



Social Media Influence on Informal Diplomacy and Humanitarian Intervention in the May 2024 Rescue of Trafficked Nigerians in Mali

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ABSTRACT

Background: The rise in the use of social media has transformed how certain issues like humanitarian acts gain visibility and attract interventions. In transnational human trafficking, formal diplomatic processes and bureaucracy often delay and hinder rescue efforts, this has created a gap that non state actors increasingly attempt to fill through informal diplomatic engagement.

Objective: This paper examined the influence of social media as a tool for informal diplomacy and humanitarian intervention in the May 2024 rescue of a Nigerian victim of human trafficking in Mali. It specifically investigated the role that informal actors play in facilitating the release of the trafficked victim; evaluated how social media narratives during the rescue campaign shaped diplomatic actions and assessed how the government responded to the online pressure.

Method: Anchored on social network theory, the study adopted a qualitative research design, employing content and narrative analysis of social media interactions and advocacy campaigns during the rescue operation.

Results: Findings reveal that non-state actors such as activists, journalists and online publics were instrumental in mobilising attention and coordinating efforts. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Youtube and Facebook served as spaces for storytelling, networked mobilisation and engagement. Prevalent narratives framed around justice, empathy and national responsibility generated significant pressure which propelled institutional response and eventually contributed to the rescue of the victim.

Conclusion: The study concluded that social media has revolutionised classical diplomacy by encouraging citizen participation and strengthening informal diplomatic channels in humanitarian affairs.

Unique Contribution: It contributes to scholarship by demonstrating how social media-driven informal diplomacy can complement formal mechanisms in addressing the menace of human trafficking particularly in Africa.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends that a structured digital diplomacy framework be developed and government-citizen collaboration encouraged for timely humanitarian response

Keywords: Informal diplomacy, Social media Advocacy, Humanitarian intervention, Human Trafficking, Nigerian Victim, Mali.



INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy, in the past, was mainly known to be concerned and confined to formal relationship between one state to another, heads of state, or foreign offices, serving as the only paradigm that could be employed in interactional relationship concerning issues that existed between them. However, over the past few years, a new paradigm, referred to as informal diplomacy has emerged, which is proving to be an effective and increasingly necessary component of global relations. This paradigm which Scott-Smith (2015) also calls “unofficial diplomacy,” “private diplomacy,” or “citizen diplomacy,” encompasses a range of practices outside formal protocol and treaty- negotiation channels or representation. Unlike formal diplomacy which appears to be protocol-bound and rigid, informal diplomacy is less bound by rigid protocol, more flexible because it often involves “non-state” actors like diasporas, civil society, religious groups, cultural actors, scholars, media, businessmen and even citizens of a country.

Various scholars have tried to highlight the core relevance of informal diplomacy. Scott-Smith (2015) asserts that informal diplomacy relies on the local expertise of private interlocutors and it is useful for facilitating changes in relationships that may be brought to a point where development can take place. This submission reiterates that diplomatic paradigm employs information and other resources that are within the confines of unofficial bodies involved in the relationship to resolve issues. In the same vein, Chen (2021), noted in Styrnik, Ishchenko and Kuz (2024) expresses that international relations and diplomacy are closely related, and the effectiveness of one of them depends on the effectiveness of the other. When formal diplomacy and negotiation processes fail, it results in disorder in international relations and often bring about mistrust. In certain cases, formal diplomacy may not be effective or it may be constrained such as during the breakdown of diplomatic relations, armed conflict, political tensions or inter-ethnic hostilities. In these cases, informal channels of communication and ‘track two’ diplomacy becomes necessary to manage conflicts and facilitate dialogues. This position suggests that in as much as diplomacy cannot be removed from the relationship between states and countries, informal diplomacy has proven more effective where formal diplomacy is lacking, and there are indeed situations where formal diplomacy may be lacking or delayed. Moreover, one of the notable tools that makes diplomacy to become a public paradigm for approaching international affairs, especially in the 21st century, is the emergence of social media. Stein (2011) and Seib (2012) establish that the application of social media in the diplomacy has been hailed as a transformative development in international politics. In other words, the actions that used to be officially restricted to governmental institutions and their protocol bodies on the affairs and wellbeing of a state can now be handled by citizens through social media. Bjola and Jiang (2015); Odoemelam (2011) equally assert that social media does not only bypass the traditional hierarchical structures of diplomatic communications, it also enables ordinary citizens to participate and lend their voices in political discourse. This shift, including its implication, accounts for social media’s emergence as a defining feature of the ‘new public diplomacy’.

Social media now serves as a means of inter-connectivity in that it has become increasingly popular components of our everyday lives and have provided contexts where people across the world can communicate, exchange messages, share knowledge, and interact with each other regardless of the distance (Sawyer, 2011; Nwonyi et al., 2024). This explains the strong



connection between social media and informal diplomacy because of its attributes of being adaptable and more responsive in changing technological, social, and political contexts. Social media could reach where official diplomacy may not or will not, having been constrained by tight protocol, political risk, lack of funds, or even slow decision making. Furthermore, informal diplomatic processes provide more room for experimentation, encourages interaction with publics, and offer greater leverage to shape narratives, listen to stakeholders, build networks and establish trust from the ground up, thus, complementing formal diplomacy. These advantages make informal diplomacy effective in addressing certain issues such as kidnapping, human trafficking, among others.

In recent years, human trafficking has notably, been one of the grievous violations of human rights throughout the African states including Nigeria and other West African countries. Incidents abound on how citizens are sold out to European countries under the guise of greener pastures. Traffickers exploit their victims, exporting them from one African country to another. Ogunniyi and Idowu (2022) note that West Africa has long been characterized by high levels of regular and irregular migration, which has provided opportunities for traffickers. Sadly, Nigeria has emerged a main subject in the discourse of human trafficking as its influence has become notoriously rampant in recent years. Investigations have established that within West African countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Togo and others, the migration of traffickers has been apparently incessant, ranging from Nigeria to Togo, Togo to Nigeria, Nigeria to Senegal, Ghana, Ivory-coast, to mention but a few. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2006:11) affirms that ‘Nigeria is a centre of trafficking in human beings, especially women and children. It is an origin, transit and destination country for trafficked children and serves predominantly as an origin country for trafficked women’.

Specifically, the case of Adeola George, Jumoke George’s (a popular actress) daughter and a victim of human trafficking to Mali, the intersection of social media and Yakubu Oyiza Hope’s effective move, which is an act of informal diplomacy serves centrally to her release. After the outcry of Jumoke George on the YouTube channel programme *TalkToB* of the popular Nollywood actor, Biola Adebayo, about her daughter who had been trafficked to Mali since past four years, Oyiza, a Nigerian ex-trafficking victim, took it upon herself to travel to Mali and locate the victim. Through her Facebook page and blog, she shared her journey to Mali, till she located the victim’s hideout and brought her to the Nigerian embassy and eventually secured her rescue.

With the level of atrocities against human right order, it appears that official or formal diplomacy has not been able to successfully rescue the victims or stop the process without the full intervention of informal means. This is understandable as formal diplomacy often proves slow and bureaucratic because of the protocols and formality involved, such that before the state could write to another state on behalf of a victim, the victim might have lost his or her life.

Ogunniyi and Idowu (2022) assert that although all 15 West African states have widely ratified the Palermo Protocol (an international agreement signed in Palermo, Italy, to fight human trafficking), the implementation in the sub-region remains unclear...and further excludes the prospect of human trafficking by individuals who are not working within an organised criminal



group. Since the formal diplomacy has become somewhat unreliable for the quick rescue of victims of human trafficking, the emergence of social media which now serves as informal diplomacy, has become an alternative. Studies abound on formal diplomacy and human trafficking, victims and survivors of human trafficking in formal diplomacy contexts (Vanderberg & Levy (2012); Hynes (2023); Nwafor (2022); Srikantiah (2007); Nguyen & Luong (2023), but few exists on the role that social media and informal actors can play or have played in the rescue of trafficked victims. This paper, therefore, seeks to explore the intersection of social media and the intervention of an ex-victim of human trafficking Yakubu Oyiza, in the quest to advocate for the rescue of Adeola, the Nigerian human trafficking victim in Mali.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The paper aims to explore how social media facilitated informal diplomatic efforts which led to the rescue of a Nigerian victim of human trafficking from Mali. The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the role that informal actors play in facilitating the release of the trafficked victim
2. evaluate how prevalent social media narratives during the rescue campaign shaped informal diplomatic actions leading to the release of the trafficked victim
3. assess how governmental institution responded to the informal diplomatic pressure generated through social media engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is anchored on social network theory, a theoretical approach that focuses on social relations. Social network theory is a complex, interdisciplinary field that draws on and evolves as an extension of sociology, psychology and political science. According to Scott (1991), there exists three lines of research that contributed to the development of social network theory and they include “the socio-metric analysis tradition, which relies on graph theory methods from mathematics; the interpersonal relations tradition, which focuses on the formation of *cliques* among a group of individuals; and an anthropology tradition that explores the structure of community relations in less developed societies” (Liu et al, 2017:1). Wasserman and Faust (1994) explain the dimension of workings of these three lines as the socio-metric perspective on social networks that were developed with a focus on structural characteristics, including the relative position of individuals nodes within the networks. During this period, researchers also advanced social network analysis by introducing techniques such as block modelling and multidimensional scaling. While block modelling examines the specific location of nodes within a network, which allows researchers to identify nodes that occupy similar structural positions, multidimensional scaling translates social relationships into socio-metric distances, enabling the visualisation of these relationships within a mapped social space.

Based on the exposition above, there exists a close relationship between individuals (social actors) with similar interest who disseminate information through social space (Facebook, YouTube, twitter, etc.) and formal diplomacy which has always existed. Hence, this study examines how the relationship between online users facilitate the advocacy and the release of the Nigerian victim of human trafficking in Mali. Also, various scholars have engaged the use of



social media, especially in the internet age and the impact of social media and informal diplomacy. Dango (2021) examined how social media is used for moral decadence in Nigerian society and the negative impact of social media on such issues as cybercrime, cyberbullying, indecent dressing, pornography and the glorification of drugs and alcohol. The paper places its significance within Nigeria's social, economic, religious, and educational systems, and Nigeria's international image, thereby broadening the scope of its relevance. The method of approach is qualitative analysis, which is appropriate for examining behavioural, cultural and ethical issues related to social media use.

Chen (2021) evaluated the success of track two diplomacy and defined it as unofficial but government-sanctioned diplomatic efforts that complement official diplomacy. The study attempts to empirically examine the connection between track one (official) and track two (unofficial) diplomacy in an attempt to bridge the gap in quantitative examinations at a broad scale. Drawing upon a multilayer network framework, the researcher formulated a new dataset of Asia-Pacific diplomatic gatherings to analyze patterns of interactions. The findings reveal that both diplomatic channels are reinforcing one another, implying that informal diplomacy supports formal cooperation among states. Findings further reveal that states choose between formal and informal channels strategically to manage sensitive relations and avoid publicly tying themselves to controversial actors.

Inyali, Ngwu and Ogande (2022) explored ways in which social media facilitates cultural exchange and diplomacy between nations. The study's overarching objective is to critically assess the role of the internet in fostering cultural awareness and interaction. In accordance with Diffusion of Innovation Theory, the study explores the mechanisms by which social media users share ideas, art, and values globally. The report indicates that social media is accelerating cultural diplomacy among the developing nations but at the same time introducing negatives such as cybercrime, privacy breaches, and inadequate digital literacy. The study advises improving digital media literacy as a tool of cultural promotion and adjustment to the maximum.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the influence of social media on informal diplomacy and humanitarian intervention during the May 2024 rescue of trafficked Nigerian in Mali. This design was considered appropriate because it allows for in-depth exploration and analysis of social processes and online interactions that are central to the understanding of informal diplomatic practices and advocacy efforts. The sources of data include content gathered from social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Blogs. The study analysed posts, videos and narratives shared on platforms including Biola Adebayo's YouTube channel (*Talk to B*) and Oyiza's blog, as well as available posts related to the rescue campaign. These sources were used because they contained first-hand information on the advocacy messages and discussions that reflected the efforts of informal diplomacy. data were then collected through a systematic retrieval of relevant posts and videos during the May 2024 campaign. Data analysis was done using qualitative content and narrative analysis. Patterns of communication and narrative framing were observed.



Case Overview

The incident started in early 2024 when one of Nollywood female actors and a YouTuber, Biola Adebayo, featured a fellow actress, Jumoke George, in an interview that was so emotional. In the course of the interview, Jumoke George had revealed that she had lost contact with her daughter that was reportedly trafficked to Mali under strange circumstances. This interview had gone viral across several social media platforms, and it sparked public empathy, mixed with concern and advocacy where discussions about human trafficking and the plight of Nigerians seeking greener pasture abroad had come to the fore.

In the midst of this uproar mixed with public interest, a Nigerian lady called Oyiza, who had herself been a victim of human trafficking in Mali and had become an advocate for other victims, emerged as a key player. By using her online platforms particularly Facebook and Instagram, and drawing on her experience and network of contacts in Mali, Oyiza began to trace Adeola, the missing lady. Her appeals, updates and live videos sustained the matter on social media, thereby turning the campaign into a sort of digital activism.

This campaign had intensified that it attracted the attention of some concerned individuals, but more importantly, the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) led by Honourable Abike Dabiri-Erewa, who took official notice of the situation. The Commission then engaged Oyiza and other stakeholders to verify the victim's location, and after much concerted efforts, the trafficked victim was successfully rescued and repatriated to Nigeria.

The Roles of Informal Actors in Facilitating the Release of the Trafficked Victim

The informal actors who were involved in the release of the victim, Adeola Omotosho-George, the daughter of Jumoke George, played very significant roles. Their interventions further justified that informal diplomacy has become one of the most reliable and faster means to rescue victims of human trafficking from other countries. Between the 13th of May and 20th of May that the victim came back to Nigeria and met with her family, the social media space was filled with every necessary step taken to rescue her. It began from the Nollywood actor Biola Adebayo who interviewed the victim's mother and uploaded it all over her social media platforms, YouTube, Instagram and Facebook pages on the 13th May, 2025, affirming that the victim had been unheard from since the past four years after she left Nigeria for Mali. Then, she pleaded with all the viewers that if anyone knew where she was in Mali or saw her, they should reach out to *TalkToB* management, uploading her pictures with her full name. As soon as the post was uploaded, the internet became buzzed with reactions, comments and the sharing of the post by netizens. This pattern reflects the dynamics of social network theory, where interconnected actors function as nodes within a network, using digital platforms to mobilise information, coordinate actions and amplify efforts towards a common goal.

The action taken by Biola Adebayo concerning this case is nothing short of noble trigger to awaken the whole social media and the people of Nigeria for the campaign against human trafficking. She and her team with the help of other netizens maximized social media as a strong tool to cry for help that was urgently needed and faithfully provided. In an interview with a NIDCOM official about how the organisation became aware of the incident, the official revealed



that “Public reports on social media attracted NIDCOM attention with different tags after the actress and other Nollywood colleagues amplified the lady’s disappearance with a hint that she’s out of the country.” This revelation attests to how effective social media could be if chosen for such a cause.

Another notable actor in the release of Adeola is NollyGisty. At evening of 13th May, a blogger called NollyGisty made a post on her Facebook page that Adeola’s location had been found in Mali. The post and the screenshot text-images with it stated:

Good news. Mama Jumoke George missing daughter had been located in Mali and they spoke to her... We embarked on some investigation and we got some update to share as a good news for all Celestial Church of Christ members Worldwide and lovers of MC Jumoke George whose daughter Deola was said to be missing since four (4) years ago. Information reaching CCC confirmed that Adeola left Nigeria four years ago to search for greener pastures as reported by her Mum Jumoke George on the interview with Talk to B which was released on her Youtube Channel on Sunday at 6pm Nigeria time. Our contact got to Mali u in search of Deola and we got to speak with her. She is alive, healthy and working in search of her dreams. Though, the working environment and income was not as she had expected before leaving Nigeria. However, she is alright. CRC put a call through to MC Jumoke George this morning at about 8am USA time and she responded. She was informed that her daughter Deola is alive, healthy and alright at Mali. She was counselled not to allow her daughter's whereabouts become a burden on her health condition. She appreciated us and prayed for us.

When Biola Adebayo saw this post, she shared this update on her Instagram page with a pleading tone caption that Adeola should be reached to speak to her mother who was still at the hospital then. She presumed that if the mother could hear her daughter’s voice. She would be happy and calm. She added that she was calling Adeola’s phone but the latter has refused to answer anyone. By 14th May, Biola Adebayo was able to reach Adeola through a WhatsApp voice call, demanding that she should come back home. However, Adeola doubted the possibility of her return because her travelling documents had been seized by her madam since the first day she got to Mali and she could not even raise enough money to bring her back even though she had worked for four years there.

This update, therefore, brought one notable actor in this case, Yakubu Oyiza Luna who travelled all the way to Mali to locate the missing and trafficked victims there and bring them home. Being a Nigerian ex-victim of human trafficking, from Akwa Ibom state, Yakubu Oyiza Luna has taken it upon herself to always rescue Nigerians—children, women and men—who by any route find themselves in the clutch of trafficking. On the 21st May, she shared a screenshot of a WhatsApp message that she sent to two of her friends that she would be going to Mali on her Facebook page...

Linho,



If you are reading this message now, chances that I have already landed in Lagos and heading to the Seme border are high. I am traveling to Mali, and e sure me die say you no gree and that's why I kept it away from you until die minute. My trip to Mali is a very big risk for me, which I know, but it's a big necessity to understand the plight of our teenage girls being lured there daily. Day by day, I keep receiving messages from distraught parents who are heartbroken about what their daughters are going through in that country and to effectively help, I need to have an insight and build a strong network and this I can't do across the border. I have made necessary arrangements for my to and fro, and all things been equally, I should be back to Nigeria on or before on the 20th of this month. It's important to let you know I know the risk involved in this trip, but it's more risky not to do anything about understanding what's going on in Mali. If I do not make it back on the 20th of this month with a video proof that I am home, kindly reach out to +73..., he has the contact information of my contact person in Mali. Any video I send to you, I will mention "... " keyword, if by any means, I do not mention it, kindly note that the video is been made under duress. A-W will be under the care of... until further notice. Please check on him on this number 0...once in a while. I will beep you when I arrive safely. Please keep me in your prayers. Thank you. 12:22 PM

According to her caption, "I knew the risk involved but some things have to be done." After receiving several tags on her Instagram handles, Oyiza made effort on the 15th May to reach out to Adeola, so she could bring her back alongside other victims. Then, she made another post that reads:

Please, there's a Yoruba actress whose daughter is trapped in Mali, and she's complaining about documents and money to use in bringing her back home. Please, can someone link me with her? I can bring the lady back home safely. Please help connect us together, I have other girls coming back on Monday, we can make the arrangements together.

She tagged other social media influencers like Tolulope Fadekemi and Olubunmi Ajai Kintsugi in her comment section but there was no instant response. When she could not get help on time from some of the comments on that post, she tagged Biola Adebayo, saying, "*Kindly please ma'am. Can you link me with the girl so as to know where she is in Mali? Even if it's the toughest village, we will handle it.*" The sound of this message does not only breathe urgency but sacrifice. Later that day, she made a post to say she had been able to speak to Biola Adebayo and the victim, Adeola, and promised to handle everything.

Eventually, she was able to get to the victim's location in Mali so she could make her speak with her mother through phone. She called Biola Adebayo on phone through WhatsApp voice/video call and promised to make arrangement for her return. This was posted on Biola's Instagram page and YouTube channel. Before the end of that day, 15th May, she posted the confirmation on her Facebook wall with a caption, "*Location secured. Lady seen and interacted with. She's spending the night in our custody. Plans to bring her back home now fully on. One of the fastest interventions ever. Only one LunaOyiza.*"



Along the line, Biola, through the help of another actor, Adeniyi Johnson, had reached out to the Chairperson of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM), Honourable Abike Dabiri, to come to their aid. Honourable Abike then put a call through to the Nigerian Ambassador in Mali, Ugo Chime, who facilitated their journey. On the 19th may, Oyiza narrated that after she found the victim and made her speak with her mother and Biola, she received a message the following morning that “NIDCOM was interested in her repatriation and they already called the embassy.” She was told to take the victim there even though the latter complained she did not have any good cloth to wear. In another interview on TalkToB programme on 23rd May, Adeola herself recounted the effort of Oyiza. According to her, she told Oyiza she could not go to embassy and Oyiza said “*let us go and buy cloth.*” “*Aunty Oyiza tried oh. She’s a lovely sister. I’m missing her.* She asked me if I needed anything else but I said nothing more,” Adeola to Biola on the programme.

It is important to note that Oyiza Luna did not only rescue Adeola but also rescued other victims of human trafficking from countries like Libya, Burkina Faso and other African countries where trafficking Nigerians for prostitution thrive. Honourable Abike Dabiri commended her effort on a phone call and promised to recommend her to the executive governor of her state.

The Prevalent Social Media Narratives and How it Shaped Informal Diplomatic Actions Leading to the Rescue of the Trafficked Victim

Since 13th May that Biola Adebayo made the post about actor Jumoke George’s homelessness and missing daughter, to the day that the victim reunited with her mother, social media was filled with many narratives. After Biola uploaded the video, various social media platforms, especially Instagram and Facebook were buzzed with the victim’s helplessness, rescue means, suggestions and assistance from well-to-do citizens of Nigerians to help the victim’s family. As soon as the post was shared to Biola’s Instagram page, actors like Salami Rotimi, Toyin Alausa—*omoalausal*, Ariyo Oluwakemisola—*kemity*, Biodun Sofuyi—*officialomoborty* and the rest shared it and pleaded with Nigerians to help with any token because of Jumoke George’s homelessness and poor health caused by her missing daughter.

Some other bloggers like *thebroadwaytv*, *nollywoodstarz*, *weintheccc*, *starzstruckz*, to mention but a few, shared the post, begging all the viewers to assist Jumoke financially and pleading to anyone who knew the victim’s location in Mali to reveal. Surprisingly, netizens began to respond positively when her account details were shared on the post as people started sending in their token with proofs in the comment;

I cannot but love her on my screen all the time...such a sweet beautiful mummy. This really made me cry a lot today. I just sent my 200k contribution. @yemosglobalproperties

I loved this woman, whenever I see her acting. I sent my own token of 50k. It is well. @bossstokes2016

I really don’t have money. I sent 1k. I believe I will send more later by the grace of almighty Allah. Everything shall come back to normal for her. @MorolaSpical



Just sent her 10k. God will bless her and the Church. Kudos to Biola as well.
@abiolarukayat2249

All these and many more of them were what arrested social media throughout that day until the news of the victim's location was posted on NollyGisty and shared by Biola on her Instagram.

As soon as the victim's location was detected and she was made to speak to her mother on 15th May, and the video of how she was eventually brought home on was posted on 19th May, the narrative changed to the appreciation of Biola Adebayo and Oyiza and others who found the victim. Such comments with prayer and good wishes flew all around social media. Comments include;

- First time of commenting on social media. I say a big thank you to Auntie Biola and all the beautiful kind Nigerians. Love you in millions for showing love, support, help, care and prayers for this woman and her family. @shakiratbolanle
- Am just crying watching this video cos if Nigeria is good, what will everybody going out of Nigeria be looking for...Sister Biola thanks for everything...God will continue to strengthen you. @SayrahAjokeade
- Kudos to Biola and her team. This is an indication that if we have the right people in position, everything will fall in place. NIDCOM under the leadership of Hon. Abike Dabiri and her team. God bless you. @BabatundeFadeyi
- Yakubu Oyiza, you're an angel. Tosin Omolewa
- You ain't doing this for attention and you are truly a definition of humility and kind. I pray God grant all your heart desires and may God seriously announce you to that helper that will promote your brand, Yakubu Oyiza Hope. Toluwase Obed Ayanda

Furthermore, comments also displayed netizen's recognition of the influence of social media in the rescue of the victim. These comments read thus;

- See the power of social media. I knew she was going to be found. Alhamdulillah. @Motuntirayo
- Imagine someone stressing and going to Pastor Alfa to find what isn't lost for years and social media bring it out within 24 hours huuuunn. Not everything is spiritual, #powerofsocialmedia. @Bukkysliving
- This story is a testament of the power of social media. From Naija to Mali, they sought Deola out! Biola, o se oh! @oyinade7426

While all these comments revealed some pitiful and appreciative feelings that netizens shared, other comments were made to rebuke the victim's refusal of not speaking with her family;

- Jesu. Haa oga o. and she could sleep well not hearing from her mum and her children. @daresanmi
- Even if she dey prison, God forbid o, she go still get access to call her mama nah...awon omo mi kan ya odaju lomo (Some children are heartless)...@chemmy_stitches



These narratives which revolved around Jumoke George's homelessness, missing daughter and health issue prevailed on social media until 10th June when Biola Adebayo posted that a new house was bought for her, her daughter with businesses to make a living for both of them. However, Yakubu Oyiza continues in her advocacy against human trafficking and campaign for rescue of victims on her Facebook blog *LunaOyiza*, using her native language every day.

How Government Institution Response to the Informal Diplomatic Pressure Online

It is crucial to highlight the immediacy in the response of government institution like NIDCOM to the pressure that was social media created concerning the case. After Biola made announcement on her social media platforms concerning Adeola's lack of papers, many comments suggested that she reached out to Nigerian embassy in Mali so they could write letter for her, others suggested that they got in touch with Honourable Abike Dabiri. Then, Biola started making announcement on her Instagram page that she would get in touch with Abike Dabiri's personal contact so the process could be faster. When asked about the internal processes that were activated when the issue gained attention on social media, the official stated that:

Upon the official receipt of the information via email NIDCOM activated inter-collaboration link with diplomatic talk. Based on NIDCOM's mandate and standard practice NIDCOM activated immediate case intake/verification, coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs/consular channels, liaison with partner agencies (naptip, com).

This testament reveals the positive immediate response of the NIDCOM as government's representative in the matter.

Eventually, Biola was able to get Dabiri's contact through her colleague, Adeniyi Johnson, who was later revealed to be an acquaintance of Honourable Dabiri. In the video of Adeola's return to the country, Biola confirmed that even though she had thought of reaching out to the NIDCOM's Chairperson should the matter become worse, she never thought getting her would be easy. According to her, she proclaimed, "*Mummy Abike spoke to me like my mom on phone, saying "Biola, mo gbo bai. Ki le ti se? (Biola, I heard something. What have you done?"*" She went further to explain that Honourable Abike stood up to the situation with a sense of urgency. She therefore, appreciated the effort from Nigerian government through Honourable Abike in facilitating the victim's repatriation.

Furthermore, the victim herself expressed her gratitude towards NIDCOM's Chairperson, and the Nigerian Ambassador Ugo at Nigerian embassy in Mali. According to her, Ambassador Ugo was constantly calling her and telling her "*Where you, where you, I'm waiting for you. Don't run away o,*" until she got to the embassy. Apart from all these testimonies, Honourable Dabiri also asked Adeola, "*Now that you're at home, what do you want to do?"*" The latter responded that she would like to have a freezer to sell drinks and Honourable promised to set her up in a business of her choice. More of these promises were what Honourable Dabiri, represent government, made to Oyiza for her selfless efforts in rescuing Nigerians who are victims of trafficking. Thus, this served as a huge motivation for Oyiza and other Nigerians who may wish to serve as informal diplomats to rescue trafficked victims, knowing that Nigerian government will support them and encourage their efforts.



The government institution proved its belief in the power of social media particularly as it was used by the actors for the quick break out of any sort of distress that any citizen, home and abroad, might be facing with the affirmation that “*Informal actors primarily raised visibility and public pressure quickly*. The official further disclosed various opportunities that the social media could provide: rapid case detection, and the online pressure that called attention; crowdsourced intelligence (contacts, witnesses, local activists) that can help locate victims; mobilisation of NGOs, private donors to support rescue and reintegration.

With the above highlighted opportunities from NIDCOM official, it confirmed that the organisation has recognised some advantages and attributed some measure of power to social media. The official buttressed this fact that “NIDCOM commenced immediately due to social media amplification even before official petition was submitted, affirming that “social media can surface cases quickly, mobilise resources, and create public pressure that speeds prioritisation,” when asked if the social media campaign influence the timing or nature of the government’s response and if informal diplomacy via social media could complement official diplomatic processes.

DISCUSSION

This study reveals how social media played a critical role in facilitating informal diplomacy and humanitarian intervention in transnational issues such as human trafficking. It further reveals the role that activists, bloggers, social media influencers and online publics, who functioned as drivers in the rescue process by mobilising attention, coordinating actions and sustaining advocacy efforts. This is in line with the argument that informal diplomacy is increasingly shaped by networked actors in digital spaces rather than its confinement to only state institutions.

Drawing on social network theory, the interactions, as observed in this study reflect a networked structure in which individuals and groups operated as interconnected nodes, thus enabling the rapid spread of information and coordinated response. The actors, being able to disseminate information, thus, attract institutional attention highlights the significance of digital platforms in restructuring traditional diplomatic processes. The study, also reveals how social media narratives which are framed around empathy, justice, and national responsibility, were instrumental in generating online public pressure, thereby influencing government’s response. This also supports the stance of existing literature on online advocacy, which emphasises the role of online storytelling in shaping public opinion and policy response (Trevisan, 2017; Nkemdilim, 2024); Shanahan, McBeth & Hathaway (2011).

The response of governmental institutions, especially NIDCOM, further illustrates how informal diplomatic pressure can complement formal diplomatic processes. The findings in this study suggest that social media-driven engagement can enhance traditional diplomacy by increasing visibility, accelerating the flow of information and propelling prompt intervention (Kareem (2019). On the overall, the study reinforces the growing relevance of citizen-driven and online-mediated diplomacy in addressing humanitarian issues and diplomatic processes in contexts where formal channels may be delayed or constrained.



CONCLUSION

This study aimed at exploring how social media facilitated informal diplomatic efforts which led to the rescue of a Nigerian victim of human trafficking from Mali, with specific objectives to examine the role that informal actors play in facilitating the release of the trafficked victim; evaluate how prevalent social media narratives during the rescue campaign shaped informal diplomatic actions leading to the release of the trafficked victim and assess how governmental institution responded to the informal diplomatic pressure generated through social media engagement. Hinged on social network theory, the study elucidated the dynamic interactions between social media activism, informal diplomatic efforts, and state response in the human trafficking rescue process. The study further demonstrated that diplomacy is no longer the preserve of state actors but an evolving sphere in which citizens, activists, and internet communities have roles to play.

This paper affirms that the power of social media as an instrument of informal diplomacy, reconfiguring power relations between citizens and governments in global humanitarian interventions. It also shows that diplomacy in the new media environment is participatory and decentralised with the example of the May 2024 rescue of Adeola and others from Mali. Finally, the study reveals how unofficial actors, through organised online advocacy campaigns, can complement official diplomacy in achieving transnational justice.

RECOMMENDATION

Having seen the role that informal actors, through social media achieved humanitarian intervention in the rescue of human trafficked victim, the study recommends first, that government agencies should establish structured online platforms of communication to engage citizens, especially on issues related to human rights and trafficking of humans, This will foster trust and cooperation between state and non-state actors. Second, civil society, organizations and activists should be equipped with ethical online campaign and crisis communication skills to make their campaigns orderly, fact-based and sensitive to diplomatic processes. Third, Nigerian foreign missions should integrate digital diplomacy and online advocacy into their activities to respond promptly to transboundary crises.

Ethical clearance

This study relied on publicly available content from social media platforms, and there was no direct interaction with the participants. As such, informed consent were not required. However, the study adhered to ethical research standards in that all data used were responsibly presented without any misrepresentation or harm to the participants involved.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

The author conceived the study, collated the data, and handled the analysis and interpretation. The author has critically reviewed and approved the final draft and is responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Data availability statement

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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