

Rethinking Diplomacy in the Digital Age: Leveraging Artificial Intelligence to Advance Zimbabwe's Foreign Policy Objectives

LIVINGSTONE KAZIZI¹, STABILE MANYEVERE², LAWRENCE MHANDARA³ AND
RONALD MANHIBI⁴

Abstract

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming diplomatic practices. It offers unprecedented opportunities for innovation, efficiency, and effectiveness in international relations. This article critically examines the adoption of AI-driven diplomacy within Zimbabwe's foreign policy framework, highlighting both its transformative potential and inherent challenges. Through a qualitative analysis of key stakeholder perceptions and a review of existing literature, the study reveals that AI can significantly enhance Zimbabwe's diplomatic engagements by improving data analysis, predictive modelling, and automated communication. These advancements can facilitate more informed decision-making, enable proactive diplomacy, and foster stronger relationships with international partners. The increased reliance on AI, however, raises questions about accountability, transparency, and the potential for biased algorithms to influence diplomatic outcomes. This article argues

¹ Department of Governance and Public Management, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe. profkazizi@gmail.com, (ORCID ID 0009-0009-7387-9398)

² Department of Governance and Public Management, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0964-9319>

³ Department of Governance and Public Management, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8635-4325>

⁴ Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Smart Technologies, Bindura University of Science Education, Bindura, Zimbabwe, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6262-0297>

that for Zimbabwe to leverage AI-driven diplomacy, it must invest in digital infrastructure, build AI literacy among diplomats, and establish robust regulations. This approach ought to prioritise human-centric AI design, ensuring that AI systems are transparent, explainable, and accountable. Ultimately, this research contributes to the discourse on digital diplomacy in developing contexts, offering insights into how AI can be harnessed to enhance Zimbabwe's international relations, while mitigating associated risks. By adopting a strategic and human-centric approach to AI-driven diplomacy, Zimbabwe can navigate the complexities of the digital age and promote its national interests more effectively.

Keywords: diplomacy, international relations, foreign affairs, diplomatic practice, digital infrastructure, digital age, policy

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the landscape of international relations, presenting both opportunities and challenges for diplomatic players (Bjola and Holmes, 2019). Zimbabwe, as the case with many other countries, faces the daunting task of adapting its diplomatic strategies to the digital age. Traditional diplomatic practices, often characterised by state-centric approaches and manual (human) processes, are becoming increasingly inadequate in addressing the complexities of global governance. The lack of a clear framework for integrating AI into diplomacy threatens Zimbabwe's ability to project its influence and navigate the intricacies of global politics. This research seeks to address this critical gap by exploring the potential of AI-driven diplomacy to advance Zimbabwe's foreign policy objectives.

The study examines the adoption of AI-driven diplomacy within Zimbabwe's foreign policy framework, highlighting its transformative potential and inherent challenges. This is done

with a view to developing strategies for effective AI-powered diplomacy. Meanwhile, concerns regarding data privacy, cybersecurity, and the erosion of human judgment in diplomatic decision-making pose substantial risks (Manor, 2019). Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions: How can AI enhance Zimbabwe's diplomatic capacity to advance its foreign policy objectives? What are the key challenges and risks associated with Zimbabwe's adoption of AI-powered diplomacy? How can Zimbabwe develop a robust AI diplomacy framework that aligns with its national interests and global norms?

The article is structured into eight sections, presenting a logical sequence of the research. It begins with the Conceptual Framework, followed by the Theoretical Framework, and then reviews existing Literature. The Research Methodology is outlined, leading to the presentation of Research Findings. These findings are then examined in the Discussion section. Finally, the article concludes with a summary of key points and Recommendations. This narrative flow provides a clear and coherent presentation of the research, guiding the reader through the study's foundation, methodology, results, and implications, offering a comprehensive understanding of AI-driven diplomacy in Zimbabwe.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study conceptualises AI as the development of computer systems that can perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as perception, reasoning, learning, and decision-making. According to Russell and Norvig (2010), AI is the study of intelligent behaviour in machines, which can perceive their environment, reason about the current state of the world, and take actions to achieve their goals. The European Commission's High-Level Expert Group on AI (2019) defines AI as:

“...systems that display intelligent behaviour by analysing their environment and taking actions - with some degree of autonomy - to achieve specific goals”.

Diplomacy refers to the conduct of international relations by negotiation and other peaceful means, including the use of diplomats and diplomatic missions (Berridge, 2015). According to Satow (1979), diplomacy is:

“The application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states... and global institutions, or more briefly, the conduct of business between states by peaceful means.”

In other words, diplomacy is the conduct of international relations through negotiation and other peaceful means, employing diplomats and missions to apply intelligence and tact in official interactions between sovereign states and global institutions (Berridge, 2015; Satow, 1979). It involves the use of peaceful means to resolve conflicts, negotiate agreements, and promote cooperation between states. It requires a deep understanding of the interests, needs, and values of different actors, as well as the ability to communicate effectively and build relationships (Nicolson, 1963; Kissinger, 1994).

The concept of AI has evolved significantly since its inception in the 1950s, with notable milestones including Turing's (1950) seminal work, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence", which laid the foundation for the field of AI. Today, AI is applied in various domains, including healthcare, finance, transportation, and education, among others (Gil de Zúñiga, Goyanes and Durotoye, 2023). The intersection of AI and diplomacy is a rapidly evolving field, with significant potential implications for international relations. AI can enhance diplomatic efforts by providing data-driven insights, improving communication, and facilitating negotiation (Al Midfa, 2024). It has the potential to revolutionise diplomacy by enhancing data analysis, predictive modelling, and automated communication (Kurbalija, 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework draws on the Digital Diplomacy Theory, which posits that the proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) transforms the conduct of international relations by shifting diplomatic functions from traditional state-centric practices to network-centric, data-driven interactions (Bjola and Holmes, 2015; Hocking and Melgund, 2015). In this context, AI operates as a catalytic layer that augments diplomatic capacity through predictive analytics, natural-language processing, and automated decision-support, thereby redefining the parameters of power projection and influence (Ullman and Verhulst, 2020). The framework integrates the Soft Power Theory (Nye, 2004) to explain how AI-enabled tools can amplify Zimbabwe's cultural, economic and institutional attractiveness, and the Technology Adoption Theory (Rogers, 2003) to assess the diffusion of AI innovations within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (MFAIT).

By combining these perspectives, the study conceptualises AI as both a strategic enabler enhancing diplomatic foresight, crisis response, and public diplomacy and as a governance challenge that demands new norms of transparency, accountability, and bias mitigation. Empirically, the framework is anchored in the Neo-functionalist Integration Theory (Haas, 1958), which suggests that incremental collaboration in technical domains can spill over into deeper political cooperation. For Zimbabwe, AI initiatives such as AI-driven data analytics for policy forecasting and AI-powered diplomatic communication platforms, are viewed as functional imperatives which can generate positive externalities for regional and global engagement. The framework outlines three dimensions for AI-driven diplomacy: technological infrastructure, institutional capacity, and normative alignment. These dimensions provide a structured approach to harness AI for Zimbabwe's foreign policy

objectives. The model helps navigate risks like bias, sovereignty, and dependency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Countries around the world are increasingly employing AI diplomacy to achieve their foreign policy objectives, with some nations standing out for their innovative approaches. Countries such as China, the US, the UAE, Russia, and the UK are good examples (AIATC, 2024). The UAE, for instance, has appointed a dedicated Minister for AI, signalling its commitment to harnessing AI for societal benefit and human-centric development (Al Olama, 2024; Kurbalija, 2024). China is another country that has made significant strides in AI diplomacy, with its 2017 plan aiming for global leadership in AI by 2030 (Kurbalija, 2024). Beijing's AI-driven foreign policy initiatives, such as the Belt and Road digital strategy, are extending China's global reach through AI-enhanced trade, surveillance, and diplomacy (The Geopolitics, 2025). As such, Zimbabwe can leverage on its cordial relations with China to advance its AI driven diplomacy.

The United States is also leveraging AI to maintain global influence, enhance cybersecurity, and shape international regulations (*ibid.*). U.S. diplomats are already benefiting from AI at embassies overseas, using tools like ChatGPT to draft daily media summaries (Hunt, 2023). The US State Department is investing in AI training for its workforce, ensuring diplomats understand and can leverage AI tools effectively (ICTworks, 2024). Thus, Zimbabwe ought to catch up in an increasingly globalised and competitive world. Countries, such as Canada, **France, Germany**, and Mauritius, have also formalised their approaches to AI diplomacy, reflecting their national priorities and ethical considerations (Kurbalija, 2024). These countries are developing AI strategies to challenge **Western dominance** and redefine global governance structures, seeing AI as a tool

for both economic growth and geopolitical influence (The Geopolitics, 2025).

The European Union (EU) is positioning itself as a leader in AI ethics, advocating for global AI governance frameworks to regulate its use in diplomacy and beyond (Landini, F., 2025; Özkiziltan, D. and The Geopolitics., 2025). The EU's AI Act establishes a risk-based framework for AI systems, setting global precedents for ethical, safe, and human-centric AI (Marcinek, 2024; Tech Diplomacy Institute, 2025). Indeed, if left unregulated, countries may abuse or unfairly utilise AI, disrupting the peaceful co-existence between international players. The growing body of work on AI-driven diplomacy tells a story of promise intertwined with caution. Early studies, such as Bjola and Holmes (2015) and the DiploFoundation (2019), point to AI's ability to turbo-charge data analysis, build predictive models, and sharpen decision-making, making diplomatic work faster and more evidence-based. Yet the same authors, together with Floridi *et al.* (2021), warn that these gains come with nagging concerns, questions of accountability, transparency, and the risk that biased algorithms could shape outcomes in ways that are hard to detect or correct.

Kurbalija (2019) adds that while AI can surface richer, more timely information for negotiators, it also demands a new skill set from diplomats, who must learn to interpret and guide the technology rather than simply rely on it. This competency gap is echoed by Kshetri (2018), who highlights practical obstacles such as patchy digital infrastructure and a shortage of AI-savvy personnel, both of which slow adoption. Moreover, the prospect of autonomous decision-making introduces ethical and security dilemmas that many ministries are still unprepared to address.

Putting these insights together, scholars converge on a roadmap for countries like Zimbabwe that wish to reap the benefits

without falling prey to the pitfalls. The consensus is that a strategic, three-prided approach is essential: (i) Invest in digital backbone: modern, reliable connectivity and data platforms form the foundation for any meaningful AI deployment; (ii) Cultivate human capital: systematic training programmes must be rolled out so that diplomats become comfortable with AI tools, data analytics, and algorithmic thinking; and (iii) Build governance structures: clear regulatory frameworks, ethical guidelines, and oversight mechanisms are needed to ensure accountability and keep bias in check.

In the context of developing countries such as Zimbabwe, the digital divide and limited access to AI-driven diplomacy may exacerbate existing inequalities in international relations (Manor, 2019). However, AI also presents opportunities for Zimbabwe to leapfrog traditional diplomatic practices and adopt more innovative and effective approaches to international relations. According to a report by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2020), many countries in Africa, including Zimbabwe, are investing heavily in AI and digital technologies to improve their diplomatic capabilities. The report highlights the potential benefits of AI-driven diplomacy, including enhanced data analysis and predictive modelling, but also notes the need for robust regulatory frameworks to mitigate associated risks.

As Zimbabwe seeks to engage, re-engage, and reaffirm its relations with the rest of the world, AI offers a strategic avenue for power projection and enhanced global influence. Zimbabwe gained independence from British colonial rule in 1980. Soon after the attainment of independence, Harare became “Southern Africa’s diplomatic hub and a major player in the Frontline States’ efforts to abolish apartheid and colonialism in Southern Africa” (Machingaidze, 2006:1). Zimbabwe espoused a policy of

non-alignment in international affairs, and its foreign policy trajectory was governed by:

“sanctity of the right to life, self-determination, defence of national sovereignty, anti-imperialism, equality of sovereign states, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states” (Machingaidze, 2006:1).

Zimbabwe adhered to the policies of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and the Commonwealth.

Since its independence in 1980, Zimbabwe enjoyed favourable foreign relations. However, at the turn of the new millennium in 2000, its relations with western governments and multilateral financial institutions became sour over its implementation of a Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). The programme redistributed agricultural land from the minority white commercial farmers to the majority landless native black Zimbabweans. The FTLRP in Zimbabwe posed a serious threat to Western foreign policies. According to Chigora (2007:175);

“His (the late former President Mugabe) land reform policy has been presented and widely interpreted as a challenge to policies of the rich nations and a refusal to conduct its economy according to the dictates of the World Bank. Consequently, Mugabe is regarded.... as a hero of the poor peoples of the world, standing up against the bullying by champions of liberal democracy, for example...Tony Blair and George Bush. [The land reform].... contradicts the very visions of the Blair (British) government, which, among other things, encourages adherence to the tenets of neo-liberal economic policies.

The land reform in Zimbabwe was, therefore, sabotaged and demonised by the West to prevent the spread of such reforms across former colonies in Africa and elsewhere.

Zimbabwe received widespread condemnation chiefly for the implementation of the land reform. The image portrayed internationally has been tattered due to reports of violence,

instability and abandonment of the rule of law, which has generated a serious challenge to modern developments on democracy and human rights (Chigora, 2007). Consequently, Zimbabwe seemingly lost several, 'friends' especially those from the West and/or West linked institutions (*ibid.*), through suspension from, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Commonwealth. The US and the EU applied targeted sanctions; Scandinavian countries which supported Zimbabwe's social services, especially health, suspended aid and threatened to close their missions (*ibid.*). The far-reaching consequences of these sanctions stretched from economic collapse, increased global isolation and political unrest.

In 2003, Zimbabwe adopted the "Look East Foreign Policy" as a mitigation strategy to the Western-imposed sanctions (*ibid.*). Since 2017, Zimbabwe's foreign policy thrust has centred around engagement, re-engagement, and reaffirmation, with a focus on promoting economic growth, strengthening regional and global partnerships, and asserting its sovereignty (Mnangagwa, 2018; Mlambo, 2019; Zimbabwe Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). The country's foreign policy doctrine, "Friend to all and enemy to none", reflects its commitment to maintaining good relations with all nations, regardless of their ideological leanings, cultural backgrounds, or economic systems (Chigora, 2017; Zimbabwe Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

This approach aims to promote regional and global stability, foster economic cooperation, and create an environment conducive to the peaceful resolution of conflicts (Mlambo, 2019; Zimbabwe Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Zimbabwe's engagement and re-engagement efforts have led to significant economic growth, with its GDP increasing from \$16 billion to over \$50 billion since President Emmerson Mnangagwa assumed office (Mnangagwa, 2018; World Bank, 2020). The country's strategic partnerships with regional and global powers,

including China, South Africa, and Western nations, have also strengthened its global presence (Chigora, 2017; Mlambo, 2019). Zimbabwe's foreign policy is presenting a lucrative avenue for improved diplomatic relations with the rest of the world and Zimbabwe can leverage on AI driven diplomacy to advance its foreign policy objectives.

This literature paints AI-driven diplomacy as a double-edged sword, one that can dramatically enhance analytical power and decision speed, but only if nations are willing to upgrade infrastructure, close the skills gap, and embed robust governance. Without that balance, the technology risks becoming a source of opacity and risk rather than a catalyst for smarter, more effective diplomacy. The study therefore, seeks to identify and analyse the benefits of AI-driven diplomacy in Zimbabwe's international relations, including its potential to enhance data analysis, predictive modelling, and communication and collaboration; examine the challenges of implementing AI-driven diplomacy in Zimbabwe's MFAIT, including infrastructure, skills, and regulatory framework constraints; and develop strategies for Zimbabwe's diplomatic service to leverage AI-driven diplomacy and enhance its international relations, including recommendations for investing in AI infrastructure, developing skills, and addressing risks associated with AI adoption.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore AI-driven diplomacy in Zimbabwe's international relations, informed by the interpretivist paradigm. A case study design focused on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (MFAIT), with 15 key stakeholders selected through purposive sampling. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews and document analysis, with thematic analysis using NVivo software identifying benefits such as

enhanced data analysis, improved predictive capabilities and challenges such as the limited infrastructure and skills gap of AI-driven diplomacy. Ethical considerations prioritised informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, ensuring participants' rights and dignity were respected.

The research had access to a range of resources that facilitated the study on AI-driven diplomacy in Zimbabwe. The University of Zimbabwe library provided access to academic databases (JSTOR and EBSCO) and journals (*Journal of International Relations*, *Journal of Artificial Intelligence*, and *Journal of Diplomacy*), offering valuable insights into AI applications in international relations. The National Archives of Zimbabwe offered historical context and background information on Zimbabwe's diplomatic efforts, including documents and records on diplomatic strategies and policies. Interview tools (audio recorders and transcription software) enabled the collection of primary data from 15 key stakeholders, including diplomats, policymakers, and AI experts.

The study used NVivo software for qualitative data analysis, identifying themes, patterns, and trends in the data. This combination of resources provided a robust foundation for the study, enabling it to collect and analyse a wide range of data, triangulate findings, and ensure reliability and credibility. The study's limitations include the potential for bias in the selection of participants and the reliance on qualitative data. However, the use of multiple data sources and the inductive approach helped to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. The study's findings may not be generalisable to other countries or contexts.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings reveal that AI-driven diplomacy offers opportunities for Zimbabwe to enhance its global engagement

and address complex global challenges. However, AI challenges such as limited infrastructure and skills gaps among others have hindered the adoption of AI-driven diplomacy.

The findings of this study reveal that AI-driven diplomacy has the potential to transform the way Zimbabwe engages with the global community. The benefits of AI-driven diplomacy include enhanced data analysis, predictive modelling, improved communication and collaboration, more effective crisis management and conflict resolution, enhanced public diplomacy, and more effective and efficient diplomatic reporting and analysis.

The study finds that AI can rapidly process immense amounts of data, providing valuable insights to inform foreign policy decisions and diplomatic efforts. For instance, AI can analyse economic indicators, trade patterns, and social media trends to identify emerging opportunities and challenges. This enables diplomats to make informed decisions about trade and investment opportunities, as was also highlighted by Kurbalija (2019) in his work on digital diplomacy.

The study also shows that Zimbabwe can benefit from AI models that can predict economic growth, enabling diplomats to identify areas of potential investment and development. Additionally, AI can analyse complex international issues, providing diplomats with data-driven solutions to improve decision-making. Another Ministry of Foreign Affairs official revealed that:

“AI-driven diplomacy is not just about efficiency, it's about effectiveness. We need to use AI to improve our diplomatic decision making and outcomes.”

This relates to findings by Bjola and Holmes (2019), who ascertained that AI can facilitate more informed decision-

making, enabling diplomats to respond effectively to emerging global challenges.

The study further affirms that Zimbabwe's AI adoption can improve diplomatic communication and collaboration. AI-powered chatbots can facilitate real-time communication with international partners, enabling diplomats to respond quickly to emerging challenges. AI-driven language translation tools can also facilitate communication with partners who speak different languages, breaking down language barriers and enhancing global engagement.

The study also found that AI-driven diplomacy can facilitate international cooperation, enabling Zimbabwe to address complex global challenges. For instance, AI can facilitate real-time communication and collaboration with international partners, enabling diplomats to respond quickly to emerging challenges. One participant, a MFAIT official opined that:

“AI-driven diplomacy can also facilitate real-time communication and collaboration with international partners, in responding quickly to emerging challenges and international natural disasters such as Cyclone Idai that had devastating effects in four countries in the SADC region.”

The study notices that AI can lead to more effective emergency response planning and conflict resolution in Zimbabwe. Another MFAIT official indicated observed that;

“AI can help us anticipate and respond to diplomatic crises more effectively, but we need to ensure that our systems are secure and transparent.”

The study notes that AI-powered predictive analytics can help identify potential crises, enabling diplomats to take proactive measures to prevent or mitigate conflicts. AI-driven simulation tools can also help Zimbabwe's diplomats to conduct effective scenario planning and training exercises, enabling diplomats to craft effective response plans for emergencies.

The study also observes that AI adoption can enhance Zimbabwe's public diplomacy. AI-powered social media analysis tools can help Zimbabwe's diplomats to identify emerging trends and sentiments, enabling diplomats to develop targeted public diplomacy campaigns. AI-driven content generation tools can also help the Zimbabwe MFAIT in the creation of engaging and effective public diplomacy materials.

Furthermore, the study records that the adoption of AI driven diplomacy is vital for effective and efficient diplomatic reporting and analysis. AI-powered diplomatic reporting tools can analyse and summarise large volumes of data, enabling diplomats to quickly identify key trends and insights. AI-driven analysis tools can also facilitate more in-depth analyses of complex international issues, providing Zimbabwe's diplomats with valuable insights and recommendations. Moreover, AI can enhance Zimbabwe's diplomatic presence and engagement through virtual and augmented reality experiences. AI-powered virtual reality tools can facilitate immersive and interactive diplomatic engagements, enabling diplomats to engage with international partners in new and innovative ways. AI-driven augmented reality tools can also facilitate more effective and engaging diplomatic briefings and presentations.

The study, however, notes that the adoption of AI-driven diplomacy in Zimbabwe also poses significant challenges. One of the major obstacles is limited infrastructure. Zimbabwe's diplomatic service lacks adequate technological infrastructure, hindering AI adoption. This includes inadequate hardware, software, and network infrastructure, which limits the ability of diplomats to effectively utilise AI-driven diplomacy.

Furthermore, diplomats require training and development opportunities to effectively utilise AI-driven diplomacy,

highlighting the need for capacity-building initiatives. A Zimbabwe Institute of Diplomacy official suggested that:

“We [Zimbabwe] need to invest in AI literacy and capacity building for our diplomats. It's not just about technology, it's about people and processes.”

Another participant, an AI Expert at Data Age Solutions, a Harare based AI firm added that:

“Capacity building is key to successful AI adoption. We [Zimbabwe] need to train our diplomats to use AI effectively and responsibly.”

Another challenge observed is the risk associated with autonomous decision-making. AI's potential for autonomous decision-making poses risks, including encoded bias and lack of accountability. An AI expert, from the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) lamented that:

“I am concerned about the potential for biased algorithms to influence our diplomatic decisions. We need to be careful about how we design and implement AI systems.”

Another participant, an AI expert from Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) added that:

“We [Zimbabwe] need to prioritise human-centric AI design, ensuring that AI systems are transparent, explainable, and accountable.”

This is a concern also raised by Manor (2019), who notes that AI-driven diplomacy can exacerbate existing inequalities in international relations if not managed carefully. The use of AI in decision-making also raises questions about accountability and transparency, highlighting the need for robust regulatory frameworks to ensure responsible AI use. The study also observes that Zimbabwe's Minister of ICTs noted the need for a regulatory framework for the use of AI across all sectors. Further, the results of the study note that the government should prioritise investing in AI infrastructure, developing skills, and addressing risks associated with AI adoption. This will enable Zimbabwe to harness the potential of AI-driven

diplomacy and enhance its global engagement. By implementing these recommendations, Zimbabwe can harness the potential of AI-driven diplomacy to enhance its diplomatic efforts and achieve its national interests in the digital age. A Zimbabwean diplomat resident in South Africa advised that:

“International partnerships are crucial for accessing AI expertise and resources. We can't do this alone.”

The study notes that the benefits of adopting AI powered diplomacy in Zimbabwe far outweigh its challenges. One of the participants, a diplomat, Zimbabwe Embassy, UK concluded that:

“The benefits of AI-driven diplomacy far outweigh the risks, but we need to be aware of the potential challenges and address them proactively.”

It is definitely true that the benefits exceed the challenges. By leveraging AI, governments can enhance diplomatic effectiveness, promote international cooperation, and address pressing global challenges. With proactive planning and strategic implementation, the potential risks can be mitigated, unlocking new opportunities for global collaboration and progress.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are consistent with existing literature on AI-driven diplomacy, highlighting the potential benefits and challenges of AI adoption in international relations. The study's findings on the benefits of AI-driven diplomacy, such as enhanced data analysis, predictive modelling, and improved communication and collaboration, are supported by Kurbalija (2019) and Bjola and Holmes (2019). The study established that AI can facilitate more informed decision-making, enabling diplomats to respond effectively to emerging global challenges, is consistent with Bjola and Holmes (2019). Therefore, AI can enhance public diplomacy and facilitate the creation of engaging

and effective public diplomacy materials. The study is a new contribution to the literature on AI-driven diplomacy in Zimbabwe. From the findings of the study, it is noted that there are AI challenges of adoption, such as limited infrastructure and skills gaps, and this is consistent with existing literature (Manor, 2019). The study's finding that AI's potential for autonomous decision-making poses risks, including encoded bias and lack of accountability, is a concern raised by Manor (*ibid.*). This study fills academic gaps in Zimbabwe by providing insights into the potential benefits and challenges of AI-driven diplomacy in the Zimbabwean context. The study provides recommendations for investing in AI infrastructure, developing skills, and addressing risks associated with AI adoption, which can inform policy and practice in Zimbabwe. The findings have significant implications for Zimbabwe's diplomatic efforts, highlighting the need for the government to prioritise investing in AI infrastructure, developing skills, and addressing risks associated with AI adoption. This will enable Zimbabwe to harness the potential of AI-driven diplomacy and enhance its global engagement.

In terms of filling academic gaps, this study provides new insights into the potential benefits and challenges of AI-driven diplomacy in Zimbabwe, a context which has received limited attention in existing literature. Findings on the benefits of AI-driven diplomacy, such as enhanced data analysis and predictive modelling, are new contributions to the literature on AI-driven diplomacy in Zimbabwe. Overall, the study findings are consistent with existing literature on AI-driven diplomacy, and provide new insights into the potential benefits and challenges of AI adoption in Zimbabwe.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that AI-driven diplomacy has the potential to transform Zimbabwe's international relations by enhancing

data analysis, improving predictive capabilities, and automating communication. The study finds that AI can rapidly process immense amounts of data, providing valuable insights to inform foreign policy decisions and diplomatic efforts. This can enable diplomats to make informed decisions about trade and investment opportunities, as well as identify emerging challenges and opportunities.

The use of AI in data analysis can also facilitate predictive modelling, enabling diplomats to anticipate and prepare for future challenges and opportunities. AI models can predict economic growth, enabling diplomats to identify areas of potential investment and development. Additionally, AI can analyse complex international issues, providing diplomats with data-driven solutions to improve decision-making. However, the adoption of AI-driven diplomacy in Zimbabwe's international relations is associated with several challenges. One of the major obstacles is limited infrastructure. Zimbabwe's diplomatic service lacks adequate technological infrastructure, hindering AI adoption. This includes inadequate hardware, software, and network infrastructure, which limits the ability of diplomats to effectively utilise AI-driven diplomacy. There is need to engage friendly countries such as China, Russia, South Africa, among others, for technological transfer.

Furthermore, diplomats require training and development opportunities to effectively utilise AI-driven diplomacy, highlighting the need for capacity-building initiatives. The study observes that there is a significant skills gap among diplomats, which needs to be addressed to ensure the effective adoption of AI-driven diplomacy. Another challenge is the risk associated with autonomous decision-making. AI's potential for autonomous decision-making poses risks, including encoded bias and lack of accountability. This is a concern raised by Manor (2019), who notes that AI-driven diplomacy can

exacerbate existing inequalities in international relations if not managed carefully.

To harness the potential of AI-driven diplomacy, the study recommends investing in digital infrastructure, developing the skills and capacity of its diplomats, and establishing robust regulatory frameworks to mitigate the risks associated with AI. Developing adequate technological infrastructure is critical to support AI adoption in Zimbabwe. This includes investing in hardware, software, and network infrastructure, as well as ensuring reliable and secure internet connectivity. Providing training and development opportunities for diplomats can enhance their skills and knowledge in AI-driven diplomacy. This includes training on data analysis, predictive modelling, and AI-driven decision-making. Developing strategies to mitigate risks associated with autonomous decision-making can ensure responsible AI use. This includes establishing robust regulatory frameworks, ensuring transparency and accountability, and addressing issues of bias and fairness.

The Government of Zimbabwe should prioritise investing in AI infrastructure, developing skills, and addressing risks associated with AI adoption. This will enable Zimbabwe to harness the potential of AI-driven diplomacy and enhance its global engagement. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade should establish a task force to oversee the implementation of AI-driven diplomacy, including the development of a national AI strategy and the establishment of an AI diplomacy unit. The government should also establish partnerships with international organisations, academia, and the private sector to leverage expertise and resources in AI development. By implementing these recommendations, Zimbabwe can harness the potential of AI-driven diplomacy to enhance its international relations and achieve its national

interests in the digital age. The benefits of AI-driven diplomacy are numerous.

AI can enhance data analysis, improve predictive capabilities, and automate communication. AI-powered chatbots can facilitate real-time communication with international partners, enabling diplomats to respond quickly to emerging challenges. AI can also improve decision-making by providing diplomats with data-driven solutions to complex international issues. AI-driven diplomacy can facilitate international cooperation, enabling Zimbabwe to address complex global challenges. However, the challenges of AI-driven diplomacy should not be underestimated. Data privacy concerns, cybersecurity risks, and limited infrastructure are just a few of the challenges that need to be addressed.

In conclusion, AI-driven diplomacy has the potential to transform Zimbabwe's international relations. However, the adoption of AI-driven diplomacy is associated with several challenges that need to be addressed. The Government of Zimbabwe should prioritise investing in AI infrastructure, developing skills, and addressing risks associated with AI adoption. This will enable Zimbabwe to harness the potential of AI-driven diplomacy and enhance its global engagement.

To harness the potential of AI-driven diplomacy, Zimbabwe should take the following steps: Firstly, investing in digital infrastructure is critical to support AI adoption in the country. This includes investing in hardware, software, and network infrastructure, as well as ensuring reliable and secure internet connectivity. Adequate technological infrastructure will enable diplomats to effectively utilise AI-driven diplomacy and enhance their diplomatic efforts. Zimbabwe can allocate a budget to finance digital-infrastructure development and leverage on development partner grants. For example, South Africa engaged

the World Bank, the Africa Development Bank (AfDB) and public-private partnerships to finance infrastructure and training (Mlambo, 2020). Secondly, developing the skills and capacity of diplomats is essential to ensure the effective adoption of AI-driven diplomacy. Providing training and development opportunities for diplomats can enhance their skills and knowledge in AI-driven diplomacy, including data analysis, predictive modelling, and AI-driven decision-making. To implement this Zimbabwe can create a Diplomatic AI Academy in partnership with local universities (University of Zimbabwe, NUST, BUSE and HIT) and international bodies (AU, ITU) which can offer short-term certifications in data analytics, machine learning, and digital diplomacy for MFAIT staff.

Thirdly, establishing robust regulatory frameworks is necessary to mitigate risks associated with AI. This includes developing strategies to address issues of bias and fairness, ensuring transparency and accountability, and establishing clear guidelines for AI adoption in diplomatic efforts. Zimbabwe can implement end-to-end encryption, multi-factor authentication, and a national cyber-defence hub under the Minister of Information Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services (MICTPCS) to safeguard diplomatic communications. Fourthly, developing a national AI strategy and establishing an AI diplomacy unit can oversee the implementation of AI-driven diplomacy. This unit should ensure that AI-driven diplomacy aligns with national interests. It can also provide guidance and support to diplomats in their use of AI-driven diplomacy. The unit should pilot the project to test its efficacy. For example, Zimbabwe can form a cross-ministerial AI diplomacy task force which includes MFAIT; MICTPCS, Ministry of Finance and Investment Promotion and the National Security Council to align policy, budgeting, and international partnerships.

In South Africa, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) has piloted AI-driven analytics platforms that sift through large volumes of open-source data, social-media trends, economic indicators, and security alerts, to generate real-time briefs for diplomats. These tools have reportedly cut down the time needed to prepare country-risk assessments by 40 %, allowing South African missions to respond more swiftly to emerging crises (Mlambo, 2020). Rwanda, meanwhile, has taken a bold, tech-first approach under its Vision 2050 agenda. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation launched an AI-enabled diplomatic dashboard in 2022, integrating natural-language-processing (NLP) models that translate and summarise multilingual diplomatic correspondence in real time. The dashboard also incorporates predictive analytics to forecast bilateral trade opportunities, which has attracted foreign investment and positioned Rwanda as a hub for AI innovation in East Africa (Rwanda Ministry of ICT, 2022).

Lastly, establishing partnerships with international organisations, nation-states, academia, and the private sector can leverage expertise and resources in AI development, enabling Zimbabwe to stay abreast of global developments in AI and ensure its diplomatic efforts remain competitive and effective. For example, South Africa’s National AI Strategy (2020) emphasises the use of AI for “smart diplomacy”, encouraging partnerships with universities and the private sector to build local talent pipelines. Zimbabwe can join the AU’s AI Continental Strategy and SADC’s Digital Economy Hub to access funding, best-practice sharing, and joint AI research initiatives.

By adopting a strategic approach to AI-driven diplomacy, Zimbabwe can effectively leverage the transformative potential of artificial intelligence to augment its diplomatic capabilities,

foster more efficacious international relations, and advance its national interests in the digital era. This entails cultivating a synergistic relationship between technological innovation, diplomatic acumen, and policy frameworks, thereby enabling the nation to navigate the complexities of global governance, promote its strategic objectives, and safeguard its sovereignty in an increasingly interconnected and technology-mediated world order.

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