

DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AND NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE SINCE 1999

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Abstract

The study explored the evolution and impact of digital diplomacy on Nigeria's foreign policy from the return to democratic governance in 1999 to the present, adopting a historical and analytical perspective. Anchored in Network Society Theory and Soft Power Theory, the study situates Nigeria's diplomatic practice within broader transformations in global communication technologies and international relations. Using a qualitative, desk-based research design, the study relies on secondary data drawn from scholarly journals, books, policy documents, and institutional reports to analyse how digital technologies have reshaped foreign policy formulation, implementation, and diplomatic engagement in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The findings reveal that digital technologies have enhanced Nigeria's foreign policy by improving communication speed, expanding international outreach, and supporting diaspora engagement, nation branding, and diplomatic networking. However, the study also identifies key challenges, including inadequate digital infrastructure, limited professional capacity, weak institutional coordination, cyber security threats, and the growing influence of uncoordinated direct-dial diplomacy. Based on these findings, the study recommends the institutionalisation of digital diplomacy within foreign policy processes, the development of a coordinated national digital diplomacy strategy aligned with Nigeria's foreign policy objectives, and sustained capacity building for diplomats in digital communication and cybersecurity. The study concludes that while digital diplomacy has become an indispensable instrument of Nigeria's foreign policy since 1999, its effectiveness depends on strategic coherence, institutional alignment, and continuous investment in digital capacity to enhance Nigeria's global presence and influence.

Keywords: Digital Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Historical Perspective, Digital infrastructure.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary global landscape, digital technologies have fundamentally transformed the conduct of diplomacy, giving rise to what is widely described as digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy involves the strategic deployment of online platforms, social media, and digital communication technologies by states to project soft power, engage foreign publics, and advance national interests. As Nyewusira (2019) explains, the increasing penetration of information and communication technologies has altered how states communicate and interact in the international system, shifting diplomacy from exclusive elite spaces to more open, interactive, and public-facing arenas. In Nigeria, this transformation has assumed heightened significance since the return to democratic governance in 1999, a period marked by renewed efforts to

reassert regional leadership, rebuild international credibility, and reposition the country within global political and economic networks.

The adoption of digital tools within Nigeria's foreign policy framework has enabled faster dissemination of policy positions, wider diplomatic outreach, and more direct engagement with both domestic and international audiences. Umuakpero (2023) observes that the internet revolution has reshaped diplomatic practice in Nigeria by complementing traditional state-to-state diplomacy with online engagement, public diplomacy, and real-time communication. These developments have allowed Nigeria to interact more actively with diaspora communities, international organisations, and foreign publics, thereby enhancing visibility and responsiveness in a rapidly evolving global environment. The evolution of digital diplomacy in Nigeria, however, has not occurred in isolation from structural and institutional constraints. Emegha *et al* (2019) note that the expansion of digital communication has contributed to the rise of direct-dial diplomacy, where government agencies and officials engage international counterparts without adequate coordination through established foreign policy institutions. This has raised concerns about policy coherence, institutional control, and the dilution of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' coordinating role. In addition, uneven digital literacy, limited cybersecurity capacity, and infrastructural deficits continue to constrain Nigeria's ability to fully exploit the opportunities offered by digital diplomacy.

Beyond institutional challenges, domestic political dynamics have also shaped the deployment of digital diplomacy in Nigeria. Hassan & Adejumo (2023) argue that since the post-Cold War era, Nigeria's foreign policy has increasingly emphasised economic diplomacy as a tool for domestic development. In this context, digital platforms have often been used to promote investment opportunities, trade relations, and international partnerships. While this reflects strategic adaptation, it also means that digital diplomatic messaging sometimes prioritises regime legitimacy and economic signalling over sustained engagement with broader foreign policy objectives. The growing prominence of digital diplomacy must also be understood within the broader historical evolution of Nigeria's foreign policy institutions. Ifeyani *et al* (2025) demonstrate that Nigeria's Foreign Service has undergone significant transformation since independence, with democratic consolidation after 1999 fostering professionalisation, institutional reform, and adaptive diplomatic strategies. These institutional changes created the foundation upon which digital diplomacy practices could emerge, integrating new technologies into existing diplomatic structures. Similarly, Enyindah and Ki (2023) emphasise that Nigeria's foreign policy is deeply shaped by historical experiences, institutional legacies, and evolving national interests, all of which influence how new diplomatic tools are adopted and utilised.

From a broader international relations perspective, the rise of digital diplomacy reflects structural changes in global politics, where traditional diplomacy, once dominated by face-to-face negotiations, embassies, and confidential communications, is increasingly complemented by online engagement and digital narratives. Eneje (2025) highlights the growing role of media and digital communication in shaping foreign policy outcomes, arguing that states must now compete for attention, credibility, and influence in an information-saturated global space. For Nigeria, digital diplomacy has therefore become both an opportunity and a necessity for managing external perceptions, responding to crises, and maintaining relevance within regional and global institutions. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of digital diplomacy ultimately depends on strategic coherence, institutional capacity, and alignment with broader foreign policy goals. Saliu (2021) cautions that Nigeria's foreign missions must continuously adapt to new global realities

while preserving professionalism, coordination, and national interest. Without sustained investment in digital infrastructure, professional training, and policy coordination, the promise of digital diplomacy risks being undermined by fragmentation and inconsistency. Consequently, this study provides a historical and analytical examination of digital diplomacy and Nigeria's foreign policy since 1999. By situating digital diplomacy within the broader evolution of Nigeria's foreign policy institutions and practices, the study analyses how digital tools have transformed diplomatic engagement, the challenges encountered in their deployment, and the prospects for strengthening Nigeria's influence in a digitally interconnected global order. In doing so, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how postcolonial states like Nigeria can navigate the opportunities and constraints of digital diplomacy in the twenty-first century.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, Nigeria's foreign policy has aimed to assert regional leadership, enhance global visibility, and foster economic partnerships. Yet, despite these ambitions, Nigeria has faced challenges in leveraging digital platforms effectively to achieve its diplomatic objectives. Inadequate investment in digital infrastructure, limited cybersecurity measures, and inconsistent online engagement have constrained the country's ability to project soft power and respond promptly to international developments. Furthermore, digital diplomacy has sometimes been underutilised in promoting national interests, managing crises, or countering negative perceptions in global media. The problem, therefore, lies in the gap between Nigeria's diplomatic goals and the strategic deployment of digital tools, which limits the effectiveness of its foreign policy in the digital age.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the evolution and impact of digital diplomacy on Nigeria's foreign policy since 1999. The specific objectives are to:

1. Analyse how digital technologies have influenced Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and implementation since 1999.
2. Assess the strategies and mechanisms through which Nigeria has engaged in digital diplomacy to advance national interests.
3. Examine the challenges and prospects of strengthening digital diplomacy to enhance Nigeria's global presence and influence.

2. Literature Review

This section considers: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework as well as the empirical review of other studies that are related to the present study.

2.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on Network Society Theory, developed by Manuel Castells in 1996, and Soft Power Theory, introduced by Joseph S. Nye Jr. in 1990. Network Society Theory explains how advances in digital and communication technologies have transformed diplomacy by shifting power and influence from traditional state-centric channels to interconnected global networks. In the context of Nigeria's foreign policy since 1999, this theory helps explain the growing use of digital platforms, social media, and online communication tools by state institutions to engage international actors, project national interests, and participate more actively in global diplomatic networks.

Soft Power Theory complements this perspective by emphasising influence through attraction, credibility, and persuasion rather than coercion. In the digital era, soft power is increasingly exercised through digital visibility, strategic communication, cultural representation, and engagement with global audiences. For Nigeria, digital diplomacy has become an important mechanism for shaping international perceptions, strengthening its democratic image, engaging the diaspora, and promoting economic and cultural interests. Together, these theories provide a coherent framework for understanding how digital technologies have reshaped Nigeria's foreign policy practice and diplomatic engagement in the post-1999 period.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the concepts below:

2.2.1 Digital Diplomacy

Digital diplomacy represents the contemporary evolution of statecraft, where digital technologies are central to how states communicate, negotiate, and project influence internationally. Nyewusira (2019) defines digital diplomacy as the use of the internet and information and communication technologies to support the achievement of foreign policy objectives. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which relies primarily on formal channels and closed-door negotiations, digital diplomacy emphasises openness, immediacy, and interaction with diverse global audiences. Umuakpero (2023) further explains that digital diplomacy encompasses activities such as online public diplomacy, crisis communication, digital storytelling, and engagement through social media platforms, making it both a strategic instrument and a practical extension of modern diplomatic practice.

2.2.2 Foreign Policy

Foreign policy refers to the strategic framework through which a state defines and pursues its interests in the international system. According to Enyindah and Ki (2023), Nigeria's foreign policy is shaped by a combination of historical experiences, domestic political dynamics, economic priorities, and external pressures. It guides decisions related to diplomacy, security, trade, international cooperation, and participation in global governance. Hassan and Adejumo (2023) emphasise that Nigeria's foreign policy has evolved, reflecting shifts from ideological and liberation-focused diplomacy to economic and development-oriented engagement, particularly since the return to democratic rule in 1999.

2.2.3 Historical Perspective

A historical perspective provides an analytical lens for understanding contemporary foreign policy by situating it within its developmental trajectory over time. Ifeyani *et al* (2025) demonstrate that Nigeria's diplomatic institutions and strategies cannot be fully understood without reference to their colonial origins, post-independence experimentation, military rule, and subsequent democratic consolidation. By examining continuity and change across these periods, a historical perspective reveals how past decisions, institutional reforms, and diplomatic experiences continue to shape present-day foreign policy practices, including the adoption and utilisation of digital diplomacy.

2.2.4 Related Studies

Ifeyani, *et al* (2025) studied Nigeria's foreign service in a historical context: Institutional growth and diplomatic shifts, 1960–2015 and stated that since attaining independence in 1960, Nigeria's Foreign Service has undergone a profound transformation, shaped by shifts in domestic politics, economic fortunes,

and global diplomatic trends. This study examines the historical trajectory of Nigeria's diplomatic service from its nascent post-colonial structures through successive military regimes to the democratic consolidation and professionalisation witnessed by 2015. The research uses a qualitative historical research approach, drawing upon oral histories from diplomats. Complementary quantitative analysis of mission openings, personnel promotions, and budgetary allocations provides empirical grounding. Comparative case studies, spanning Nigeria's engagements with the United Nations, ECOWAS, and major bilateral partners, illuminate how internal reforms (notably the 1988 Diplomatic Service Act and the 2006 Repositioning Agenda) recalibrated strategic priorities and institutional capacity. Findings reveal three pivotal phases: (1) formative expansion and identity-building (1960–1975), characterized by ad hoc postings and limited training; (2) consolidation under military rule (1976–1998), marked by both diplomatic activism and politicisation of postings; and (3) democratic professionalisation (1999–2015), distinguished by merit-based recruitment, enhanced training programmes, and an adaptive regional focus.

Hassan & Adejumo (2023) explored Nigeria's foreign policy in the post-Cold War era: An appraisal of its economic diplomacy. Nigeria, since its independence in October 1960, has strived to achieve its foreign policy objectives through various instruments - political, economic, military, psychological, and cultural. However, like many other states, diplomacy has dominated the country's foreign policy since its inception. The country's diplomatic endeavour, since independence, has oscillated between what can be described as conservative-accommodationist diplomacy, in the immediate post-independence era to assertive-liberationist diplomacy of the post-Civil War era, to civilist-economic diplomacy of the post-Cold War era. An attempt is made in this paper to assess economic diplomacy as an instrument of Nigeria's foreign policy, with specific emphasis on the experience during the Fourth Republic. The paper adopts a historical-descriptive approach, with heavy reliance on documentary data sources, and political realism as the method and theory of analysis, respectively. It is established that economic diplomacy has become a fulcrum of Nigeria's foreign policy as successive regimes since 1999 have been refocusing foreign policy towards domestic economic development. It is concluded that, though some successes were recorded in terms of repatriation of looted funds, debt relief, and attraction of foreign investment, these have yet to translate to economic development and the well-being of Nigerians. For the gains of economic diplomacy to translate to socio-economic development.

Umukperu (2023) studied Nigeria's foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy and observed that the advent of the internet revolution has affected all aspects of life, including the way nations interact with each other in the international arena. Foreign policy, which is simply the means through which Nigeria, like other nations, intends to achieve its national objectives, is often anchored on Diplomacy. This tool of foreign policy is being transformed by the Internet revolution. Thus, traditional diplomacy is now transformed into digital diplomacy. This paper, therefore, examines the impact of digital diplomacy on Nigeria's foreign policy, how its utilisation is changing traditional diplomatic practices, and the opportunities and challenges it presents for diplomatic activities. The paper also explores how Nigeria's foreign policy can be greatly strengthened in its foreign policy projections to its domestic and foreign audiences, by the adoption of digital diplomacy.

Emegha *et al* (2019) investigated the Coordination of Nigeria's foreign policy: A reflection on direct-dial diplomacy and stated that the traditional institutions and personalities responsible for the formulation, control and coordination of Nigeria's foreign policy unarguably revolve around the president, National

Assembly and the Minister/Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The idea and practice of direct-dial diplomacy, which became increasingly popular and challenging, has continually impeded the statutory institutions that control and coordinate foreign policy; as government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) relate directly with their international counterparts without recourse to the grand norm. The study sets out to appraise the implications of direct-dial diplomacy on Nigeria's foreign policy. The study is hinged on decision-making theory, which avers that policies are the outcome of decisions made by leaders or those in authority. Anchoring our discourse on a qualitative research approach, via trend design, documentary method of data collection, and qualitative method of data analysis, the study argues that direct-dial diplomacy has come to stay, but could impede the essence of foreign policy control and coordination if not well managed. The study deciphered that information and communication technology (ICT) in the contraction and expansion of the globe into a global village contributes greatly to direct-dial diplomacy, which in turn affects the coordination and control of foreign policy in Nigeria.

Nyewusira (2019) examines Digital diplomacy: Opportunities for Nigeria's foreign policy and noted that Technology is changing the face of diplomatic practice. This change is referred to as digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy is the use of the internet and information and communication technology to help a country achieve its foreign policy objectives. This paper looked into the opportunities and challenges for Nigeria's foreign policy in digital diplomacy. The identified opportunities were in consular and Diaspora relations, diplomatic networking and nation branding. The key challenges described were the lack of professionalism, the presence of bots and algorithms, as well as the possibility of cyber hacking.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, desk-based research approach, relying primarily on secondary sources to examine the evolution of digital diplomacy within Nigeria's foreign policy from 1999 to the present. The methodology focused on the systematic review of scholarly journal articles, books, conference papers, policy documents, and reputable online publications related to diplomacy, foreign policy, and digital communication technologies. Particular attention was given to works that provide historical and analytical insights into Nigeria's diplomatic practice since the return to democratic governance, including studies by Umuakpero (2023), Nyewusira (2019), Emegha *et al* (2019), Hassan & Adejumo (2023), and Ifeyani *et al* (2025), which collectively examine digital diplomacy, foreign policy coordination, economic diplomacy, and institutional development within Nigeria's Foreign Service.

Data collection involved accessing academic databases, institutional repositories, foreign policy journals, and official reports to identify patterns, debates, and trends on Nigeria's engagement with digital diplomacy. The selection criteria prioritised studies that addressed the transformation of diplomatic practices through information and communication technologies, the coordination of foreign policy in the digital era, and the historical evolution of Nigeria's diplomatic institutions. Data analysis followed a thematic and historical approach, enabling the synthesis of ideas around digital engagement, policy objectives, institutional capacity, and strategic communication. Through this method, the study provides a coherent understanding of how digital diplomacy has reshaped Nigeria's foreign policy practice over time, highlighting both the opportunities and constraints encountered since 1999.

4. Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings is organised in direct alignment with the three objectives of the study and draws explicitly from the empirical evidence reviewed on Nigeria's foreign policy and the emergence of digital diplomacy since 1999.

4.1 Influence of digital technologies on Nigeria's foreign policy formulation and implementation since 1999

The findings suggest that the introduction and expansion of digital technologies have had a significant impact on the formulation and implementation of Nigeria's foreign policy in the post-1999 democratic era. Evidence from Umuakpero (2023) suggests that digital platforms have transformed the way foreign policy messages are crafted, disseminated, and received, facilitating faster communication between state actors and international audiences. This shift has complemented the institutional reforms within Nigeria's Foreign Service, highlighted by Ifeyani *et al* (2025), particularly the professionalisation and modernisation that accompanied democratic consolidation. Together, these developments demonstrate that digital tools have become embedded in foreign policy processes, reshaping diplomatic engagement from predominantly formal, state-centric interactions to more open, interactive, and public-oriented practices.

4.2 Strategies and mechanisms of Nigeria's engagement in digital diplomacy to advance national interests

Findings further reveal that Nigeria has adopted several strategies to leverage digital diplomacy in advancing its national interests. Studies reviewed indicate that government institutions increasingly use official websites, social media platforms, and online communication channels for diplomatic networking, diaspora engagement, and nation branding. Nyewusira (2019) identifies consular services, diaspora relations, and international image projection as key areas where digital diplomacy has been strategically deployed. Similarly, Umuakpero (2023) observes that digital platforms have enhanced Nigeria's ability to project its foreign policy positions to both domestic and international audiences. These strategies reflect an adaptive response to global diplomatic trends, aligning Nigeria's foreign policy practice with the realities of a digitally interconnected international system.

4.3 Challenges and prospects of strengthening digital diplomacy for Nigeria's global influence

The findings also reveal that while digital diplomacy presents significant prospects for enhancing Nigeria's global presence, it is accompanied by notable challenges. Emegha *et al* (2019) show that the proliferation of information and communication technologies has encouraged direct-dial diplomacy, which can undermine policy coordination and weaken centralised foreign policy control. Additionally, Nyewusira (2019) and Umuakpero (2023) highlight challenges such as limited technical capacity, insufficient professionalism, cybersecurity threats, and the disruptive influence of automated digital actors. Despite these constraints, the prospects remain substantial. Strengthening institutional coordination, investing in digital capacity building, and developing coherent digital diplomacy strategies can enable Nigeria to maximise the benefits of digital engagement and enhance its influence in global affairs.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that Nigeria's foreign policy has undergone significant institutional and strategic transformation since independence, with democratic consolidation after 1999 providing fertile ground for professionalisation and reform. The post-Cold War emphasis on

economic diplomacy and the growing influence of digital technologies have reshaped how Nigeria formulates and implements its foreign policy. Digital diplomacy has emerged as a critical instrument for enhancing communication, visibility, and engagement in international relations, although its effectiveness is constrained by coordination gaps, capacity deficits, and technological risks. Overall, the findings underscore that digital diplomacy represents both an opportunity and a challenge, requiring deliberate institutional alignment, strategic planning, and capacity development to fully support Nigeria's foreign policy objectives in a rapidly evolving global environment.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings from the study

1. The Nigerian government should institutionalise the use of digital technologies within foreign policy formulation and implementation processes. This can be achieved by developing clear digital diplomacy frameworks within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ensuring that diplomatic missions systematically employ digital tools for policy communication, negotiation support, and real-time international engagement.
2. Nigeria should develop a coordinated national digital diplomacy strategy that aligns foreign policy objectives with targeted digital engagement. Emphasis should be placed on nation branding, diaspora relations, consular services, and diplomatic networking through professionalised and centrally coordinated digital platforms to effectively project Nigeria's interests and values globally.
3. To overcome existing challenges, Nigeria should invest in capacity building for diplomats through continuous training in digital communication, cybersecurity, and online engagement ethics. Additionally, mechanisms should be established to improve coordination among government agencies, regulate direct-dial diplomacy, and protect digital diplomatic infrastructure from cyber threats, thereby enhancing Nigeria's global presence and influence.

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FAMILY INSTITUTION AND STRESS MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA**Eloho Hope Albert**alberteh@fuo.edu.ng

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Abstract

This paper examined the relationship between family institution and stress management in Nigeria. The Family Systems Theory was adopted to explain the relationship between family institution and stress management. The theory posits that the family functions as a system in which members are interconnected through shared roles, relationships, and responsibilities. The paper reviewed key concepts such as family institution, sources of stress, stress management, and practical strategies for coping with stress within the family. Findings revealed that family structure, communication, adaptability, and support systems significantly influence stress management among family members. The study further established that stress is an unavoidable aspect of daily life, but it can be effectively managed through healthy family interactions and coping mechanisms. Unlike previous studies that focused largely on Western societies, this study contributes to existing knowledge by examining stress management within the Nigerian family context, where economic hardship, cultural expectations, and changing family structures shape stress experiences. The study recommends that family members should adopt regular relaxation techniques, effective communication, and supportive coping strategies to reduce stress and improve emotional well-being.

Keywords: Family Institution, Stress, Stress Management, Emotional well-being,**1. Introduction**

The family institution is a continuous system of interacting persons bound together through shared roles, rules, relationships, and rituals. Early social psychologists defined the family as a unit of interacting personalities whose members share both a history and a future. Contemporary definitions place emphasis not only on biological ties but also on shared responsibilities, values, and family practices such as weddings, birthdays, graduations, and funerals. This is because family relationships are increasingly shaped by social interaction and emotional support rather than biology alone.

Researchers have argued that what matters most in families is how members relate to one another and perform family responsibilities rather than merely how the family is structured (Lucier-Greer et al., 2015). In many societies, including Nigeria, extended family members such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts often play active roles in childcare and family support. Economic challenges, migration, unemployment, and social changes have also altered traditional family structures and increased stress within families.

Studies conducted in different parts of the world show that caregiving responsibilities can expose family members to emotional and psychological stress. Bakhouse and Graham (2013), for instance, found that grandparents who were fully responsible for raising their grandchildren experienced high levels of stress due to emotional burdens, social isolation, and financial pressures. Similar situations are common in

Nigeria, where economic instability and family obligations often compel older relatives to assume caregiving responsibilities.

Stress and family relationships are important factors that influence mental and physical health. Acute or chronic stress may predispose individuals to anxiety, depression, insomnia, hypertension, and other health problems. In many Nigerian families, stress may arise from unemployment, poverty, marital conflict, academic pressure, illness, or the loss of loved ones. Such stress affects not only individuals but also the entire family system because family members are interconnected.

Family stress varies according to the age, responsibilities, and life stage of family members. Common stressors include childbirth, adoption, parental conflict, financial difficulties, divorce, illness, and bereavement. Although stress is often viewed negatively, some forms of stress may be positive and motivating. Degges-White (2024) noted that positive stress, known as *eustress*, may encourage growth and productivity, while negative or toxic stress may result in emotional and physical health challenges.

In Nigeria, the family remains one of the strongest social institutions and serves as a major source of emotional, financial, and moral support. However, rapid social change, economic hardship, and changing cultural values have increased the stress experienced within families. Consequently, understanding how Nigerian families manage stress has become essential for promoting social stability and psychological well-being.

2. Statement of the Problem

Stress is an unavoidable part of daily life. Individuals are constantly exposed to situations that generate physical, emotional, psychological, and social pressure. However, people respond differently to stressful situations depending on their coping abilities, personality, and family environment. When stress becomes excessive or poorly managed, it may lead to serious health and social problems such as anxiety, depression, frustration, violence, substance abuse, and reduced productivity. In Nigeria, increasing economic hardship, unemployment, insecurity, academic pressure, and family responsibilities have contributed to rising stress levels among family members. Many families struggle to cope with these pressures due to poor communication, inadequate emotional support, and limited stress management strategies. As a result, stress-related conflicts and psychological challenges continue to affect family stability and individual well-being. Although several studies have examined stress management among students and workers, limited attention has been given to the role of the family institution in managing stress within the Nigerian context. Most existing studies also focus heavily on Western societies, with little emphasis on Nigerian cultural and social realities. This study therefore seeks to examine the relationship between family institution and stress management in Nigeria and to identify practical strategies that can help families cope effectively with stress. The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between family institution and stress management in Nigeria.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Family Systems Theory

Family Systems Theory conceptualizes the family as a complex, dynamic, and interconnected system made up of individuals, relationships, and subsystems. According to Olson's (2000) Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems, three important dimensions determine family functionality: cohesion, flexibility, and

communication. Families that maintain balance in these dimensions are more likely to adapt effectively to stressful situations.

The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES) was developed from Olson's model to assess family adaptability and cohesion. Within the theory, family hierarchy is also considered important. Hierarchy refers to differences in authority and responsibilities among family members. Clear family boundaries and proper role distribution help families remain resilient during stressful periods (London et al., 2019).

The theory is relevant to this study because it explains how stress experienced by one family member can affect the entire family system. It also emphasizes the importance of communication, emotional support, and adaptability in stress management.

3.2 Stress Theory

Stress Theory was propounded by Hans Selye in 1936. The theory describes stress as a nonspecific physiological response of the body to demands or harmful stimuli, which Selye termed the "General Adaptation Syndrome." Stress occurs when individuals attempt to adapt to changing or challenging conditions.

Stress does not always produce negative outcomes. Positive stress (eustress) can motivate growth and achievement, while negative stress (distress) may result in emotional and physical health problems (Guldberg et al., 2008). Stress responses involve both psychological and physiological reactions and are influenced by environmental and social conditions. This theory is relevant to the study because it explains how individuals and families respond to stressful situations and how coping mechanisms can reduce the negative effects of stress.

4. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative survey research design. The design was considered suitable because it enabled the researcher to examine the relationship between family institution and stress management through the review of existing literature, journal articles, textbooks, and related studies. The study relied mainly on secondary sources of data obtained from academic journals, books, conference papers, and internet materials relevant to family institution and stress management in Nigeria and other societies. Content analysis was used to examine and interpret information obtained from these sources.

The study focused particularly on the Nigerian family system, highlighting how economic challenges, cultural expectations, and social changes influence stress and coping strategies among family members. The paper also reviewed practical stress management strategies applicable within the family setting.

5. Discussion

5.1 Stress Management

Stress management refers to the ability to control and reduce the negative effects of stress through appropriate coping strategies and behavioral adjustments. Stress affects individuals physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Human beings respond differently to stressful events depending on their perception of the situation. Stress may result from positive or negative experiences. Positive stress, known as *eustress*,

motivates individuals and promotes growth, while negative stress, known as *distress*, may lead to frustration, anxiety, and illness.

According to Ogden (2004), stress may be viewed as pressure, tension, or emotional strain caused by demanding situations. Stress can also manifest through abnormal behavior, emotional instability, and reduced ability to perform daily activities effectively.

5.2 Sources of Stress

Stressors generally fall into four categories: fear, overload or underload, change, and uncertainty. Fear produces strong physical and emotional reactions such as rapid heartbeat, sweating, and anxiety. Overload occurs when individuals face demands beyond their available resources, while underload results from insufficient stimulation or activity.

Change is another major source of stress. Events such as marriage, childbirth, relocation, job loss, illness, or bereavement often require adjustment and adaptation. Uncertainty about the future can also create anxiety and emotional instability. In Nigeria, common sources of family stress include unemployment, poverty, insecurity, inflation, academic pressure, marital conflict, and poor access to healthcare.

5.3 Practical Strategies for the Management of Stress

Step 1: Identification of Family Stress and Stressors

The first step in stress management is identifying the source of stress within the family. Family members should openly discuss stressful experiences and seek professional assistance where necessary.

Step 2: Assessment of the Severity of Stress

The intensity, duration, and effects of stress on family members should be assessed. Tools such as the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) may help evaluate stress levels and their impact on family functioning.

Step 3: Assessment of Family Environment and Adaptability

The family environment, communication pattern, emotional support system, and adaptability should be examined to determine the family's capacity to cope with stress.

Step 4: Reduction of Stressors

Efforts should be made to reduce or eliminate identified stressors. This may involve counseling, financial planning, medical treatment, or conflict resolution within the family.

Step 5: Improvement of Coping Strategies

Families should develop healthy coping mechanisms such as effective communication, emotional support, relaxation techniques, time management, and seeking external support from friends, relatives, counselors, or religious organizations.

6. Conclusion

Stress is an unavoidable aspect of human life and family relationships. The interaction between family members significantly influences how stress is experienced and managed. In Nigeria, economic hardship, social change, and cultural expectations have increased stress levels within families.

Effective stress management requires strong family relationships, good communication, adaptability, and emotional support. Families that work together and adopt healthy coping strategies are better able to manage stressful situations and maintain psychological well-being. This study has shown that the family institution plays a vital role in stress management and that strengthening family support systems can improve mental health and social stability in Nigeria.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Family members should adopt relaxation techniques such as meditation, exercise, and deep breathing to reduce stress.
2. Parents should identify signs of stress among family members and provide emotional support and counseling where necessary.
3. Families should encourage effective communication and conflict resolution to minimize tension and misunderstanding.
4. Government and non-governmental organizations should organize public enlightenment programs on stress management and family well-being.
5. Educational institutions and religious organizations should provide counseling services to help individuals and families cope with stress effectively.
6. Families should develop healthy coping strategies such as proper time management, financial planning, and social support systems.

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AGE GRADE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN AMASIRI CLAN, 1960-2015

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samuelcole11@yahoo.com**Abstract**

This study examines the roles of age grade system in the development of Amasiri clan between 1960 and 2015. Age grade, as a traditional institution, has contributed significantly to mobilization of people; pooling resource; and governance in African societies. The work highlighted the contributions of age grade groups in the socio-economic and political development of the Amasiri Clan through infrastructural projects, social welfare initiatives, cultural preservation, among others. The work made use of primary and secondary sources for data collection. The primary sources encompassed oral data from face-to-face interviews; and the the secondary sources include books, journals, and internet materials. Qualitative historical method was used for data analysis. From the findings, the study concludes that community developments in Amasiri have greatly benefited from the roles of the age grade groups.

Keywords: Age grade, Community development, Amasiri clan, Cultural preservation.

1. Introduction

Age grade was and still one of the most important socio-political institutions in different parts of Igboland. The importance of age grade in Igbo society, is connected to its roles in socioeconomic and political development of communities. These roles were not only prevalent in traditional Igbo society; they have become more pronounced in the modern time. Ibeh and Ndubuisi (2022) maintained that, even in the modern times it is still well known that the age grade has continuously remained relevant through their roles towards societal development, especially as it concerns the rural community. Ndukwe (2015) added, the organization, structure and activities of age grade varies among Igbo communities. However, they serve a major organ of development, maintenance of peace, law and order, depending on the community they operate.

Amasiri clan is one of the Igbo communities where age grade institution has remained dominant since time immemorial. In Amasiri clan, age grade popularly known as *eburu* (mate) do not only serve as unit of political administration, it also defines the status and position of the people. U.H. Jacob et al argue, “age grades are the bricks that form the foundation upon which the traditional government of Amasiri rests. The entire traditional system of government will collapse once the age grade system is weak”.³ Among the Amasiri people, age grade group were formed by people of same age bracket and undergone transition from one level to another. The age grade group formation starts at *ezi* (compound). At this stage, individuals who have reached the formative age within *ezi* come together to form an age grade group. This group formed within the *ezi* is *Ukezi*. The *Ukezi* transits upwardly to become the *Ukeogo* Amasiri; the *Ukeogo* Amasiri transits to become the *Ekpu Uke*, who transits to the status of the *Essaa*, who, in turn, become the *Ichie* Amasiri (Obasi, 2019).

Every age grade group in the Clan played significant role in advancing development in Amasiri Clan. These roles were evident in the socio-economic and political sphere of the clan. While the young age grade groups like *Ukezi*, *Ukeogo* and *Ekpu Uke* undertook projects that impact -positively on the lives of the people, policed and ruled the clan, the older age groups such as the *Essaa* and the *Ichie* served as the law-making body and arbitrators in the clan. From the foregoing, this study explores of age grade institution in community development in Amasiri clan.

2. Statement of the Problem

Community development is an essential component of societal advancement in Nigerian societies where the people and the socio-political institutions collectively work to foster growth, unity and sustainable development. Ramsey-Soroghaye (2021) emphasized that, “community development in Nigeria is as old as humankind and there are vital proofs that at one point or the other people have craved for and engaged in one form of development or the other to enable them to function more easily and effectively in the society.” Over the years, in Amasiri Clan, age grade remained the major means the people mobilized resources, undertook community projects and maintained social order for the common good of the people.

Nevertheless, in the contemporary era, age grade like other traditional socio-political political institutions in various Igbo communities including Amasiri clan, has been confronted with challenges arising majorly from modern governance structure, globalization, urbanization, among others. Moreover, the continuous migration of the people especially the youth from the community to urban centers have posed serious challenge to some of the age grade groups. These challenges are further compounded by absence of documentation and analysis of the contributions of age grades groups to community development in Amasiri. Thus, it created gap in understanding the impact of age grade groups in the traditional and contemporary Amasiri society. Moreover, existing studies on age grade groups in Amasiri clan focused more on their roles in political administration, with limited attention to their contributions to development in infrastructure, education, healthcare, among others. Because of this, policy makers have not optimally harnessed the potential of age grades in complementing formal development strategies. This study tends to this gap by exploring the roles of age grade in social, economic and political development of Amasiri.

3. Conceptual Clarification

3.1 Age Grade

The term “age grade” has been conceptualized by different scholars. According to Theophilus (2012), age grade primarily means a set of people in a society who are of the both sex and approximately the same age having certain definite duties and privileges in common and constituting a division of a tribe society. Maduka, Agbarevo, and Dada (2017) conceived age grade as a collection of people of about the same age with the difference ranging from three to five years and sometimes between seven and ten years. For Esekpa and Ufumaka (2022), it is a socio-peer group made up of males and females born within a given age bracket who have a common goal or objective and operate within a set belief and customary rule. Uzoh, and Iheanyi (2024) holds that, it is appropriate to regard age- grades as organizations made up of people within the same “age set”. According to Ndukwe (2015), age grade is an association of people of equal or about the same age, operating within a given territory or area with the aim of individual, collective and societal transformation/development. Deducing from the above definitions, age grade is an association made up of individuals born within the same period which could either range from between three and five or seven

and ten years or in same community and share a common purpose defined by their communal values and beliefs.

3.2 Community Development

Community development is the process whereby citizens mobilize their members so as to map out a strategy of improving their community through collective efforts. Adekolai and Uzoagu (2022) hold that, in the African traditional society, community development implies working together as members of a particular community to achieve common goals that are meant to benefit each and every member of the community. Ramsey-Soroghaye (2021) assert that, community development is a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. Drawing from the above definitions, community development is the process of advancing a community for the common good of the people through collective efforts.

3.3 Overview of Amasiri Clan

Amasiri clan is one of the clans that make up Afikpo North Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. Amasiri is bounded by Okposi to the north, Edda to the south, Afikpo (Ehugbo) to the east, Akpoha to the north-east and Akaeze to the west. It is a road- junction town lying at about the mid-point or approximately 65 kilometers between Okigwe and Abakaliki (Anthony, 1993). It is also traversed by the Ohaozara –Afikpo South road. Anthony further reports that the town is a transitional zone of rolling plain between open grassland and tropical rain-forest with an annual rainfall of about 197cm. Amasiri, which is regarded as a “land of hospitality”, covers an approximately area of about 270 square kilometers. As at 2006 census, Amasiri population is estimated at 23, 101, by the Nigerian population commission (NPC). The clan consists of five villages: Ohechara, Ezeke, Ihie, Poperi and Ndukwe. The people of the clan are majorly farmers and traders. They cultivate different crops such as yam, rice, cassava, vegetable of different kind, etc. and grow cash crops such as palm, orange, guava, among others. The people have rich cultural heritages such as new yam festival, wrestling festival, masquerade festival, title taking, etc.

4. Discussion

This discussion presents the findings from data obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Oral interviews were conducted with four notable individuals from different communities in Amasiri, namely Obiahu, a farmer from Poperi-Amasiri; Idam, a trader from Ohaechara-Amasiri; Nzagha, a retired teacher from Ndukwe-Amasiri; and Aluru, a retired civil servant from Ezeke-Amasiri. The interviews were aimed at gathering firsthand information on the contributions of age grade groups in the socio-economic life, cultural practices, historical experiences, and developmental changes within the Amasiri community. Through their diverse backgrounds and personal experiences, the respondents provided valuable insights that enrich the understanding of the age grade and community development in Amasiri clan. The report therefore serves as a documentation of indigenous knowledge and lived experiences relevant to the study.

4.1 Organizational Structure of Age Grade Groups in Amasiri Clan

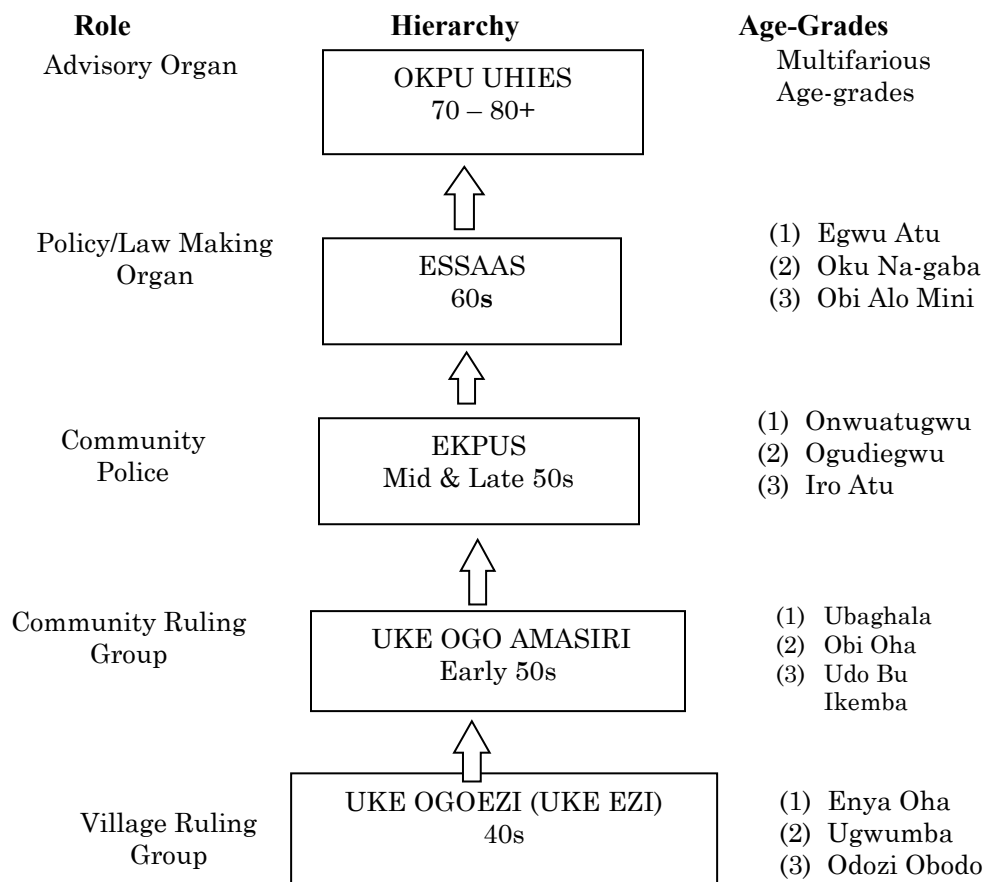
The age grade system in the Amasiri clan organized the people into groups based on age and maturity. The organization of the people into different age grade groups start at their early age. Young people at various *ezi* (compound) of same age bracket come together to form an age grade group. At the early stage, the age grade group is usually without a name. The group is usually referred as “Boys No Name”. At the attainment

of maturity age, the group choses a name recognized by the community.¹⁸ However, the clan structured age grade groups into five hierarchies. This hierarchical structure is transitional and age based.

The first hierarchy was the *Uke-Ezi*. The *Uke-Ezi* consists of young people who are not up to the age of 50. It was usually formed by three different age grade groups. The most senior age grade group always took the leadership role of the *Uke Ezi*. *Uke Ezi* was only entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the affairs of *ezi*. At the attainment of 50, they transit to another hierarchy known as *Uke-ji-Ogo*. The *Uke-ji-Ogo* oversee the administration villages that make up the Amasiri clan and served as appeal court for issues that were not resolved at the *ezi* level.

At the attainment of 55, the *Uke-ji-Ogo* transits to *Ekpu –Uke –Eto*. The *Ekpu –Uke –Eto* was usually intermediaries between the *Uke-ji-Ogo* and the ruling class (*Esaa*). People transit to *Esaa* when the attained the age of 60. This hierarchy was regarded as the governing council of the clan.²¹ and those who attained age of 70 and above, move to the last hierarchy known as the *Ndi-ichie*. The *Ndi-ichie* is regarded as a “living ancestor”, and addressed by the title “*ichie*.” *Ndi-ichie* are the ultimate repositories of indigenous wisdom and the embodiment of the people’s custom and history, and they are consulted to resolve intractable issues in the villages and the clan in general.

Diagram Showing the Organizational Structure of Age Group in Amasiri Clan



Source: Obasi (2019)

4.2 Contributions of Age Grade Groups to Community Development in Amasiri Clan

Since from pre-colonial era, age grade groups have been playing significant role in all Igbo communities including Amasiri. Ezeogidi (2020) maintained that in Igboland, age groups are agents of change and modernization and sophistication, role models and community conscience; educators and socializing agent, managers of projects, advocate of best practices, and power balance in the community: initiatives, providing support to the poor and disadvantaged, enforcers of ancestral wishes and protectors of cultural values and norms (Ezeogidi, 2020). In Amasiri Clan, the contributions of the age grade groups to community development are evident in three spheres: political, social and economic.

4.3 Political Development

The contributions of the age grade groups to political development of Amasiri clan cannot be overemphasized. Thus, it has remained unit of political administration of the people from time immemorial. Each of the age grade category play essential role in the governance of the people. However, the *Esaa* was majorly regarded as the ruling class. This was because, the major executive, legislative and judicial functions were embodied in the *Essa*. Obasi (2019) maintained that, *Esaa* was the power pillar of the community that made strategic policies and deals with critical external matters, inter-village and inter-village-group problems.²⁷ The *Essa* made law for the clan and resolved disputes between and among the people; and appropriately punished those who violated the laws of the land. While the *Esaa* administered the clan, *Uke-Ezi* provided to security to mineral resources such as bamboos, rocks, sand, palm and other economic trees in their respective villages; *Ukeji Ogo* administered the village that make up the clan; *Ekpu Uke Eto* policed the clan; and *Ndi-Ichie* served as the advisory council.

These roles of these age grade groups are still relevant in the contemporary Amasiri society. In the contemporary era, Amasiri clan has been split into three autonomous communities headed by *Ezeogos*. Nevertheless, the decisions of these *Ezeogos* are not definite or binding on the people without the backing or approval of the *Essa* council.

4.4 Social Development

The age grade system played pivotal roles in the social development of Amasiri clan. One of such roles was socialization of children. Generally, in Igboland, age grade is regarded as most essential agent of socialization besides the family. In Amasiri, the age grade played a leading role in instilling cultural values, norms and social skills in the young people that would enable them to be fully integrated into the society. Moreover, the age grade has been at the forefront of ensuring the wellbeing of the people through provision of social amenities such as construction of roads, healthcare facilities, bore holes, etc. In 2015, an age grade group known as “*Nwabuike-oha*” in Ohaechara village of the clan constructed primary health center. This facilitated quick healthcare delivery for the people in Ohaechara community. In all the five villages of Amasiri clan, the age grade groups have constructed bore hole for supply of clean water for the people.

The age grade has also contributed significantly to the advancement of education in the clan. The most pronounced contribution of the age grade groups’ advancement of education in the clan has remained provision of classroom blocs and establishment of community schools across all the five villages. Apart from Amasiri Secondary School Amasiri (ASSA) established by the government in 1978, other secondary schools in Amasiri clan such as Ekumabagala memorial secondary school, Ezeke; Ndukwe Community

Secondary School, Ndukwe; and Comprehensive Secondary School, Poperi, were established by different age groups.³⁵ Again, some age groups in the clan collaborated with the Ebonyi State Community and Social Development Agency (EB-CSDA) to build standard and well equipped classroom blocs. One of such age grade groups was “*Izubudo*” in Ezeke village. In 2007, the age grade group through the collaboration started construction of classroom blocs in Ekumabagala Memorial Secondary School. This project was completed in 2009.

Beyond establishment of new schools and construction of classroom blocs, the age grade groups also sponsor their members and the children of members of their members to further their education. Most often, when a member is financially incapable to further his education or sponsor his children especially in tertiary institutions, the members of his age grade group always stepped in to support him with the needed resources especially finance.

Furthermore, the age grade played important role in crime reduction in the clan. No community develop when amidst crimes. Because of this, the age groups put place a whole lot of efforts to ensure that crimes remain at the barest minimum. Each age grade group was saddled with the power to punish any of its member who engaged in crimes such as adultery, witch-crafting, domestic violence, stealing, fighting, rape, among others, accordingly.³⁸ For instance, a member of an age grade group who indulged in stealing are heavily fined, beaten and suspended. This did not instill discipline in the culprits, but also discourage other members of the clan from engaging in crimes.

The age grade groups in the Amasiri clan were also preservers of culture of the people. To preserve the culture heritages of the people, the age grade groups employed several measures. This was clearly evident in the mandatory rule that before one join an age grade group, he must be initiated into “*isiji*” (manhood) (Omaka & Anthony, 2012). This measure has made *isiji* cultural practice unchanged even in the era of globalization. The age groups also enforced of ancestral wishes and protect of cultural values and norms from extermination.

4.5 Economic Development

The age grade group have contributed immensely to the economic development of Amasiri Clan in diverse ways. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of the Amasiri people. Due to this, the age grade groups create roads and bridges within farmland to enable the farmers to access their farm and transport their produce to the market. This created room for profit maximization for farmers in the clan. Again, the age grade groups through provision of security provided conducive environment for businesses. This accounts for the reason businesses thrive in the clan.

5. Conclusion

The assessment of the role of age grades in fostering community development within the Amasiri clan indicated the significant place of age grade institution in the collective progress of a society. The study revealed that age grade was not just an institution, but also mechanism of socioeconomic and political development in Amasiri Clan. Through their multifaceted contributions ranging from infrastructure development and conflict resolution to cultural preservation and social cohesion, age grade institution demonstrated their enduring relevance in addressing the evolving needs of the community. Thus, the age

grade institution serve as a cornerstone of grassroots governance, mobilizing resources, fostering unity, and promoting civic responsibility among members.

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