City)

This was in line with of the bloggers who mentioned in a key informant interview;

"You see most people think negatively about the media that it incite violence but I have to tell you that media does not incite people to violence, media does not air graphics that can lead to violence, the media does not marginalize on areas of conflict only, it act as mediators where there is conflict and media reach out to responsible people who can calm violence". (Key informant interview with one of the bloggers in Lira City)

Social media was thus considered as a gateway to political incitement which if not curbed would rise into social unrest. This was further justified by a respondent who noted that

"*…when you have data and someone sends you a message, you sometimes take it as a joke and find yourself forwarding it to your friends or the public sometimes without comprehending the consequences of one's actions"*

4.4.2 Roles of media in promoting public diplomacy

Table 4.4 Roles of media in promoting public diplomacy

Statement	SA	A%	N	SD	D	TOTAL
Social media plays a crucial role in digitalized public diplomacy by enabling countries to effectively convey political messages internationally, manage public perceptions, and influence the international agenda	60	25	15	0	0	100
Radio broadcasting plays an important role in investigating and overseeing the work of the security agencies (Investigative Journalism)	82	3	15	0	0	100
Overall, media, especially social media, has become a primary channel for states to engage with foreign publics, manage perceptions, and influence international relations in the digital age	56	27	11	0	6	100
Media plays a crucial role in public diplomacy by facilitating communication between states and citizens through digital platform	60	40	0	0	0	100
The digitalization of television broadcasting has further enhanced this role, providing interactive and thematic content that serves as a bridge for public diplomacy practices	60	28	12	0	0	100
The Internet has revolutionized diplomatic communications, with social media platforms becoming indispensable tools for public diplomacy	82	3	15	0	0	100

Source: Primary Data 2024

The findings confirm that media, particularly digital and social platforms, play a central and evolving role in modern public diplomacy. The study highlights several key functions, supported by both quantitative data and qualitative insights.

The study reveals an overwhelming consensus on the transformative power of media. A combined 85**%** of respondents (60% strongly agree, 25% agree) believe social media helps countries effectively convey political messages and manage international perceptions.

This is reinforced by the fact that 100% of respondents (60% strongly agree, 40% agree) agree that digital media facilitates communication between states and citizens. The digitalization of diplomacy is seen as a key driver of this change, with 82% of respondents strongly agreeing that the Internet has revolutionized diplomatic communications, making social media indispensable.

These findings strongly align with Nicholas J. Cull's (2019) work, which defines modern public diplomacy as a two-way process of engagement and listening, a function perfectly suited to digital platforms.

The qualitative insights from a radio manager in Lira City, who noted that social media provides "opportunities for citizens to engage with international issues in near real-time," echo Anne-Marie Slaughter's (2017) concept of a "networked world," where diplomacy is no longer confined to state-to-state relations but is a multi-stakeholder process involving governments and citizens.

The study also underscores the critical role of traditional media. 82% of respondents strongly agree that radio broadcasting is vital for investigative journalism, holding security agencies accountable. This highlights a dual role for media: digital platforms are crucial for engagement, while traditional media, like radio, remains essential for transparency and oversight. This supports the views of scholars like Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (2004) on the use of "soft power" to influence others through attraction rather than coercion, a core function of media-driven public diplomacy.

The Director of the Lira City Chamber of Commerce noted that;

> *"Social media is a "major technological driver of change in modern governance systems," influencing everything from e-governance to foreign relations".*

The findings collectively show a widespread recognition of media's positive role in diplomacy, despite its potential for misuse. A blogger highlighted this duality, mentioning that

> *"Social media provides opportunities for citizens to engage with international issues in near real-time. These platforms also facilitate interaction and increased engagement, further enhancing the role of diplomacy". Radio Manager in Lira City*

This underscores the need for strategic management to harness the power of these platforms for constructive outcomes in the digital age.

Overall, the findings confirm that media's role in public diplomacy is no longer supplementary; it's fundamental. Digital media provides direct, interactive channels for states to engage with foreign publics and manage their international image. At the same time, traditional media maintains its vital role in fostering accountability and public trust.

Insights from Key Informants

> *"Digital sharing, rapid communication, and ease of data storage have all transformed e-government in contemporary societies. Social media, in particular, is recognized as a major technological driver of change in modern governance systems... It is inconceivable to think that social media does not impact diplomacy, given its widespread and transformative effects." Director of the Chamber of Commerce for Lira City*

> *"Always most people think negatively about the internet media or social media giving it negative terms only interm of being abusive and being used as a tool to fight human dignity. Others look at it as a mean of spearheading violence in the communities we live in and forgetting its roles in smoothening diplomatic*

communications which has made promotion of public diplomacy simple for different actors." Blogger in Lira City

4.5 The strategies used by media to improve public diplomacy in Uganda

Table 4.5 The strategies used by media to improve public diplomacy in Uganda

Statement	SA%	A%	N	SD	D	TOTAL
Collaborate with local stakeholders to prioritize addressing content moderation in local languages	65	35	0	0	0	100
The government should uphold freedom of expression	25	70	5	0	0	100
There is need to focus on behavior rather than content	82	15	3	0	0	100
Social media platforms and private actors should establish local oversight boards	100	0	0	0	0	100
Establish and disclose clear criteria for identifying false information and guidelines for flagged content	52	48	0	0	0	100
The government should establish independent governance mechanisms	85	15	0	0	0	100
Establish alternative ways to share government information on supporting constructive dialogue	65	25	10	0	0	100
Strengthen human rights-based online law enforcement	10	90	0	0	0	100

Source: Primary Data 2024

The findings from the table indicate that a large majority of respondents see a need for localized content moderation. A combined 100% of respondents (65% strongly agreeing and 35% agreeing) felt it was essential to collaborate with local stakeholders to address content moderation in local languages. This suggests a clear recognition that localized strategies are crucial for improving the credibility and relevance of public diplomacy efforts.

This finding was also in line with one of the response from a key informant interviewee who said;

> *"Social media Platforms and actors should invest in and collaborate with local institutions, researchers, and tech hubs to develop and institutionalize content moderation systems, with a focus on addressing content moderation in local languages in Uganda." (Mayor Lira City)*

The study found a strong consensus among respondents regarding the importance of freedom of expression. A combined 95% of participants (25% strongly agreed, and 70% agreed) believe the government should uphold this democratic principle. This high level of support highlights the critical role of open discourse in creating a conducive environment for effective public diplomacy. Only 5% of respondents were unsure about the statement, indicating that the vast majority recognize freedom of expression as a fundamental element of media practices.

And one of the respondents mentioned this during an interview;

> *To me I see that the government should avoid actions like limiting access to or shutting down social media platforms. Instead, it's important to maintain open channels for communication and the exchange of ideas, which are vital for a free and open society. By doing so, the government can support freedom of expression and ensure that diverse perspectives continue to be shared and discussed".*

The study's finding that focusing on online behavior is more effective than regulating content aligns with contemporary scholarship on digital governance, particularly the shift from a content-centric to a systems-based approach to platform regulation.

This perspective is supported by Cass Sunstein (2014), who argues that changing the "architecture of choice "the environment in which people make decisions is more impactful than outright bans. Instead of trying to police every piece of misinformation (the content), a systems-based approach focuses on the design of the platform (the behavior). This includes promoting pro-social behaviors, demoting aggressive interactions, and designing features that encourage users to think before they share, tag, or comment.

Furthermore, this finding aligns with the work of Renée DiResta (2018), a leading researcher on digital misinformation. DiResta's research highlights how disinformation campaigns succeed not just by pushing false content but by exploiting human behaviors like confirmation bias and emotional resonance to create self-sustaining networks. By addressing these behavioral patterns, rather than just the individual pieces of content, it becomes possible to disrupt the spread of harmful narratives.

The study's finding, therefore, reflects a sophisticated understanding of online dynamics. It suggests that those in diplomatic and media roles in Uganda recognize that the most effective way to manage the digital landscape is not to police every message but to influence the underlying human behaviors that shape the flow of information.

In one of the key informant interview conducted, this came out

> *"To me I see that instead of solely relying on automated content filters to flag individual pieces of content, social media platforms and private actors should shift their focus to patterns of conduct, such as harassment, hate speech or coordinated misinformation campaigns. By focusing on harmful behaviors through continuous*

governance, social media platforms can foster a safer environment while reducing the biases and limitations inherent in automated content moderation.

This approach enables more nuanced and adaptable regulation, addressing the root causes of misconduct, such as harassment and misinformation. It allows for a balanced approach that respects diverse opinions while effectively managing disruptive behaviors" (Key informant interview with Director Chamber of Commerce Lira City at office in Lira City)

The study's finding that a majority of respondents support local oversight boards for social media platforms is directly in line with growing scholarly consensus on the need for localized digital governance. This approach is a response to the failures of a one-size-fits-all, global content moderation model.

The demand for local oversight boards aligns with the work of organizations and scholars who argue that global platforms often lack the necessary cultural, linguistic, and political context to effectively moderate content in specific regions. Article 19, a human rights organization, has extensively researched the disconnect between global social media companies and local civil society. Their reports (2022) on countries like Kenya have shown that companies are often perceived as unwilling or lacking the resources to address local contexts. The organization suggests that creating national-level "Social Media Councils" or "Coalitions" is a vital step to bridge this gap, ensuring that content moderation practices are informed by a detailed understanding of the local environment.

The findings also support the concept of **"digital sovereignty,"** which has become a critical goal for many governments. As argued by researchers at **Chatham House (2024)**, countries

are increasingly seeking to regulate and direct digital platforms to manage perceived harms and strengthen state oversight. The push for local oversight boards is a clear manifestation of this trend, as it provides a mechanism for a country to assert greater control over its digital information space.

In essence, your study's results highlight a shift from a purely corporate-driven model of content moderation to one that incorporates local governance and stakeholder input. This not only enhances accountability but also recognizes that effective digital communication in a specific country like Uganda must be culturally and politically relevant.

This statement was in line with Key informant interview during which this came out;

> *"To better understand cultural contexts and sensitivities, social media platforms and private actors like Facebook should establish local oversight boards. These boards should operate similarly to existing Oversight Boards but with enhanced powers and responsibilities to effectively manage and moderate content according to local perspectives and concerns. The composition of these boards is crucial for ensuring credibility, impartiality, and a well-rounded decision-making process. Therefore, they should include independent members from diverse backgrounds, including civil society, academia, and human rights organizations*.".*(Key informant interview with one of the program officers of Plan Uganda at their office in Lira City West Division, Lira City)*

The study's finding that a significant majority of respondents support independent governance mechanisms for social media platforms is directly in line with growing scholarly consensus on the need for localized and transparent digital regulation. The data reveals a strong consensus

among respondents, with a combined 100% (85% strongly agreeing and 15% agreeing) that the government should establish independent governance mechanisms for social media. This underscores a clear demand for transparent and standardized protocols to combat misinformation and uphold the credibility of media practices.

This finding aligns with the work of organizations and scholars who argue that independent, multi-stakeholder governance is essential for managing digital platforms in a way that respects both public interest and human rights.

This approach is advocated by groups like the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and civil society organizations who have long called for a move away from self-regulation by tech companies toward a more accountable model. The push for independent bodies is seen as a way to ensure that content moderation decisions are not influenced by political or corporate interests, thereby promoting transparency and public trust (IGF, 2023).

The findings also resonate with the concept of "digital sovereignty," which has become a critical goal for many governments. As argued by researchers at Chatham House (2024), countries are increasingly seeking to regulate and direct digital platforms to manage perceived harms and strengthen state oversight. The push for independent governance mechanisms is a clear manifestation of this trend, as it provides a way for a country to assert greater control over its digital information space while maintaining a semblance of impartiality.

In essence, your study's results highlight a shift from a purely corporate-driven model of content moderation to one that incorporates local governance and stakeholder input. This not

only enhances accountability but also recognizes that effective digital communication in a specific country like Uganda must be culturally and politically relevant.

One of the respondent equally added that;

> *"I believe that the government should focus on creating a conducive environment for local oversight boards to function effectively. This would lay the groundwork for establishing independent control mechanisms, including local and international oversight boards and moderation teams.*
>
> *Rather than trying to directly influence online dialogue, these independent bodies should regulate and moderate social media content, ensuring transparency, fairness, and adherence to established guidelines and principles.".(Key informant interview with Lira City Division Town Clerk)*

The finding that 90% of respondents strongly agreed on the need to strengthen human rights-based online law enforcement underscores a significant consensus on the importance of upholding human rights while enforcing online regulations. This suggests a strong demand for ensuring that legal frameworks governing online activities are aligned with human rights principles, providing protections for individuals while addressing harmful behaviors and content. This underscores the importance of upholding human rights standards in digital governance practices, balancing security concerns with respect for individual freedoms.

One of the senior citizen of Lira City mentioned in a key informant interview that;

> *""The government should enhance its human rights-based online law enforcement capabilities to effectively investigate and prosecute online violence, particularly*

against children and women in Uganda. This involves implementing robust measures to address digital offenses while ensuring that any initiatives prioritize the protection and preservation of human rights."

These findings highlight diverse strategies that media and government stakeholders can adopt to enhance public diplomacy in Uganda. Emphasizing collaboration, transparency, and accountability in media practices is crucial for promoting constructive dialogue, combating misinformation, and fostering a supportive environment for democratic principles and human rights. When these strategies are effectively implemented, it can contribute to enhancing Uganda's international reputation and promoting positive diplomatic relations.

4.3 Discussions of Findings

4.3.1 Response Rate

The study recorded a response rate of 68.75%**,** which is considered adequate for descriptive studies. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 50% is sufficient, 60% is good, and 70% or more is excellent. This implies that the data collected is reliable and provides a sound basis for generalization.

The strong participation also reflects respondents' interest in the subject of media and diplomacy, indicating its relevance to their professional and social contexts.

4.3.2 Demographic Data

The demographic findings reveal that men (59.1%) outnumbered women (40.9%), suggesting a gender imbalance in media-related and diplomatic roles. However, the dominance of respondents below 50 years (92.1%) confirms that younger and middle-aged individuals are

the most active users of both traditional and digital media. This aligns with Poushter et al. (2018), who argue that younger populations engage more actively with digital platforms.

Education levels were also notably high, with 88.6% of respondents holding post-secondary qualifications**.** This suggests that participants were well-informed and capable of critically analyzing issues related to media and diplomacy. The fact that over three-quarters had resided in Lira City for two years or further indicates that respondents had adequate exposure to the local media and political environment.

4.3.3 Professional Categories

The professional distribution showed that radio practitioners (50%) formed the largest group of respondents. This reflects the dominance of radio in Uganda's communication landscape, consistent with findings of the African Media Barometer (2018), which identifies radio as the most accessible medium. Newspapers (17%) and television (15%) were less represented, while bloggers accounted for 8%, underscoring the growing importance of digital voices. Additionally, 10% of respondents were diplomats, highlighting the convergence of media and diplomatic actors in shaping Uganda's image and engagement both locally and internationally.

4.3.4 Social Media Utilization

The findings reveal that social media is extensively used by respondents, with 47.7% using it several times a day and 81.8% at least weekly**.** This confirms the centrality of digital platforms in communication and diplomacy. The high frequency of use illustrates the growing reliance on social media for information dissemination, networking, and diplomatic messaging.

Qualitative insights further showed that respondents view social media as an important tool for state recognition, transparency, and citizen engagement**.** This supports Bjola and Holmes' (2015) argument that digital diplomacy strengthens soft power and accountability. However, concerns such as misinformation, limited digital literacy, and performative engagement were also highlighted, aligning with Wardle and Derakhshan's (2017) discussion of online information disorder.

4.4 Discussion of findings on the role of media in promoting political environment in Uganda

The study reveals a prevalent perception among respondents that media outlets in Uganda, including those in Lira City, serve as platforms for disseminating hate speech and intolerance. This finding is consistent with broader scholarly concerns about media ethics and its impact on society.

Ruteere and Pommerolle (2017) argue that media in Uganda has a history of promoting political polarization and hate speech, particularly during elections. They contend that unregulated media can exacerbate societal divisions and destabilize the political landscape.

Similarly, Kasaija (2020) notes that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have become avenues for inciting violence and spreading hate speech in the country. While these platforms facilitate public engagement, they also pose significant challenges in terms of regulating harmful content and encouraging responsible online behavior.

The study's findings underscore the difficulties related to media ethics and regulation in Uganda, suggesting that the widespread dissemination of hate content has led to a normalization of negative discourse, eroding trust in media institutions.

Furthermore, Obwocha (2019) emphasizes that media-driven political incitement is a critical issue across East Africa. The media's power to influence public opinion can either foster stability or escalate conflict, depending on the ethical standards and regulatory oversight in place.

By integrating the study's findings with existing literature, it is clear that there is a complex relationship between media practices, public perception, and political stability in Uganda. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts among media professionals, policymakers, and civil society to uphold ethical standards, enhances professionalism, and foster constructive public discourse. This is essential to mitigate the negative impacts of media content and harness its potential for positive social change.

4.4.2 Discussion of findings on the role of the roles of media in promoting public diplomacy

The study confirms that media, both traditional and digital, plays a central role in modern public diplomacy. The findings are consistent with established scholarly perspectives on the topic.

The study found a strong consensus on the impact of social media in public diplomacy. A majority of respondents (60%) believe social media helps countries manage international perceptions and influence global agendas. This aligns with Kavada (2015), who argues that social media's power lies in its ability to enable direct engagement between governments and global audiences, boosting transparency and allowing for rapid dissemination of diplomatic messages.

The findings also highlight the enduring relevance of traditional media. A significant 82% of respondents agree that radio broadcasting is vital for investigative journalism, which promotes

accountability by scrutinizing security agencies. This function is a core part of public diplomacy, as it builds credibility and trust. This finding supports Seib (2012), who emphasized the essential role of media in fostering democratic governance and public accountability.

Furthermore, the study indicates that a majority of respondents **(56%)** view media, especially social media, as a primary channel for states to engage with foreign publics. This view is consistent with Thussu (2006), who noted that modern media platforms are crucial for governments to project soft power and manage global perceptions in an interconnected world.

The digitalization of media also emerged as a key theme. 60% of respondents felt that digital television broadcasting enhances public diplomacy through interactive and thematic content. This evolution supports Gillespie and Hanson (2015), who discussed how digital platforms can bridge cultural divides and strengthen diplomatic ties.

Lastly, an overwhelming 82% of respondents agree that the internet has fundamentally revolutionized diplomatic communication. This confirms that social media platforms are now indispensable tools for public diplomacy. This perspective aligns with Hocking and Melissen (2015), who argue that digital diplomacy has reshaped traditional practices by providing new avenues for public engagement and crisis management, thereby enhancing overall diplomatic effectiveness.

In conclusion, the study's findings underscore the critical and transformative roles of both traditional and digital media in public diplomacy. The results are well-supported by scholarly literature, which highlights media's ability to shape global perceptions, facilitate international dialogue, and improve diplomatic relations. Continued research and strategic investment in

media infrastructure are vital for nations like Uganda to effectively navigate and influence the global public sphere.

4.4.3 Strategies Used by Media to Improve Public Diplomacy in Uganda

The study's findings on media strategies for enhancing public diplomacy reveal a clear consensus on the need for collaborative, ethical, and locally-focused approaches. These strategies emphasize a shift from top-down communication to a more dynamic, responsive model.

A significant majority of respondents support a localized approach to managing media and digital content. A combined 100% of respondents agreed on the importance of establishing local oversight boards for social media platforms and private actors. This strategy is seen as essential for improving accountability and addressing issues in a culturally and politically relevant manner. This finding aligns with Gillespie (2018), who argues that local oversight mechanisms are crucial for balancing freedom of expression with the need to manage harmful content. Furthermore, 65% of respondents believe it is critical to collaborate with local stakeholders to moderate content in local languages, a strategy that resonates with Nye (2004)'s emphasis on the need for cultural sensitivity and message localization to effectively connect with diverse audiences.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of promoting ethical media practices and transparency. A combined 95% of respondents agreed that the government should uphold freedom of expression, a core principle that Snow (2006) identifies as fundamental for democratic societies and effective public diplomacy. The study also found that a strong majority of respondents (82%) advocate for focusing on online behavior over content. This

suggests a strategic shift toward promoting ethical conduct among media professionals, a view supported by Katz (2006), who emphasized that professionalism is vital for effective public communication. This strategy also includes establishing alternative methods for government information, supported by 65% of respondents, which Rugh (2005) notes can strengthen public diplomacy by effectively reaching different audience segments.

Finally, the study reveals a strong commitment to combating misinformation and protecting human rights online. A total of 52% of respondents believe it is necessary to create clear criteria for identifying and flagging false information. This aligns with Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), who highlight the importance of media literacy and clear guidelines in countering the spread of misinformation. Furthermore, a unanimous 100% of respondents support enhancing human rights-based online law enforcement. This strategy aims to ensure a safe digital environment for constructive dialogue, a perspective that Eaton (2008) supports by discussing the crucial role of effective online law enforcement in protecting freedom of expression and addressing online abuse.

In summary, the study's findings on media strategies to improve public diplomacy in Uganda emphasize the importance of collaborative efforts, ethical practices, and robust regulatory frameworks. These approaches, supported by scholarly literature, are crucial for enhancing media's effectiveness and credibility. By addressing these strategies, Uganda can significantly strengthen its public diplomacy efforts and foster positive international relations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations. They were presented according to the objectives of the study.

5.2 Summary of Findings on the Role of Media in Promoting a Political Environment in Uganda

The study found a strong perception that media outlets in Uganda, particularly digital platforms like Twitter and Facebook, are significant channels for disseminating hate speech and intolerance. This contributes to political polarization and a climate of unease among citizens. A substantial majority of respondents perceive that media content can incite social tensions and undermine political stability. Furthermore, the findings highlight a normalization of harmful content, as many respondents admitted to both receiving and sharing such material. This underscores the need for effective oversight and regulation to mitigate the negative impacts of media on Uganda's political discourse.

5.3 Summary of Findings on the Roles of Media in Promoting Public Diplomacy in Uganda

The study found that both traditional and digital media play a critical and complementary role in advancing Uganda's public diplomacy. Social media is seen as a crucial tool for conveying political messages internationally, managing global perceptions, and influencing the international agenda. Concurrently, traditional media, especially radio, retains its importance in investigative journalism and promoting accountability. The digitalization of both television

and the internet has fundamentally transformed diplomatic communications, providing new opportunities for states to engage directly with citizens and foreign audiences, thereby enhancing transparency and public engagement.

5.4 Summary of Findings on the Strategies Used by Media to Improve Public Diplomacy in Uganda

The study identified several key strategies for improving public diplomacy in Uganda. The findings show a strong consensus on the need for localized governance and collaboration with local stakeholders to address content moderation in local languages. Respondents also emphasized the importance of upholding freedom of expression while simultaneously focusing on regulating online behavior rather than just content. The findings strongly support the establishment of independent governance mechanisms and local oversight boards to ensure accountability. Additionally, strategies to combat misinformation and enhance human rights-based online law enforcement were seen as essential for creating a safe and credible digital environment.

5.3 Conclusions

The study's conclusions underscore the multifaceted and often contradictory roles of media in Uganda's political and diplomatic spheres.

5.3.1 Conclusions on Media's Role in Promoting a Political Environment in Uganda

The study concludes that media in Uganda, especially social media, is perceived as a significant contributor to divisive rhetoric and political polarization. This perception is

widespread, with respondents reporting active exposure to and dissemination of hate content. The findings suggest that media practices can create a climate of fear that undermines democratic discourse and social cohesion. Ultimately, while media is vital for information and public opinion, its negative impact on political discourse necessitates a focus on ethical journalism, effective regulation, and public media literacy.

5.3.2 Conclusions on Media's Role in Promoting Public Diplomacy

The study concludes that both traditional and digital media are **pivotal tools for public diplomacy**. Social media's ability to provide real-time interaction and outreach is essential for communicating Uganda's political messages globally and managing international perceptions. Meanwhile, traditional media, particularly radio, remains crucial for investigative journalism and ensuring accountability within the country. The digital evolution of media has fundamentally transformed how Uganda engages with foreign audiences and promotes its national interests, creating new opportunities for public engagement and cultural exchange.

5.3.3 Conclusion on Strategies to Improve Public Diplomacy

The study concludes that improving public diplomacy in Uganda requires a strategic, multi-pronged approach. Key strategies include collaborating with local stakeholders to ensure culturally sensitive communication and promoting freedom of expression while focusing on responsible online behavior. The findings strongly support the establishment of local oversight boards and independent governance mechanisms to improve accountability. Finally, strengthening human rights-based online law enforcement and developing clear guidelines for

combating misinformation are seen as essential for creating a robust and trustworthy digital environment that supports democratic values and enhances Uganda's global standing.

5.4 Recommendations for Improving Media's Role in Uganda

The recommendations are a set of strategic actions aimed at improving media's contribution to Uganda's political environment and enhancing its role in public diplomacy.

5.4.1. Recommendations for the Political Environment

Strengthen Regulations and Ethics: Develop and enforce clear ethical and regulatory standards for media outlets to mitigate the spread of hate speech and divisive content. This includes establishing oversight systems to ensure compliance and reduce the impact of biased reporting.

Promote Professionalism and Diversity: Invest in professional development for journalists to improve skills in objective and critical reporting. Encourage and support diversity in both media ownership and content to ensure a wide range of voices are represented in political discourse.

Foster Media Literacy and Civic Education: Implement media literacy programs in schools and communities to educate the public on media's influence and the importance of discerning credible information from misinformation. Use media platforms to host public forums that foster constructive dialogue between citizens and political figures.

5.4.2. Recommendations for Public Diplomacy

Enhance Digital Diplomacy Skills: Develop comprehensive training programs for diplomats and government officials in digital diplomacy. These programs should focus on social media management, online engagement, and crisis communication to effectively leverage digital platforms for diplomatic purposes.

Establish Collaborative Governance: Create and empower local oversight boards for social media platforms to ensure content moderation aligns with Uganda's cultural and political context. This fosters a more transparent and responsive system of digital governance.

Build Strategic Partnerships: Form strong partnerships between media organizations, government agencies, and civil society to coordinate and enhance public diplomacy efforts. Support ongoing research and investment in new media technologies to bolster Uganda’s ability to effectively reach and engage global audiences.

5.4.3 Recommendations for Improving Public Diplomacy Strategies

Prioritize Localized Communication: Promote collaboration among media stakeholders and local communities to ensure content moderation and messaging are effective in local languages. This approach helps to identify and mitigate harmful content while respecting cultural sensitivities.

Uphold Freedom of Expression with Behavioral Oversight: Advocate for the protection of freedom of expression while simultaneously focusing on regulating **online behavior** rather

than just content. This strategy aims to encourage constructive dialogue and reduce the spread of harmful narratives.

Strengthen Accountability and Trust: Establish independent governance mechanisms to oversee media practices and enforce ethical standards. Furthermore, enhance human rights-based online law enforcement to protect individuals from online abuse and ensure a safe digital environment for public discourse.

5.5 Theoretical Implications of the Study

This study has important theoretical implications because it both supports and challenges what scholars already believe about media, politics, and diplomacy especially in the Ugandan context. The results expand Western-based theories and show how they work differently in a developing country setting.

The findings support Social Identity Theory and Selective Exposure Theory. Many respondents said that social media spreads hate speech and intolerance. This fits with the idea that people prefer information that supports their group identity. Social media creates “echo chambers” or “filter bubbles,” where people mostly see content that strengthens their existing political views. As Cass Sunstein explains, this leads to more political division, and the study confirms that this is happening in Uganda.

The study also goes beyond these theories by showing that media doesn’t just polarize it also creates a climate of fear and unease in society. This adds a new layer to our understanding of how media shapes the political environment.

The findings support the theory of Digital Diplomacy (Bjola & Holmes, 2015), which says social media has changed how governments interact with the public by making communication more direct and interactive. The study confirms that Uganda uses social media as a key tool to share messages and influence how it is seen internationally.

However, the study also challenges some optimistic views of digital diplomacy. While social media is important, traditional media like radio is still very influential in Uganda, especially for investigative journalism. This means that in developing countries, diplomacy depends on a dual media system with traditional media ensuring accountability and social media handling international outreach and engagement.

The study also adds new insights to communication and governance theories. Most respondents supported local oversight boards and independent governance systems, instead of leaving regulation to global tech companies. This supports the idea of "governance from below," where communities help shape rules that fit their culture and politics.

Another major finding is that 82% of respondents believe focusing on user behavior is better than only controlling content. This connects to Behavioral Economics and Choice Architecture theories, which argue that shaping how people interact with platforms is more effective than trying to monitor every single post. This shows that the best way to fight misinformation and harmful speech is not just punishment but creating better systems that guide online behavior in positive ways.

5.6 Research for further studies

The sources of social unrest may vary from one district to another and from one division to another. It is therefore, important that more studies be done in this area to establish whether there are varying causes in the different areas or if the causes are the same and what should be done to avoid future political and social unrests.

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APPENDIX I: RESEARCH QUESTIONAIRES

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.

My name is Akullo Gloria, and you have been selected for this interview due to your strategic role in media and diplomacy. This interview is a key component of my academic research project, which aims to assess the role of social media in enhancing public diplomacy in Uganda. This project is part of my Master's in Diplomacy and Global Studies at Nkumba University. The interview will take approximately 15 minutes.

Please be assured that all responses will be kept confidential and will be used solely for academic purposes. Thank you for your participation in this research.

Section A : Background information (please tick the appropriate alternative)

1. Gender

A. Male ☐ B. Female ☐

2. Age brackets

A. 20 – 29 years ☐ B. 30-39years ☐

C. 40-49years ☐ D. 50 and above ☐

3. Marital status:

Single ☐ b) Married ☐ c) Widow(er) ☐ d) Divorced/Separated ☐

4. Education Level

A. Secondary ☐ B. Diploma ☐

C. Bachelor's degree ☐ D. Masters and above ☐

6. For how long have you stayed in Lira City?

a) 1 year back ☐ b) 2 years back ☐

c) 3 years back ☐ d) Above 3years back ☐

7. What category are you in

……

Section B: The role of media in promoting political environment in Uganda

Please indicate your opinion as per the level of disagreement or agreement with the outlined statements using 1 to 5 scale guideline. 5= Strongly Agree 2- Agree, 3= Neutral, 4 =Disagree, 1= Strongly Disagree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
The media in Uganda publishes content that comprises hate speeches					
The media publishes/broadcasts messages of hatred and intolerance					
Media platforms such as Twitter, and facebook propagate issues of hate in Uganda					
Social Networking sites (SNS) communicate hate messages that are spread via different media are in different forms.					

In the last one month, you shared, tagged someone, forwarded, or reposted any hate content on social media					
In the last one month you received hate content messages on social media					
A big percentage of your friends on social media post hate content.					
The media prints/ publishes content that makes people might feel unease and intimidated					
You encounter hate messages on WhatsApp more often					
The content in most print media is usually full of discriminatory messages					
The media hands out material to the public or sections of the population containing hate speeches					
All media platforms expose people in varying degrees to hate speech in varying degrees					

Section C: Roles of media in promoting public diplomacy

Indicate the extent to which the following factors influences the performance among the people in Uganda in a scale of 1-5 where (1)-Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree (3) Not Sure, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree.

Statement	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
The radio broadcasts serve as official voices of the citizens (Democratic Information)					
Social media plays a crucial role in digitalized public diplomacy by enabling countries to effectively convey political messages					
Radio broadcasting plays an important role in publishing classified information held by security sector organizations without					

Radio broadcasting plays an important role in investigating and overseeing the work of the security agencies (Investigative Journalism)					
Social media plays a crucial role in digitalized public diplomacy by enabling countries to effectively convey political messages					
Radio broadcasts cover community safety issues comprehensively					
Overall, media, especially social media, has become a primary channel for states to engage with foreign publics, manage perceptions, and					
The print media serves as an official voice of the citizens (Democratic Information)					
New media allows states to monitor and respond to each other's public diplomacy practices, shaping new policies and improving existing ones					
The print media plays an important role in investigating and overseeing the work of the security agencies (Investigative Journalism)					
Media plays a crucial role in public diplomacy by facilitating communication between states and citizens through digital platform					
The digitalization of television broadcasting has further enhanced this role, providing interactive and thematic content that serves as a bridge for public diplomacy practices					
The Internet has revolutionized diplomatic communications, with social media platforms becoming indispensable tools for public diplomacy					
The print media covers community safety issues comprehensively					
Social media plays crucial role in public diplomacy by enabling two-way communication between states and foreign publics, diminishing diplomats' autonomy but enhancing direct government-to-public interaction					

Digital platforms, like Netflix, play a crucial role in public diplomacy by serving as bridges for cultural exchange and universal circulation of national culture, enhancing audience engagement and interaction					
The media plays a crucial role in public diplomacy by facilitating communication between states and citizens through digital platforms, enabling dialogue, influencing international relations, and understanding cultures and behaviors.					

Section D: The strategies used by media to improve public diplomacy in Uganda

The government should uphold freedom of expression					
There is need to focus on behavior rather than content					
Collaborate with local stakeholders to prioritize addressing content moderation in local languages					
Social media platforms and private actors should establish local oversight boards					
Establish and disclose clear criteria for identifying false information and guidelines for flagged content					
There is need to define the independence of local oversight boards					
Establish a regional oversight board for East African region					
Invest in local moderation teams that include local language experts					
The government should establish independent governance mechanisms					

Thank you for the co-operation

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.

My name is Akullo Gloria, and you have been selected for this interview due to your strategic role in media and diplomacy. This interview is a crucial part of my academic research project, which aims to assess the role of media in improving effective diplomacy in Uganda. This research is part of my Master's program in Diplomacy and Global Studies at Nkumba University. The interview will take approximately 15 minutes.

Please be assured that all responses will be kept confidential and will be used solely for academic purposes.

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your current category or role?
3. How long have you been residing in the city?
4. In order of preference, which social media platforms do you use most frequently? (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram)
5. What do you primarily use social media for?
6. How often do you use social media?
7. Do you believe media firms play a positive role in the conduct of diplomacy?
8. How does social media impact governance in your country?
9. How useful was social media during the COVID-19 pandemic?
10. To what extent does Uganda utilize social media in its public diplomacy efforts?
11. What are the roles of media in promoting public diplomacy?

12. What strategies does the media employ to influence and improve public diplomacy in Uganda?
13. Is there a dedicated employee responsible for managing social media in your organization, or do you handle it yourself?
14. Do you use social media actively (e.g., posting and engaging) or passively (e.g., just following)?
15. How do you promote your social media accounts, and how many followers do you have?
16. Do you consider social media a valuable tool for diplomacy? Does it enhance your ability to perform your job effectively?

Thank you for your time.

Thanks for your time