

DISSERTATION | DOCTORAL THESIS

Titel | Title

The EU as a Global Digital Actor: Catching up? Staying on Top? Lending a Hand?

verfasst von | submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doktorin der Philosophie (Dr.phil.)

Wien | Vienna, 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt |
Degree programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 796 310 300

Dissertationsgebiet lt. Studienblatt | Field of
study as it appears on the student record
sheet:

Politikwissenschaft

Betreut von | Supervisor:

ao. Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Gerda Falkner

English Abstract

This research project analyses the European Union's (EU's) self-portrayal and how the EU is perceived as a global digital actor vis-à-vis Africa and the United States: does the EU present itself, and is it perceived as an actor driven by norms or by its own interests? Has the demand for a stronger orientation of the EU towards its interests, as expressed by various leaders, materialised in the EU's self-portrayal and in the way the EU is perceived in this relatively new field of external digital policy? The methodology builds on a qualitative approach comprising qualitative coding and content analysis of official EU-documents and expert interviews with EU-insiders and outsiders. Based on this analysis, the EU is then allocated to one of four ideal types concerning the orientation towards norms or interests on two dimensions: projected orientation (analysis of EU-documents) and perceived orientation (analysis of expert interviews with EU-outsiders) of the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US. In both cases, the EU corresponds to the ideal type of an incoherent realist actor: it presents itself as a normative actor in relevant documents but is perceived as an interest-oriented actor by EU-outsiders. The third perspective, the one of EU-officials, is interesting, since they discern the EU as a normative actor concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa but as a balanced actor (i.e. norm- and interest-based goals are equally present) concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US. Regarding the types of norms and interests present in the different perspectives (self-portrayal, EU-officials, EU-outsiders) on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US, it is primarily the norm of inter-regional solidarity and the interest of economic gains that are at the forefront. An interesting outlier is the EU-outsiders' perspective on the EU's external digital policy towards the US, where, in contrast, the norm of respect for human rights and the interest of political gains rank first.

German Abstract

Dieses Forschungsprojekt analysiert wie sich die Europäische Union (EU) bezüglich ihrer digitalen Außenpolitik gegenüber Afrika und den Vereinigten Staaten selbst darstellt und wie sie wahrgenommen wird. Präsentiert sich die EU beziehungsweise wird sie wahrgenommen als globaler digitaler Akteur, der sich an Normen oder an seinen eigenen Interessen orientiert? Hat sich der Ruf nach einer stärkeren Interessensorientierung der EU durch führende EU-Politiker:innen bezüglich der Selbstdarstellung sowie der Wahrnehmung im Bereich des relativ jungen Felds der digitalen Außenpolitik verwirklicht? Für die Analyse wurde ein qualitativer Zugang, welcher eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse von EU-Dokumenten sowie Expert:inneninterviews umfasst, gewählt. Basierend auf dieser Analyse konnte die EU einem von vier Idealtypen bezüglich einer Norm- oder Interessensorientierung in zwei Dimensionen zugeordnet werden: projizierte Norm- oder Interessensorientierung (Analyse von EU-Dokumenten) und wahrgenommene Norm- oder Interessensorientierung (Interviews von Expert:innen außerhalb der EU) der digitalen Außenpolitik der EU gegenüber Afrika und den USA. In beiden Fällen entspricht die EU dem Idealtypus eines inkohärenten realistischen Akteurs: sie präsentiert sich selbst als normativer Akteur, wird hingegen als realistischer Akteur von außen wahrgenommen. Die dritte Perspektive, jene der EU-Beamten:innen, ist interessant, da diese die EU als normativen Akteur bezüglich ihrer digitalen Außenpolitik gegenüber Afrika, aber als ausgeglichenen Akteur (d.h. es sind norm- und interessensorientierte Ziele in gleichem Maße vorhanden) bezüglich ihrer digitalen Außenpolitik gegenüber den USA wahrnehmen. Hinsichtlich Norm- und Interessenskategorien, die in den unterschiedlichen Perspektiven präsent sind, stellten sich die Norm der inter-regionalen Solidarität sowie ökonomische Interessen als vorherrschend heraus. Im Gegensatz dazu stellt die Außenperspektive auf die digitale Außenpolitik der EU gegenüber den USA einen interessanten Sonderfall dar, in dem die Norm der Menschenrechte und politische Interessen im Vordergrund stehen.

Acknowledgements

There are numerous people to thank, so this can by no means be considered an exhaustive list. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor Gerda Falkner, not only for her invaluable advice and feedback, but also for the interesting discussions, and for motivating me to follow my interests and my own ideas in my research. Thank you for giving me this freedom to be creative and to think by myself, while always stepping in with inspirational thoughts and advice whenever needed. I would also like to thank my former colleague Anke Obendiek for taking the time to read and to give feedback on my proposal as well as on the final work, which gave me a good start and a good end. I would also like to thank my partner, Martin Gerstl, who delivered constant moral support (I had to promise not to write a second doctoral thesis) and a critical eye when it came to the design of tables and visualisations. I would also like to thank my parents for their support in many ways, making it possible for me to get an excellent education.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for their constant support – please forgive me for not naming you all in this list. Further, I would like to thank my colleagues Katharina Meißner-Schöller, who is an amazing teacher, Sebastian Heidebrecht, who always had an open ear, Magnus Schöller, who gave me one-on-one lessons on different aspects of political science during lunchtime and was particularly patient in answering all of my very many questions, Timo Seidl, who let me participate in a special course on Discourse Network Analysis for his students, and particularly Florian Sowa, whom I also consider a dear friend, who helped me out whenever the software ‘Word’ was challenging me and gave encouragement whenever needed.

I thank the jury of my public presentation of the research proposal for this thesis, Dirk Lange, Barbara Prainsack, Sieglinde Rosenberger, and Peter Slominski, who gave valuable comments, which helped with putting the proposal into practice. Participants and discussants at several conferences and workshops have provided valuable help. I would like to thank my fellow panellists at the Conference of the SGEU (Standing Group on the European Union) of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) in 2022 and in 2024, and the respective discussants Paul Timmers and Anna Herranz-Surrallés. I would also like to thank for feedback given at the International Conference of Europeanists in June 2022 particularly by Katharina Meißner-Schöller and Magnus Schöller. I also thank my fellow panellists as well as our discussant Julia Pohle at the European Union in International Affairs Conference in 2023 for her helpful comments. Further, I would like to thank Sarah Wolff, Heidrun Maurer and Marine

Bardou for their valuable comments at the Workshop for Early Career Researchers in Lisbon in 2024 as well as Marianna Lovato for organising the workshop. I would also like to thank my fellow panellists at the Pan-European Conference on International Relations in 2024 as well as our chair and discussant, Niklas Bremberg for his insightful and considerate feedback.

Vienna, 19 November 2024

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List of Abbreviations

Afreximbank	African Export-Import Bank
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
CISA	United States Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency
DG CNECT	Directorate General Communication Networks, Content and Technology
DG INTPA	Directorate General International Partnerships
DMA	Digital Markets Act
DPF	Data Privacy Framework
DSA	Digital Services Act
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDPB	European Data Protection Board
EEAS	European External Action Service
ENISA	European Union Agency for Cybersecurity
EU	European Union
FFT	French Telecoms Federation
FISA	Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (United States)
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GIZ	German Development Agency
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IO	International Organisation
IoT	Internet of Things
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MPE	Market Power Europe
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIST	US National Institute for Standards and Technology
NPE	Normative Power Europe
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SREN	French law regulating digital services (Sécuriser et Réguliser l’Espace Numérique)

TTC	Trade and Technology Council
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations Human Rights Council
US	United States

1 Introduction

The ongoing digitalisation¹ is often called the digital revolution since it represents one of humanity's most complex and pervasive current challenges. It affects our economies, the development of our societies, and, last but not least, politics. There is increasing awareness that digital technology is crucial to international power relations (Franke and Torreblanca 2021: 260-61).

Amid this digital revolution, the EU has to cope with a myriad of challenges as a global actor in the digital arena. Digital companies, often originating in the United States, have garnered great power and influence worldwide (see for instance Newman 2020: 277,96; Zuboff 2019), which the EU thus aims to regulate to constrain their power and create a balance concerning other actors, such as users of digital platforms or smaller digital companies. The table below offers an overview of the most prominent digital companies based on their market capitalisation and revenue (Bloomenthal 2024). As stressed before, the most prominent digital and globally operating companies are mostly US- American and Chinese. There are no European companies in those rankings.

Table 1: Five largest global digital companies (ranking based on market capitalisation)

	Market capitalisation (May 2024)	Annual revenue (financial year 2023)	Country of origin
Alphabet	\$ 2.18 trillion	\$ 307.39 billion	United States
Amazon	\$ 1.92 trillion	\$ 574.79 billion	United States
Meta	\$ 1.2 trillion	\$ 134.9 billion	United States
Tencent	\$ 481.14 billion	\$ 85 billion	China
Alibaba	\$ 215.47 billion	\$ 126.49 billion	China

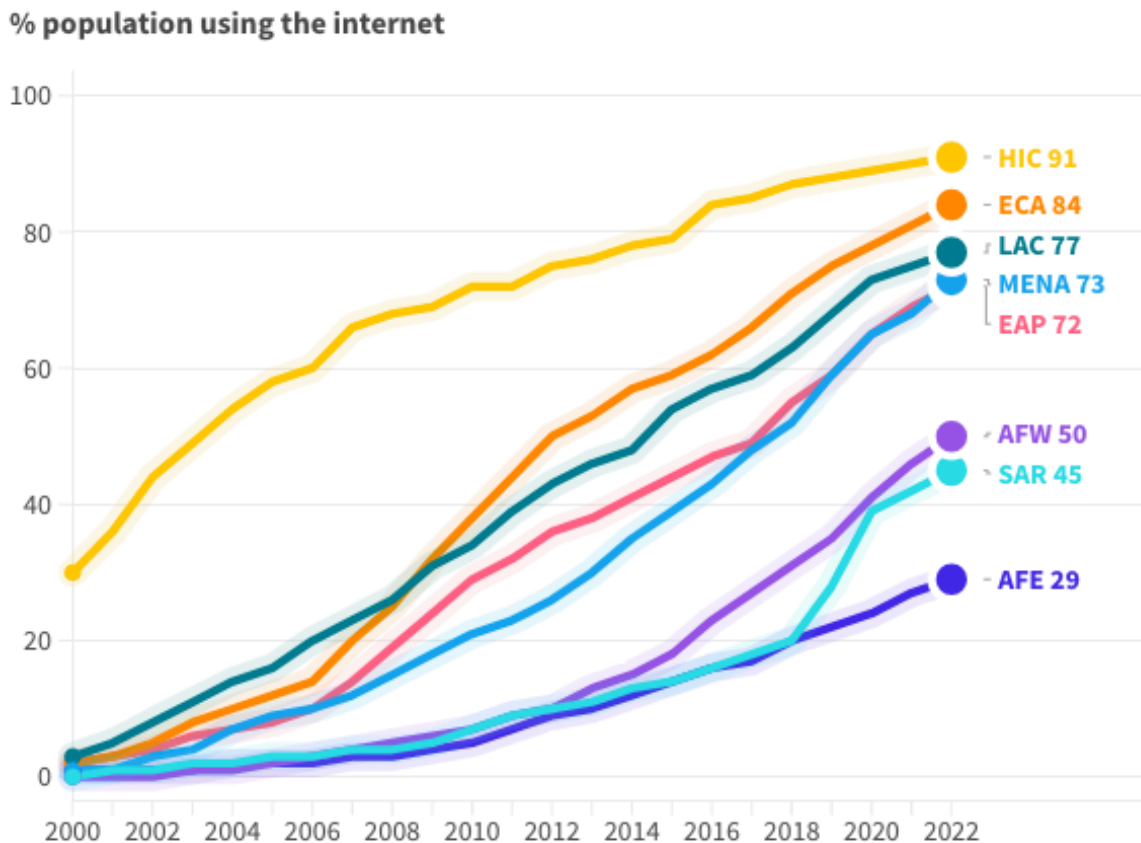
Created by the author based on: <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/personal-finance/030415/worlds-top-10-internet-companies.asp>, 12.8.2024 (Bloomenthal 2024)

On the other hand, there are regions in the world where the necessary infrastructure is not developed adequately and many people, therefore, do not even have access to the Internet or digital tools, nor do they have the required skills (see for instance van Dijk 2020). To illustrate this global digital divide, the graph below shows the ostensible differences in Internet usage in high-income countries, like the US and many Western-European countries and countries, for instance, in Africa (AFW – Africa West and AFE Africa East). Internet usage has risen

¹ Digitisation is “the material process of converting individual analogue streams of information into digital bits” while digitalisation is “the way in which many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures” (Brennen and Kreiss 2014)

drastically everywhere, but African countries notably lag behind. Apart from that, there are many more gaps, not only concerning Internet usage but also skills or the development of the necessary digital infrastructure; where for instance, African countries also lag behind, as many indices, such as the Network Readiness Index (<https://networkreadinessindex.org/countries/>) and the International Telecommunications Union's (ITU) annual reports show.

Figure 1: The Global Digital Divide - Usage of the Internet in percentage points of population



Notes: High-Income Countries (HIC), Europe and Central Asia (ECA), Latin America and Caribbean (LAC), Middle East and North Africa (MENA), East Asia and Pacific (EAP), Africa West (AFW), South Asia (SAR), Africa East (AFE)

Source: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2024/03/05/global-digitalization-in-10-charts>, 12.8.2024

When balancing its external digital policies towards so many different players as a global actor in the digital field, the EU has to ‘catch up’ or at least ‘stay on top’ (vis-à-vis digital leaders such as the US) but also ‘lend a hand’ (vis-à-vis digital laggards such as African states), depending on the context and the third party. When referring to external digital policies, all

digital issues are included, thus the term ‘digital’ is used as an umbrella term also including what in some contexts and by some practitioners or researchers are called ‘cyber issues’².

In more abstract terms, this means sometimes the EU will strive to act in coherence with its interests, sometimes with values and norms – so it is not a question of either or, but of how much in which context. How vital are interests and norms in the EU’s external digital relations? Will the EU continue its path to include more interest-related elements in its global strategies as could already be seen in the Global Strategy of 2016 (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 72)? Will the EU become a geopolitical player and find the language of power – as demanded by Josep Borrell (2020) on several occasions – in the global digital field? For this, the EU will have to be explicit about its interests. As Ursula von der Leyen announced, will her Commission be geopolitical (Hyde-Price 2021: 152)? This would also lead to interest-led strategies as well as an interest-led communication of the EU. And will this also be the case in the digital arena? A 180 degree turn from a norm- to an interest-orientation cannot be considered as realistic. But given the fact that already in 2016, the first foundations for a more a more interest-oriented external strategy were laid (Global Strategy 2016) and announcements regarding a geopolitical orientation were already made in 2020, one could expect to see first changes in the years after, particularly in a comparatively young field as external digital relations.

Further, Ursula von der Leyen dedicated an essential part of her State of the Union Speech in 2020 to digitalisation, mentioning the relevance of the EU’s digital sovereignty (von der Leyen 2020b). Digital sovereignty brings us to questions like: How important is the EU’s self-interest in times of dependence on foreign digital giants and chip production outside of the EU? Does the EU already play its cards in the global digital arena, just as Thierry Breton (2021) demands? On the other hand, what are the EU’s actions and intentions vis-à-vis digitally less advanced actors, such as Africa? In how far does the often-communicated equality of the partnership with Africa materialise? This would also ask for the EU to stand by its interests rather than taking a more normative but possibly more patronising approach.

In this context, it is vital that while the EU might present itself as a normative actor, others do not necessarily see the EU in the same light (Farrell 2015: 786). Even in the realm of security and defence policy, the evaluation of a CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) mission

² In some contexts, practitioners and researchers distinguish between ‘digital’ and ‘cyber’ issues, the first connected to more economic issues such as the flow of data, digital trade or competition in the digital realm and the second linked to cyber-security and -threats.

by representatives of a third country might be completely different from the evaluation by representatives of the EU (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 208). This is certainly also true for digital foreign policy.

To evaluate the EU's global digital actorness, the focus of this thesis will thus not only be on the image the EU gives itself, but the focus will be on comparing said image with perceptions of the EU as a global digital actor by others. Thus, a holistic picture of the EU as a global digital actor can be drawn, rather than a one-sided picture only looking at how the EU presents itself or how it is perceived. Those perceptions are highly relevant in practice since, for diplomats (or any other EU officials working in the field of the EU's external relations) to be more effective in their work, it is paramount to understand how other global actors perceive the world (Wilkinson 2007: 11). This additional perceptive approach furthers the understanding of the EU's external digital policies beyond the goals set by the EU itself and uncovers tensions between the different perspectives and, thus, unsuccessful communication and misunderstandings.

In short, this research project thus scrutinises the EU's orientation towards or motivation by norms and values on the one hand and interests on the other by asking and answering the following question:

How does the EU present itself (projected image), and how is it seen by others (perception) concerning its external digital policy towards the US and Africa? Does the EU present itself as a normative actor, i.e. an actor driven by norms or oriented towards interests?

The main aspect is, thus, **if and in how far there is an interest-orientation concerning the EU's external digital policies towards the US and Africa**, which is what could be **conjectured** based on a certain **turn towards interests already in the EU's Global Strategy of 2016**³ (High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2016), as well as based on more recent **announcements**⁴ **concerning the EU's orientation towards power and geopolitics by high EU officials** (Borrell 2020; Breton 2021; von der Leyen 2020a) as outlined before. Further, it shall be assessed if this interest-orientation – or lack thereof – is

³ The reason why a strategy dating back to the year 2016 is stated is that changes outlined in strategic documents do not materialise immediately after the publication of such documents, but after a period of 'adjustment' one assumes to be able to observe what is outlined in strategic documents.

⁴ Those announcements show a continuance in this tendency or orientation towards norm concerning global issues.

actually perceived, i.e. if and in how far there is a **gap** between how the EU **presents** itself and how it is **perceived** concerning the **driving factors** behind its **external digital policy**. Another layer of this issue is added due to **potential differences** between the EU's **presented** and **perceived driving factors** in its **external digital policy** towards a **digital leader**, the US, versus towards a **digital laggard**, Africa. According to the literature, interests and norms⁵ underly the EU's global policies. From a realist lens, interests are more relevant while norms are considered second-order concerns. Conversely, constructivism focuses on norms. Thus, those two concepts – norms and interests – will be operationalised for the analysis in order to see which one prevails concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US. This research design is based on recommendations of the literature, taking goals as the unit of analysis and clear definitions of interests and norms as a basis for rigorous operationalisation.

Thus, the focus will be on this particularly critical and pressing challenge for the EU of simultaneously having to deal with actors that are more (the US) or less digitally advanced (African states) compared to the EU itself. The case studies analysed will be the EU's external digital policy towards the US, which is considered a global digital leader, and its external digital policy towards Africa, a digital laggard according to different indices and also based on the UN's digital development compass⁶.

External digital policy refers to any foreign policies regarding digitalisation, such as the flow of data between countries, the creation of international standards in the digital realm or cyber security and the dealing with global cyber threats and attacks. This research includes both in the term EU's external digital policy. The EU is thus confronted with two very different actors, in which it looks once 'upwards' and once 'downwards', and one would presume that the respective external digital policies might be pretty different from one another and will serve different purposes since different goals are to be achieved by the respective policies. Several questions arise: What are the EU's goals behind its external digital policies towards those two actors? Is it the EU's economic, geopolitical and security interests (see for instance Hyde-Price 2006) or its orientation towards norms, as Ian Manners (2002) suggests in his seminal work on Normative Power Europe (NPE), behind those policies?

⁵ The term norms refers to norms in the sense of values (not to norms in the sense of legal norms).

⁶ The UN digital development compass (<https://www.digitaldevelopmentcompass.org/>) assesses the US at a digital development stage four (out of five). The EU on the whole is not assessed, but the individual member states are, which are all either stage four (Western Europe) or three (Eastern Europe). Africa has three countries (Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Egypt) assessed as stage three and all others are below, with both stages, one and two, represented)

The concept of NPE would suggest that the EU's focus is working on reducing the digital divide between itself and Africa to help African countries, for instance, develop their digital industries and advance the internet usage by African citizens. This could then be linked to the diffusion of the EU's value-based approach to digitalisation by using for instance the instrument of conditionality. Proponents of realism, by contrast, some of whom even having expressed criticism of the concept of NPE, will undoubtedly see that differently. They would instead argue that the EU will focus on closing the gap between itself and digital leaders and that the EU will only close the gap between itself and laggards to serve its interests.

It is obvious that both norm- and interest-based elements will be found within the EU's policies targeting those different actors; as explained, this is not a question of either-or but rather a question of degrees. It will be thus all the more interesting to see where the EU positions itself as a global digital actor in this relatively new policy field at a time where a change from a more normative to a more interest-oriented approach in general as well as a more equal approach towards Africa has been announced by different leading personalities. Will we see a hesitant or even a clear orientation towards interests, or will the EU rather present itself as a normative actor?

The theoretical contribution of this thesis consists in adding to the debate on the EU as a normative global actor and thus speaks to the literature on Normative Power Europe (NPE) as well as realist IR literature criticising the NPE concept. It further provides a framework to assess the EU's global digital actorness, as outlined in the tables below, based on contrasting the image the EU gives itself and the perception from the outside with regard to an orientation towards norms or interests. Additionally, a typology of norms and interests, as well as domains of external digital policy, have been devised to ascertain which types of norms or interests prevail in which contexts.

Table 2: Ideal types of the EU's global digital actorness

		Image projected by the EU	
		<i>Norm-oriented</i>	<i>Interest-oriented</i>
External perception of EU	<i>Norm-oriented</i>	coherent normative actor presentation as normative actor, perception as normative actor	incoherent normative actor ⁷ presentation as realist actor, perception as normative actor
	<i>Interest-oriented</i>	incoherent realist actor ⁸ presentation as normative actor, perception as realist actor	coherent realist actor presentation as realist actor, perception as realist actor

The image projected by the EU is the way the EU presents itself in officially available documents such as press releases relevant to the EU's external digital policy towards the US or Africa. The external perception is the way the EU is perceived by outsiders such as African or US officials, think tankers or journalists. In both cases, the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US, four different combinations are possible: both perspectives can be norm-oriented, thus the EU corresponds to the ideal type of coherent normative actor. If both are interest-oriented, the EU is a coherent realist actor. In case the EU's self-representation is interest-oriented, but EU-outsider perceive the EU as norm-oriented, the EU is considered a incoherent normative actor; the other way around, the EU corresponds to an incoherent realist actor.

While in the table above, the potential tensions between two perspectives (how the EU presents itself and how it is perceived) are shown with the help of four ideal types, the next table reflects potential tensions between the EU's global digital actorness vis-à-vis a digital leader (the US) and a digital laggard (Africa). In each of the perspectives, the EU can correspond to either a normative actor (if it is in both cases – vis-à-vis Africa as well as vis-à-vis the US – norm-oriented), an upward normative and downward realist actor (if the EU is a norm-oriented actor towards the US and interest-oriented towards Africa), an upward realist and downward

⁷ Whenever the presentation and the perception contradict each other – one being norm-oriented the other interest-oriented – the EU can be assessed as an incoherent actor. A decision concerning the naming of those two incoherent ideal types had to be taken in order to distinguish them from each other. Which perspective shall be the name giver? Since it is the actual perception that in the end makes the EU a normative or realist actor, not the intentions or the wish of how to be seen, the perception of outsiders was used for the names of the two incoherent ideal types.

⁸ See footnote 5 above

normative actor (if the EU is interest-oriented towards the US and norm-oriented towards Africa) or a realist actor (if the EU is interest-oriented actor in both cases).

Table 3: Ideal types of the EU's global digital actorness contrasting external digital policy towards a digital leader (US) and a digital laggard (Africa)

		External digital policy towards Africa (digital laggard)	
	Goals	<i>norm-based</i>	<i>interest-based</i>
External digital policy towards the US (digital leader)	<i>norm-based</i>	normative actor	upward normative, downward realist actor
	<i>interest-based</i>	upward realist, downward normative actor	realist actor

The following table shows the different categories of norms, interests and domains helping to get an overview of which norms, interests and domains are relevant in which external digital policy (towards the US and towards Africa) as well as in which perspective (the EU's self-representation or the perception).

Table 4: Norms, interests and domains within EU external digital policy

Norms	Interests	Domains of EU external digital policy
• peace • liberty • democracy • rule of law • respect for human rights • social solidarity • anti-discrimination • sustainable development • good governance • inter-regional solidarity • consumer rights	• economic gains • (geo)political gains • security gains	• transregional governance in digital realm (e.g. standards concerning the internet) • (digital) industry (digital industry itself and effects of digitalisation on any industrial sector) • digital trade • security issues in the digital realm, e.g. cyberattacks, hybrid threats, cybersecurity • development cooperation in the digital realm • societal digital issues • digital issues in the public sector e.g. e-governance, e-health

The empirical contribution consists of the study of the image the EU gives itself as well as the perception of different actors, EU-insiders and EU-outsiders, regarding the motivation behind the EU's goals of its external digital policies towards Africa and the US, carried out through an analysis of documents as well as of semi-structured expert interviews. This also leads to a normative and practical contribution, uncovering discrepancies between the EU's discourse and what is actually perceived and thus allowing for an interpretation of potentially advisable changes to make the EU's discourse, negotiations, strategies and policies more effective. Additionally, the typology of norms and interests, particularly the former, will be very helpful in digital policy-making. Since disruptive technologies develop fast, regulations must be adaptive, which can be achieved by basing the laws on norms. For this, it has to be ascertained which norms are relevant under which circumstances and in which contexts, which this research will deliver regarding external digital policies towards digitally advanced as well as less advanced actors.

This analysis and the results will be presented by first reviewing the literature scrutinising the EU's digital policies concerning global and external issues, thus demonstrating the research gap filled by this thesis. Then, the research design, including the chosen methods, will be explained and discussed. The following empirical chapters will first give the larger context of the EU's relations with the US and Africa in general and concerning digital issues. Then, the results of the empirical analysis will be presented in detail, discussed, and put into context. The following chapter will compare those results to get an overview of the differences and similarities between the EU's external digital policies towards a digital leader, the US, and a digital laggard, Africa. The conclusion will stress the most relevant results and give an outlook on potential future avenues of research building on the thesis at hand.

2 The EU's External Digital Policy and its Global Digital Actorness: Literature Review and Research Gap

This chapter aims to present an overview of the existing literature related to this thesis's thematic focus on the norm or interest-orientation of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US in different perspectives (self-representation and perception of EU-insiders and outsiders). The following strands of literature are relevant and shall be outlined: literature on the EU's digital policy with an external focus, literature on the EU's normativity or lack thereof in its external (digital) policies and relations⁹, and literature on global digital divides. The latter is particularly relevant regarding the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. Within the literature on the EU's normativity in different globally relevant policy fields, the digital field has not been covered yet, nor has the literature on the EU's external digital policies or on digital divides used the lens of norm- or interest-orientation.

2.1 Literature on the EU's external and global digital policy

⁹ Some of mentioned literature is used and outlined in more detail in subsequent chapters: chapter three on approaches and concepts as well as the chapters focusing on the history and status quo of EU-Africa and EU-US relations (chapters 5.1 and 5.2 as well as 6.1. and 6.2 respectively).

This strand of literature covers the external dimension of the EU's digital policy making, where the concept of digital sovereignty has been considered in an increasing number of analyses, digital industrial policy is a focus which has been receiving rising attention lately, while digital diplomacy has been covered for a certain period already but is still further developing.

In his contribution to the classic handbook on *Policy Making in the European Union* (Wallace et al. 2020), Abraham L. Newman (2020) gives an overview of the EU's digital policymaking, focusing on the challenge of integrating market-making and market correction efforts¹⁰ within the digital single market, but also mentions research on the EU's external policies concerning technology and digitalisation. The author refers to Sandholtz's (1992) early work on international cooperation in the field of technology and research and development (R&D) and includes a short overview of global challenges, particularly concerning global data flows. He also refers to the EU's policies shaping global forces, potentially generating tensions with transatlantic partners (Newman 2020: 277,78,91,95), which this research looks into regarding the EU's external digital policy towards the US. The same author has also written about the role of global coalitions of different actors concerning privacy and surveillance issues between the EU and the US¹¹ (Farrell and Newman 2019b). The research project at hand now adds an analysis of the tensions between the EU's projected image and US American as well as African views concerning the EU's external digital policy making.

Recent literature dealing with global digital issues and the EU often focuses on the EU's digital sovereignty, which has also become a buzzword in current debates on the EU's role within the global digital arena. Anke Obendiek (2021: 2) argues that this concept should not be the guiding principle of the EU's digital policymaking. In her view, the EU should focus on its strengths, namely its role as a normative power, rather than trying to catch up with the US and China by isolating itself and creating European digital giants modelled after Facebook and Google (Obendiek 2021: 2,6,9). Andreas Aktoudianakis (2020: 11) argues along the same lines but would have preferred the EU to have fostered its own digital companies to make them able to compete with US digital giants before introducing regulations such as the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). In a special issue regarding digital sovereignty in discourse and actual policy change, Gerda Falkner, Sebastian Heidebrecht, Anke Obendiek and Timo Seidl (Falkner

¹⁰ Those two areas – market-making and market-correcting – relate to the categories of economic interests and various norm categories, such as respect for human and consumer rights or anti-discrimination (see chapter on research design).

¹¹ Surveillance can be related to security gains (see chapters on research design and empirical analysis).

et al. 2024) found that there has been policy change towards more control in the digital arena. At the same time, there has only sometimes been discursive change towards digital sovereignty.

Dennis Broeders, Fabio Cristiano and Monica Kaminska (2023) scrutinised the use of both terms, digital sovereignty as well as strategic autonomy, and could identify tensions between those concepts and the EU as a normative power in the digital arena due to a geopoliticisation of the EU's agenda concerning digital technologies¹². Matthias Braun and Patrik Hummel (2024) connect the concept of digital sovereignty with normativity to gain a more differentiated approach to digital sovereignty. This normativity should entail vulnerability, freedom, openness and sensitivity to tensions and ambivalences, enabling innovative digital regulatory practice in the digital arena.

Digital sovereignty is also an issue in Africa, which is relevant for this research project, looking at the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. In this context, Flashadé Soulé (2024) argues that interpretations of the concept of digital sovereignty vary from continent to continent. In Africa, although data localisation is seen as a means of ensuring digital sovereignty, it remains challenging to achieve. Several African countries have built or are building data centres, but when these projects involve external actors, there are often strings attached, and data benefits may be unequally distributed.

With regard to digital industrial policy and digital economy, many advanced economies in Europe can be seen as latecomers. Since the digital economy is still relatively weakly regulated, said digital latecomers, such as the EU, could use this open policy space to implement a digital industrial policy, which can be detrimental to the interests of global digital leaders like the US (Azmeah and Foster 2016). The EU has been trying to do just that, particularly since 2015, when it launched the Digital Single Market Strategy (European Commission 2015), which has led to numerous policies to prepare the EU for the digital age, turning it into the regulatory leader of the digital economy (Bradford 2020; Burwell 2018: 5). The future of both the US and the European economy depend on developing their digital economies. The US, being home to several internet giants, has taken the lead in the digital sector, except for a few very specific and narrow areas in which the EU is ahead of the US, such as quantum computing (Burwell 2018: 2,5). Timo Seidl and Luuk Schmitz (2024) highlight changes in the EU's reaction to declining competitiveness in that the EU changes its industrial policy from market-creation

¹² In this context, the authors refer to geopoliticisation in the sense of geopolitical concerns and goals driving the EU's digital policy making.

towards supranational market direction due to a changing geopolitical and technological context and to safeguard its technological sovereignty.

The EU's digital diplomacy constitutes an integral part of the EU's foreign digital policy, where there has been an expanding amount of research. In their recent article, Federica Bicchì and Marianna Lovato (2024) analyse written communications of EU diplomats from an interdisciplinary perspective, combining IR literature with Management Studies and addressing the effects of digitalisation on diplomacy in different dimensions: time, space and confidentiality. Within the EU foreign policy system, this can be seen in the decline of the COREU system (the latter being analysed in articles by Federica Bicchì already in 2011 and 2012 from the lens of practice theory (Bicchì 2011; Bicchì and Carta 2012) in favour of newer and faster technologies, such as e-mails or WhatsApp messages.

Already a decade before, Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes (2015) edited a book on digital diplomacy offering an overview of policy-related as well as institutional aspects of digital diplomacy, including a chapter on the EU's digital diplomatic strategy in China in comparison to the US, Japan's and Sweden's respective strategies. Neil Collins (2018) examined the EU's claims to use social media more meaningfully in its diplomacy, analysing the patterns of use of Facebook by European embassies in Kazakhstan. He concludes that the EU's diplomatic service used Facebook to give routine information without interacting with the public. Rebecca Alder-Nissen and Kristin Anabel Eggeling (2022) found that traditional and digital diplomacy were difficult to entangle. They thus devised the concept of 'blended diplomacy', analysing this entanglement and its consequences for diplomatic imaginaries and relations. The interplay between digital diplomacy and gender issues has already been studied focusing on the relevance of gender issues in the EU's use of its Twitter account, which transpired as being only marginal (Wright and Guerrina 2020). After this overview of the literature on the EU's external digital policy, which primarily focuses on digital sovereignty, diplomacy and industry, we shall shed light on the literature scrutinising the EU's norm-orientation as a global actor.

2.2 Literature on the EU's normativity as global actor

Another strand of literature this doctoral thesis wants to contribute to is literature on the EU's normativity or lack thereof in its global policies. In this strand of literature, the literature on Ian

Manners' concept of Normative Power Europe (see for instance Manners 2002, 2013a) is highly relevant, including its critique (see for instance Del Sarto 2016; Diez 2005, 2013; Hyde-Price 2006). Further aspects covered are different norms and interests in the EU's external policies and their relevance for decision taking, (Saltnes 2021), not referring to digital policies though; for policy coherence and geopolitics in the EU's external digital policy, though only marginally referred to (Ringhof and Torreblanca 2022; Teevan 2022); and a framework for the analysis of internal policy fields developing an external dimension (Schunz and Damro 2020), which is also relevant for the digital field, though digital issues have not been referred to regarding this framework.

The EU is often described as a normative power, with particularly Ian Manners' concept of normative power Europe (NPE) being well-known and widely discussed, as well as referred to, for instance, by Van Schaik and Schunz (2012). The latter used the concepts of norm and interest in their analysis and discovered that, related to global climate politics, the EU is rather driven by norms but not very effective in uploading those norms to the worldwide level, thus being only a normative actor rather than a normative power. George Dikaïos (2024) came to the same conclusion regarding the EU's climate diplomacy towards the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). Nathalie Tocci (Tocci 2008b) designed a theoretical framework to ascertain an actor's normativity based on three dimensions, normative goals, normative means, and normative impact, the latter including unintended consequences. This framework was then used to assess the EU's normativity regarding various external policies, particularly trade and sanctions policies, towards different actors such as Syria or Russia.

Johanne Døhlle Saltnes found that when the EU must take decisions concerning sanctions, such choices are instead taken based on norms than interests, with the EU deciding which norm to follow, the develop norm, as Saltnes calls it, or, for instance, the norms of human right or democracy. The two latter could be those that the country in question does not follow and the EU decides if it follows the norm of development and still supports the country in question, or if it follows the norm of democracy or human rights by sanctioning the country in question.

On a critical account, Adrian Hyde-Price (2006), Mark A. Pollack (2012), Thomas Diez (2005), Chad Damro (2012, 2015) and Wolfgang Wagner (2017) with their respective counter-concepts of market power Europe (MPE) and liberal power Europe, or Katharina Meissner (2018) outlined their reservation concerning the concept of NPE. Ben Tonra (2009: 18) even called for

an ‘enlightened power Europe’, which „entails a more reflective and collaborative style of leadership, one that is values-driven, that has an explicit normative ambition and impact and one which is based upon “collaboration, cooperation, communication and open dialogue” ”. The literature on which the theoretical concepts used in this thesis are based on, i.e. the literature on Normative Power Europe and the literature critical of this concept will be outlined in detail in Chapter three on the approaches and concepts used for the analysis.

Frank Schimmelfennig (2001) contends that norms are mainly used in the EU’s rhetoric. Raffella A. Del Sarto (2016) argues along similar lines, saying the EU uses its allegedly normative policies to, on the one hand, present itself as a normative power, and on the other hand, it is those ‘normative’ policies that help the EU to pursue its interests, be it in the economic or the security realm. Richard Youngs (2004) also demonstrates how interests and norms are intertwined by focusing on the norm of human rights and security interests. He thus highlights that regardless of general acceptance that both – values and interests – co-exist in the EU’s external policies, a more in-depth exploration gives valuable insights into this co-existence of power politics and a normative agenda. This research project will also deliver such a valuable insight through an in-depth exploration of the EU’s external digital policies regarding different perspectives.

Turning now to a potential ‘Normative Power Europe’ in the digital arena, the EU was categorised alongside China and the US regarding its approach to digital issues in general and internet governance in particular: Kieran O’Hara and Wendy Hall (2021) call the EU’s approach to internet governance the “Brussels Bourgeois Internet” focusing on human rights and regulation while the “Silicon Valley Internet” is based on openness and efficiency, the more recent “DC Commercial Internet” focuses on property rights and market solutions; finally, the Beijing Paternal Internet highlights control of content. Anu Bradford’s (2023) categorisation follows similar lines but does not distinguish between two different US approaches. She classifies the EU’s approach to digital issues as rights-driven as opposed to the US market-based and Chinese state-focused approaches; all three strive for global relevance or even supremacy. Both categorisations do not explicitly refer to a Normative Power Europe but indirectly relate to this concept by referring to (human) rights as the centre of the EU’s respective approaches to digital technology and Internet governance.

Regarding the EU’s digital foreign policy, Chloe Teevan (2022) stresses the importance of coherence between the EU’s internal and external digital policies as well as between the EU’s

and its member states' digital policies. In this regard, she refers to the relevance of uniform and consistent communication concerning the EU's and its member states' common norms and interests, emphasising the importance of clearly defining the EU's economic interests regarding global digital policy. Julian Ringhof and José Ignacio Torreblanca (2022) go even further, arguing that the EU needs to become a geopolitical player in the global digital arena by devising and implementing an ambitious strategy. This should enable the EU to defend its values as well as strengthen security and its digital markets, particularly vis-à-vis China and Russia. Linda Monsees and Daniel Lambach (2022) mention China as well, but also the US, categorising both as firstly economic rivals and secondly security threats concerning the digital field. They argue that while digital sovereignty seems unachievable, the imaginary related to digital sovereignty projects is very powerful and depicts the EU as a future-oriented global player in the digital age.

Chad Damro and Simon Schunz (2020) delve into another direction, devising a framework to analyse in how far the EU develops external engagement in previously only internal policy fields. In their article, they scrutinise policies in the domains of culture, energy and science; undoubtedly, the digital domain would also be an interesting case in point. Nonetheless, the digital field was not covered in their research. Digital policy making happened in particular regarding the Digital Single Market and thus had an internal nature. Still, there is an essential external dimension, as can be seen in the case of various EU policies, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Digital Markets Act (DMA) or the Digital Services Act (DSA). In their framework, norms and interests play an essential role since those are considered the two potential driving factors of policy entrepreneurship, one of the three factors leading to the EU's external engagement, with opportunity and the EU's presence in a policy field being the other two. Norms and interests were also referred to by Lesley Masters and Chris Landsberg (2021) when identifying a rise in interest-oriented elements in addition to normative aspects in the EU's Global Strategy of 2016, calling this phenomenon 'principled pragmatism'. They highlight that before, approximately from the early 1990s until the 2000s, the EU presented itself as a normative actor¹³.

¹³ The interested reader will find more insights into their argument in chapter 5.1.1 From the Treaty of Rome to Cotonou.

2.3 Literature on digital divide(s)

With regard to partners of the EU that can be considered digital laggards, research on the digital divide is of relevance. The literature's changing foci will be outlined including the different approaches to the significance of the digital regarding supporting 'development', which certainly relates to the normativity (or lack thereof) of actors trying to reduce digital divides but without using this particular lens of normativity explicitly.

At the beginning of research into the digital divide, the focus was on differences in physical access to the internet; with time, more and more people had this access, so other issues like skills and usage became relevant in this strand of literature (van Dijk 2020: 17-18). Thus, the digital divide was categorised into first (motivation, attitude, and physical access), second (digital skills and usage), and third-level divide (participation outcomes) (van Dijk 2020: 33). Researchers came from different fields, for instance, economics, education science, or development studies. Consequently, research became interdisciplinary but stayed rather descriptive, focused on quantitative studies, lacking a comprehensive theory (van Dijk 2020: 20-21).

Development has been quite a prevalent issue within research on the digital divide (van Dijk 2020: 19). Still, the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in lowering the digital divide between the Global North and the Global South¹⁴ is still contested. In the 2000s and after, the Internet and ICTs were considered development enablers. The assumption was that as soon as digital inclusion was achieved, development would follow more or less automatically (Rice 2009: 123) (James 2003: xii). Later on, doubts were raised due to the reality of a profit-oriented market (Franco 2006: 532,34), and physical access to the internet was not considered enough since it does not necessarily lead to an exchange of useful information and knowledge (Carr 2007: 58) (Franco 2006: 544). There is general agreement, though, that policies are needed to improve the situation (James 2003: xii) (Rice 2009: 138). This also leaves a potential field of action for the EU as a global digital actor within the ongoing global digital revolution. The EU can play an essential role concerning those needed policies, as we can see from an edited volume on "Africa–Europe Cooperation and Digital Transformation", (Daniels et al. 2023) covering, among others, the issues of digital sovereignty and geopolitics, power

¹⁴The terms 'Global North' and 'Global South' are not used as geographical but analytical terms to avoid more normatively loaded terms such as developed and developing world.

politics, industrialisation, digital skills and regulation. Africa could be an essential partner in digital governance, but it is also an attractive digital market for the EU (Teewan 2021: 4). We will see from the results of the research project at hand which goals the EU focuses on – norm-based goals such as developing digital skills on the African continent or geopolitically motivated interest-based goals.

2.4 Research gap

The research gap identified within the literature concerning the EU's digital foreign policy and the EU as a normative power or actor is the lack of analysing different perspectives, meaning the image the EU gives itself as opposed to how it is viewed by others or even by its own officials. Further, the EU's normativity was not analysed concerning the global digital arena since the literature focuses on digital sovereignty in particular, but also on digital diplomacy and the EU's normativity in other policy fields, such as environmental policy. There is also a current shift of research interest towards the EU's digital industrial policy, which is deemed necessary regarding digital sovereignty. Thus, putting on the lens of normativity versus interest-orientation regarding different perspectives on the EU's external digital policy seems pertinent. It will be interesting to see the differences between said perspectives, the different external digital policies (towards the US versus towards Africa), and differences between thematic digital domains such as digital trade or cyber security. Where are norms prevailing, where are interests, and which types of norms and interests are at the forefront?

3 Theoretical lenses used for empirical analysis

This research project aims at achieving a holistic view of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US, thus several theoretical lenses shall be used for analysis following a pragmatist¹⁵ and abductive approach¹⁶. The concept of Normative Power Europe was used as a starting point, since this concept helps explaining the relevance of norms in international

¹⁵ Pragmatism can be situated in between positivism and subjectivism and its roots lie in the late 19th and early 20th century with Charles Pierces, William James and John Dewey as the most well-known representatives or rather 'founders'. (Katzenstein and Rudra 2008:113)

¹⁶ see chapter 4.2 in the section on research design for details

relations. Reactions of realist and poststructural scholars to the concept of Normative Power Europe are outlined to stress the relevance of interests as opposed to norms as well as to question the universality of norms. Thus, both driving factors behind international policies, norms and interests, shall be applied as well as critical approaches, in particular concerning said potential universality of norms, will be used for analysis. Based on these concepts from different research traditions, further categorisation will be undertaken during empirical research according to the needs in relation to the analysis. The chapter will be leading us finally to literature on the EU's foreign policy in which interests and norms were already used and whose arguments are referred to later in the analysis and discussion of the results in this research project. An additional concept – Africa's derivative power – shall show in how far Africa's particular power is also relevant regarding the EU's external digital policy towards this continent.

Eclectic theorising is based on a pragmatist and problem-driven foundation rather than on a particular paradigm (Katzenstein and Rudra 2008: 110-11). The focus is on a problem and how this problem can be solved through using different, often competing research traditions, which helps embrace the complexities of international and global issues, which one research tradition is not able to achieve (Katzenstein and Rudra 2008: 118). Thus, the best answer to a problem can be found since different styles of thought and paradigms are combined and, therefore, help generate "theoretical perspectives that have practical value beyond the academe" (Katzenstein and Rudra 2008: 111).

In this dissertation project, the concept of normative power Europe and its realist, post-structural and postcolonial answers or critiques are used as a starting point for the conceptual basis. Engaging with such different research traditions and concepts means that various concepts and narratives can be compared and integrated, thus expanding analytic tools, theoretical concepts, and methodological devices (Katzenstein and Rudra 2008: 118), as outlined in the chapter on research design.

This eclectic approach also relates to how pragmatists view progress, which differs entirely from a positivist's understanding of progress. Progress, in the view of pragmatists, means that the quality of communication among researchers of various research communities is enhanced, that real-world problems can be framed in new ways and that new knowledge has some practical utility by finding potential solutions to said real-world issues (Katzenstein and Rudra 2008: 116). This being outlined, the different concepts and approaches used for devising the research design and discussing the results shall now be delineated and defined.

3.1 Relevance of Norms: Normative Power Europe

The discussion of the EU being a norm- or interest-oriented actor is closely related to the debates concerning Ian Manners' concept of normative power Europe (NPE) (see for instance Manners 2002, 2012, 2013b). It states that the EU bases its actions on norms and diffuses those norms, whilst its neorealist critique stresses the EU's orientation toward interest (Hyde-Price 2006; Meissner 2018). The state-of-the-art in this rich academic debate invites the conjecture that – also within the digital arena – the EU is both a value-driven community following norms enshrined in its treaties and a digital single market interested in expanding its own digital industry – just how much of each in which perspective (official EU stance versus EU officials versus EU-outsiders) shall be the focus of this dissertation.

Ian Manners conceived the concept of normative power to move away from the two predominant concepts of the EU as a power: military and civilian power (Manners 2002: 238). Francois Duchêne (see for instance Duchêne 1972, 1973) introduces the term and notion of civilian power in discussions related to international relations and the EU's role within those. As Manners (2002: 235-36) mentions, Duchêne's main point was that civilian power tends to trump military power within international relations (at least at that time, i.e. in the 1970s) and that the EU represents such a civilian power because of its economic rather than its military might, which was inexistent at the time when Duchêne was writing his works related to the concept of civilian power. Although Duchêne argues that there is a change of focus from military to civilian power, Manners points to the fact that Duchêne still focuses on international rather than civil society, which he has in common with researchers who, in contrast to himself, still argued for the relevance of military power, such as Hedley Bull (cf. Bull 1982) (Manners 2002: 238). This focus on international rather than civil society is closely connected to Manners' criticism of the concept of civilian power as too much related to the Westphalian idea of states (Manners 2006: 184).

Further, the concept's focus on physical power and material interest rather than on a way of acting within the international or global sphere are further points of criticism Manners (2006: 184) advances. Apart from this content-related criticism, Manners (2006: 184) also criticises the use of the term civilian power Europe since he perceives the term civilian as too encumbered and Eurocentric, reminding us of the European narrative of the supposed civilisation of its former colonies. Thus, he decided to use the term normative power Europe for his concept instead of moving “away from Cold War (and neo-colonial) approaches to the EU” (Manners

2006: 184). In short, Duchêne bases the EU's civilian power on the availability of material resources and the EU's ability to use those. In contrast, normative power Europe focuses on persuasion and argumentation (Van Schaik and Schunz 2012: 172) as well as on other types of norm diffusion (see below for different forms of norm diffusion).

3.1.1 Types of Norms according to Ian Manners

In this research project, Ian Manners' different types of norms form one part of the basis for the empirical research and further categories have been developed to perfectly cover all digital issues. Normative power Europe is based on the norms of the EU, such as human rights, democracy or the rule of law. Ian Manners identified five core norms in the body of the laws and policies of the European Union, namely peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights (Manners 2002: 242). Concerning the first core norm, peace, Manners refers to past treaties and declarations: the Schuman Declaration, the preamble of the European Coal and Steel Treaty, and the Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community (TEC), i.e., the Treaty of Rome of 1957. For the second core norm, liberty, he refers to the preambles of the aforementioned Treaty of Rome and the Treaty of the European Union (TEU). i.e. the Maastricht Treaty, and also to article 6 of the latter, in which one can find the four foundational principles of the EU. The last three, democracy, rule of law and human rights, can be found again "in the preamble and founding principles of the TEU, the development co-operation policy of the Community (TEC art. 177), the common foreign and security provisions of the Union (TEC art. 11), and the membership criteria adopted at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993" (Manners 2002: 242).

Ian Manners (Manners 2002: 243) also identified four minor norms, which he considers more "contested": social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance. Although the first minor norm, social solidarity, can be "found throughout the *acquis communautaire et politique* of the EU" (Manners 2002: 243), he refers explicitly to the preambles and articles 2 of the TEC and the TEU as well as to the centrality of social policy and of the Economic and Social Committee. Manners mentions article (art.) 13 and Title XI of the TEC and the Copenhagen criteria concerning the second minor norm, anti-discrimination. The third minor norm, sustainable development, is referred to in Article 2 of the Treaty of Rome and the Treaty of the EU, respectively, as well as in Article 6 of the former. Good governance, the fourth minor norm, is also the most recent. Manners (2002: 242-43) mentions its implicit inclusion in the Copenhagen criteria and different Commission papers referring to this norm.

Manners then also names further fundamental rights that can be linked to those core and minor norms (Manners 2002: 243), which will also be considered norms potentially relevant in the EU's digital policies, such as equality, which is indeed a fundamental norm concerning digital divides.

3.1.2 The 'power' aspect of the concept of NPE: how to diffuse norms

The mere fact that the EU has a normative basis makes it a normative actor but does not make it a normative power, though; what makes a normative power is the diffusion of its norms and influencing what is considered normal regarding relations between international actors. In this research, the focus is on the EU's norm- or interest-based goals rather than the diffusion of its norms. Nonetheless, this is an important aspect of the concept of Normative Power Europe, which will be referred to in the discussion as well as the contextualisation of the results of this research, thus the different forms of diffusion shall be outlined. Manners (2002: 244-45) mentions six factors that shape the EU's diffusion of norms and thus its normative power: contagion, information, procedures, transference, overt diffusion and cultural filter.

Contagion is the unintentional diffusion of norms whenever the EU serves as an example. In the digital realm, the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a case in point since other states have introduced laws modelled after it, such as California, Japan, and even China (see for instance Dai and Deng 2021; Obendiek 2021: 6). In contrast, informational diffusion is intentional and follows strategic communication by EU institutions, particularly by the Commission (Manners 2002: 244).

Procedural diffusion refers to "the institutionalisation of a relationship between the EU and a third party" (Manners 2002: 244), which can take different forms, such as a partnership agreement or EU enlargement. Digital issues might be an essential ingredient of future trade or partnership agreements, which would also fall under this category. In the so-called 'post-Cotonou agreement', there is, for instance, already an article (article 48) dedicated to ICT. E-commerce is mentioned a few times throughout the agreement (European Commission 2021). At the same time, digital issues were not included in the past economic partnership agreements with different African regions, such as the economic partnership agreement (EPA) between the European Union and the SADC (South African Development Community) EPA States. In the case of the agreement mentioned above, the term digital was, for instance, only applied in context with products or descriptions of products, such as digital cameras or pianos, rather than

in connection with any digital issues or challenges. Thus, there could not have been any procedural diffusion of norms through this agreement, but as the post-Cotonou agreement shows, this might change. Another example of this type of diffusion are the European Commission's adequacy decisions concerning data flows from the EU to third countries, such as the privacy shield between the EU and the US, which has been invalid as of 16th July 2020 based on the judgement of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in the so-called Schrems II case. There are also adequacy decisions with other countries still in place, such as Switzerland or New Zealand.

In the digital field, software exports also entail exporting norms from the country where the export occurs. China, for instance, exports its surveillance software to authoritarian African states, which can be seen as alarming since Chinese norms are exported as well. Thus, it affects how the software is used in respective importing countries (see for instance Erie and Streinz 2021). This corresponds to what Manners (2002: 245) calls transference, which refers to any type of exchange, such as diffusion of standards through trade in goods as mentioned before, but also financial aid, technical assistance, and sanctions within a stick-and-carrot approach.

The overt diffusion is overt because the EU is physically present in a third state through representatives such as delegations or missions. In the future, there might also be a data or digital representative within embassies, which would correspond to this type of norm diffusion. The last form of diffusion Manners (2002: 245) outlines is the cultural filter, which "is based on the interplay between the construction of knowledge and the creation of social and political identity by the subjects of norm diffusion".

Manners (2013a: 38-40) also clarifies that 'normative power' has many meanings in the social sciences. First, Manners (2013a: 38-39) explains the distinction between *puissance*, "the potential to do something" and *pouvoir* "the act of doing something", with the first term referring to an actual normative power and the second term referring to an ideal type of global actor. Within EU studies, three meanings are used. The first meaning concerns normative theory, i.e. the way of justifying truth claims; the second concerns a form of power "that is ideational rather than material or physical" (*pouvoir*) (Manners 2013a: 39) and the third meaning refers to an "ideal type of global actor" (*puissance*) (Manners 2013a: 39). The second meaning is the most relevant for this thesis, while a typology of specific ideal types concerning the EU as a global digital actor will be devised. Taking a closer look at what mentions Manners (2012: 194) as the second meaning, it is essential to note that the distinction between three

abilities is of relevance: first, the ability to use normative justification; second, the ability to use material incentives; and third, the ability to use physical force. The EU might most often be associated with material incentives, such as economic sanctions, trade preferences or development assistance; all these measures can be linked to the diffusional factor of transference (Manners 2012: 195) mentioned before. Physical force is related to policing, military operations, or the EU's rules of law deployment. It is connected to what Manners calls overt norm diffusion (see above for further details) and thus linked to a physical presence of the EU in any form, for instance, whenever EU member states participate in UN peacekeeping missions (Manners 2012: 195). Normative justification is related to persuasion, argumentation but also shaming and prestige within an international dialogue or through the socialisation of candidate countries. In this case, the corresponding type of diffusion is the procedural diffusion (see above for further details) of norms through the institutionalisation of relationships between the EU and third parties (Manners 2012: 195-96).

A more recent work can be seen as related to Manner's concept of normative power Europe, namely "The Brussels Effect" by Columbian law professor Anu Bradford (2020), in which she argues that the EU imposes global standards in two different ways. First, multinational companies voluntarily stick to the EU's strict rules since this is cheaper than adapting their products and services according to the laws in the respective importing countries. This is what Bradford calls the 'de-facto Brussels effect'. Second, other countries introduce laws modelled after EU legislation, which she calls the 'de jure Brussels effect'. This second effect corresponds to one of Manners' normative power Europe diffusions, namely contagion. Since Anu Bradford's work focuses on the diffusion of norms rather than the EU's normative basis, it is not used for the analysis carried out in the research project at hand. However, it is still worth mentioning and should not be overlooked since it is closely related to the used theoretical concept and further particularly suitable for research on the EU's global role in the digital realm because the EU plans on and most probably will continue this diffusion for instance with the Digital Markets Act (DMA) or the Digital Services Act (DSA). This research project, however, is concerned with the EU's goals behind its policies and to see if these are norm-oriented, as they should be, if the EU was considered a normative actor, or if they are oriented towards the EU's interests, or both.

In a nutshell, Manner's concept of the EU as a normative power lies on those two ingredients: a normative basis and the ability to shape what is normal in international relations through diffusion of the EU's norms. For this thesis, only the first ingredient is used for the analysis.

Nonetheless, the second ingredient is essential and relevant in the digital realm since the EU has already been diffusing its digital norms, as shown by the examples above; the General Data Protection Regulation may be the most prominent example. In this research project, the EU's endeavour, partly together with other like-minded partners, such as the US, to counter in particular Chinese and Russian efforts to diffuse their digital norms globally and in particular on the African continent, are discussed. In this regard the International Telecommunications Union¹⁷ plays an important role, where different standards are deliberated and discussed in various working groups, and thus different players, also the EU, try to influence standard setting in the digital arena, corresponding to Manners' procedural diffusion.

While the NPE research and academic debate was first rather conceptual, i.e., criticising the concept and trying to find alternatives, current academic efforts aim to use this conceptual tool and test its usability, as concisely summarised by Max Roger Taylor (Taylor 2022: 366). This is what is done in this research project, with one aspect of the concept of NPE in the foreground, namely the normative basis of the EU in its external digital policies towards the US and Africa. Apart from norms, interests are relevant in the international arena, which shall be the issue treated with in the next section.

3.2 Relevance of Interests: Realism and Realist Critique of Normative Power Europe

Since this research project's analysis is concerned with norms and interests alike, the 'counterpart' to the literature on concepts focusing on norms, namely realist literature focusing on actors defending and advocating their own material interests, forms the second important pillar the research design is based on and thus shall be presented. As mentioned in the chapter outlining relevant literature (chapter 2), there has been an extensive debate on Manners' concept. To put it in a nutshell, the main critique of realists is that NPE is a hypocritical concept since the EU applies its normative principles only if they do not run counter to interests (Juncos and Friis 2022: 287). Adrian Hyde-Price gave a structural-realist answer to the concept of NPE (2006: 222), stating that ethical concerns are only second-order concerns. Whenever there is a conflict between the interests of a state and ethical concerns, the interest wins, according to him. For specific examples of the relationship between interests and norms in decision-making, as well as external communication concerning policies, see the chapter on research design.

¹⁷ The Telecommunications Union is an agency of the United Nations focusing on information and communication technology.

While Hyde-Price (2021: 155-56) contends that power is a crucial variable for explaining global politics, he also states that said power is not based on norms but on capabilities, referring to Gilpin, who distinguishes between military, economic and technological capabilities. The author relates further to normative and milieu-shaping goals as overambitious, running the risk of unintended consequences and not always compatible and complementary (Hyde-Price 2021: 159).

Systemic determinants are unquestionably an essential part of global digitalisation and the so-called digital, data or surveillance capitalism, with digital giants such as Meta or Google being important global players with considerable power, which can be weaponised (cf. for instance Farrell and Newman 2019a; Zuboff 2019). This relates to the realist systemic approach and focus on how power is distributed within a global structure, making structural realism suitable for explaining the EU's foreign policy (Hyde-Price 2006). The author's (2006: 218) criticism I consists in arguing that liberal-idealist theory is reductionist since its focus lies on national or subnational elements. Power is actually neglected, making a concept like civilian *power* Europe or normative *power* Europe a contradiction in terms according to realists (Bull 1982: 151; Hyde-Price 2006: 218). Further, the EU's normative power is seen as positive, which leads to a lack of 'objective' critical distance towards the object of analysis, the European Union, by researchers, according to the realist (Hyde-Price 2006: 219). This does not correspond to the view of the author of this thesis, who, as already explained, follows a pragmatist approach and makes use of the usability and explanatory power of different approaches – realist, constructivist as well as critical postcolonial approaches – to achieve a holistic picture of the EU as a global digital actor.

Even Hyde-Price admits that structural realist explanatory power has its limits concerning the EU's foreign policy since it can instead explain the "nature of the EU as an international actor and the underlying dynamics" rather than the details of the EU's dealing in the realm of foreign and security policy (Hyde-Price 2006: 218,23), which is why in this thesis both norms and interests are considered as potential driving forces and are therefore part of the empirical analysis of this research project (see the part on norms and interests in this chapter as well as the chapter on research design for details). For full explanatory power, what would be needed is a theory comprising both the domestic dimension related to the articulation of interest as well as decision-making on the one hand and systemic circumstances and conditions or even pressures on the other (Hyde-Price 2006: 219). For an even more holistic analysis, the combination of different approaches, as done in this research project, is useful.

To understand Hyde-Price's realist critique of the concept of NPE, a short excursus outlining the key assumptions and propositions of neorealism or structural realism is undoubtedly helpful and will be concisely done in this paragraph. Neo-realists start their analyses from the premise that states are the primary, unitary and rational international actors within an anarchic, competitive self-help system, in which named states strive for their survival (Hyde-Price 2006: 220-21), i.e. their survival is their primary interest driving their actions. From these main assumptions, one of the propositions that follow, or probably the most relevant proposition concerning the research project at hand, is that ethical concerns are concerns of second order. At the same time, national interests are prioritised (Hyde-Price 2006: 222), as mentioned above.

Turning now to the research at hand, several experts interviewed mentioned that interests rather originate from the member states, which might hinder the EU's acting normatively. This relates to Hyde-Price's (2006: 223) linking of the EU as a whole to ethical concerns, which the EU might follow. In contrast, he links interests to the member states, meaning that if the interests of individual member states are at odds with the EU's ethical concerns, the EU cannot act as a normative actor

Another proposition of the realists that can be considered relevant concerning this research project is that states prioritise relative gains over absolute gains. Nonetheless, this is not necessarily true for minor powers, for whom it might be the other way round. Further, absolute gains are supposed to rise in relevance when competition decreases (Hyde-Price 2006: 222). Thus, for the global digital realm, this also means that if there is high (geopolitical) competition, as is the case now, relative gains are at the forefront, and this might also be an essential driver of the EU's external digital policy. In contrast, absolute gains might become more important as soon as this competition lessens.

What can be related to the constructivist school and the relevance of norms, also in the digital realm, is that the realist school also considers milieu-shaping an essential activity of states in the international sphere to create a stable environment where states can (inter)act (Hyde-Price 2006: 222). There is a link to Ian Manners's explanations concerning the EU's diffusion of its norms as what he calls normative power Europe (NPE) (Manners 2002: 244ff). Concerning digitalisation, the conception and diffusion of norms is indisputably an essential aspect for global actors: for multinationals, which have to adhere to those norms, as well as for states wanting to have a say concerning those norms.

As regards domestic factors and interests of the EU's member states (MS), the three main options of the MS according to structural realism should also be mentioned shortly, namely balancing, buck-passing and bandwagoning (Hyde-Price 2006: 224). The first refers to the member states using the EU as a balance against global powers such as the US and China, both essential digital powers. The second refers to relying on other international powers, particularly the US, to deal with security threats rather than dealing with those issues themselves, allowing them to focus on economic issues. The last option, bandwagoning, refers to MS aligning with the most potent power to gain influence.

An essential point of the structural realists concerning the US, whose 'digital relations' with the EU are also part of this research project, is that the US did not only become a military unipolar power after the demise of the USSR but also an economic, scientific, cultural and – for this thesis most importantly – technological power (Hyde-Price 2006: 228). With relation to this technological power, one can also see that nowadays, the US can also be considered a global digital power, mainly because of the digital giants that have developed on its soil thanks to favourable economic and political conditions.

In this thesis, the EU is not seen as an isolated actor but as an actor embedded in a global system of digital or surveillance capitalism – however one wants to call this constantly evolving system – with specific pressures and restraints. This corresponds to structural realists' concession that it is not only systemic pressures that account for what happens on the global stages and how actors act, interact and react, but that one has to carry out analyses on both levels, the actor- and the systemic level (Hyde-Price 2006: 232).

In the realm of trade, similarities can be seen to the digital realm, such as different actors fighting for influence and power. In her work on the EU's trade policy, Katharina Meissner (Meissner 2018) uses a realist approach rather than the more common liberal-institutionalist approach to identify international factors influencing the EU's policies in the area of trade. She concludes that the EU wants to enhance or at least maintain its "great power status in the economic area" by challenging "other great powers such as the US or China" and thus sees the EU as a regulatory and economic power rather than a normative one (Meissner 2018: 36). This is also the case within the digital realm, with the US and China being significant powers and the EU trying to counter those powers and gain geopolitical and economic influence and power as well. However, the EU's regulatory power in the digital arena has already been confirmed (cf. Bradford 2020). While Hyde-Price, as outlined before, follows a structural-realist approach,

Meissner is to be located within so-called ‘commercial realism’¹⁸, as is Chad Damro (2015) with his concept of market power Europe¹⁹, which also has a certain relevance for the digital arena, since the EU’s digital single market is a source for the global projection of the EU’s power. After this realist critique concerning the concept of NPE, we shall scrutinise critiques originating from poststructuralist and postcolonial schools of thought in order to question the EU’s universality of norms, which is an important issue regarding the global digital arena and the diffusion of norms.

3.3 Are European or Western Norms Universal?

In this part, relevant critiques from a poststructuralist and a postcolonial perspective—the latter being particularly relevant for EU-Africa relations but also related to the EU’s external digital policy towards the US – shall be presented and discussed since they are used to critically discuss the results of the empirical analysis carried out in the context of the research project at hand.

In order to provide a critical evaluation of European norms and their sometimes presumed universality and global applicability, also in the digital realm, Thomas Diez’ and Bahar Rumelili’s conceptualisations are helpful. Diez’ (2005) called the discourse on NPE a “practice of European identity construction” (Diez 2005: 635) and highlighted the importance of analysing the forms of othering used in this discourse to rescue “normative power from becoming a self-righteous, messianic project that claims to know what Europe is and what others should be like“ (Diez 2005: 636). Bahar Rumelili (2021) also puts forward the argument that the EU adopts different forms of ‘Othering’, which, she argues, affects the reaction of target states, who either recognise or reject the EU’s discourse. Ueli Staeger (2016b: 981-82) argues along similar lines about the EU’s relations with Africa, ascertaining that NPE is neither post-imperial nor non-colonial but a Eurocentric concept falsely claiming universality of European norms while, in fact, those are contested and based on European knowledge and experience rather than on African ones. As Federica Bicchieri states correctly, „EFP [European foreign policy

¹⁸ Meissner refers to Wohlforth (2008) and Kirshner (2010) when laying out the basis of commercial realism, namely realist theory, with groupism, the self-interest of states and state-like entities, their fear of losing security in an anarchical system as well as the importance of relative gains and power as its main characteristics.

¹⁹ Market power Europe stands for the EU focusing on market norms rather than norms based on values as put forward by Ian Manners. The concept is based on three characteristics of the EU’s identity: its material existence as a single market, its institutional features as well as the existence of different interest groups or interest contestation. These characteristics form an analytical framework which can be used in empirical studies of the EU’s externalisation of market-related policies.

– information added by author], is informed, at least partially, by the idea that ‘our size fits all’.” (Bicchi 2006: 287). Asne Kalland Arstad (2015: 131) states that what needs to be done to counter Eurocentrism “is to recognise that Europe cannot be studied in isolation: Europe must be understood and analysed concerning its others.”, referring to works of John M. Hobson (*The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, 2004 and *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, 2012).

After this overview, relevant terms, namely Eurocentrism and postcolonialism, shall be defined before delving into the details of the aforementioned critiques since the latter refers to those two terms. First, eurocentrism is „the sensibility that Europe is historically, economically, culturally and politically distinctive in ways that significantly determine the overall character of world politics“ (Sebhatu 2020: 40, quoted after Sabaratnman 2013: 261), i.e. Eurocentrism legitimises coloniality and modernity, which are closely linked (Sebhatu 2020: 40). Decentring, in turn, can be defined as „interrogating, disturbing, engaging, reframing, challenging, mocking, or even undoing mainstream, privileged ways of viewing the world“(Sebhatu 2020: 41, quoted after Nayak and Selbin, 2010: 8).

Postcolonialism is linked to the concept of Eurocentrism in that postcolonial approaches criticise the Eurocentrism of ‘mainstream’ approaches such as the normative power Europe approach. Sebhatu (2020: 45) argues that while a postcolonial approach does not deny economic and material differences between Africa and Europe, it contextualises this fact to analyse in how far and why those asymmetries exist, recognising „the epistemic violence behind this discourse“. He further explains that a postcolonial approach tries to decolonise certain assumptions, such as the presumably enabling power of market liberalisation, seen in the economic partnership agreements between the EU and African regions and the related negotiations (Sebhatu 2020: 46). Regarding language, postcolonial approaches avoid the jargon and terminology of development, which is seen as colonial (Sebhatu 2020: 46).

IN this research, language and rhetoric are relevant, in that EU documents related to external digital policy towards the US and Africa are analysed which relates to Diez’ focus on the power of NPE discourse in his seminal article on the concept of NPE. He (Diez 2005) explains what the construction of the EU as a normative power entails politically and to what extent and how ‚Othering‘ plays a role as well as the need for self-reflexivity in the whole debate about normative power Europe. He further clarifies that normative power can be combined with or even underpinned by other types of power, such as economic or military power, as the example

of the US shows, which also disseminates its norms and thus is a normative power (Diez 2005: 616). This relates to this research's results concerning the combination of norms and interests in the EU's documents concerning its external digital policy towards Africa and the US.

With relation to the EU's working together with like-minded actors such as the US in the digital arena, some of Diez' arguments are also of relevance. Referring to Kagan's 'Of Paradise and Power', Diez (2005: 620,23) outlines that Europe's pacifism is not a consequence of choice but rather one of necessity since the EU does not have the military resources for becoming a military power like the US, but actually, the EU as a normative power depends on the military backing of the US. This criticism is interesting in that one could deduce from this that the EU is not a purely normative power; it just does not deliver the military power needed to back its normative power itself, but this is done by the US. In the digital realm, the EU could further strengthen its regulatory power and diffusion of its digital norms with the support of the US' digital industrial power to be able to exert power through the diffusion of digital norms. According to Diez (2005: 635-36), the difference between the EU and the US concerning their normative power is that the EU has a higher degree of reflexivity and a less missionary approach than the US. This relates to what was found in this research regarding the EU's focus and reflexivity on data protection and the US trying to stick to its own approach, which resulted in a constant re-design of a regulatory framework for dataflows between the EU and the US (see discussions of the Data Privacy Framework in the empirical chapter. In relation to this missionary approach of the US, he also claims that the US often not only tried to impose its norms on others but also refused to bind itself to international treaties (Diez 2005: 622). Further, in the case of the US, normative and military power are entangled, which the author underpins by referring to the Bush administration as an example, during which norms were spread to places that were considered 'evil' (Diez 2005: 623).

The before-mentioned Data Privacy Framework with the US as well as its forerunners are examples of criticism concerning the EU's inconsistency concerning its normative focus on privacy and data protection, criticising a lack of focus on privacy and an actual focus of the EU on economic interests, as some interviewees as well as the well-known Austrian activist Max Schrems (see for instance Clasen 2023b) argue. This links up with a further critique of Diez concerning the concept of NPE. The author (Diez 2005: 624) puts forward concerns the EU's inconsistency when it comes to its own norms: first, different external actors are sometimes treated differently, so some are discriminated against while others get favourable treatment. Second, the EU occasionally undermines its own norms within its own policies, one particular

example being the securitisation of migration. Another example that some might associate with this criticism is the norm of democracy and the rule of law concerning certain member states.

Diez (2005: 632) defines NPE as a ubiquitous discursive practice and power that constructs the EU's identity, which helps organise the world cognitively. Still, he deems it very important to stay critical of the context in which this discourse takes place. He further argues that the NPE discourse empowers not only the EU but also external actors that could remind EU actors of their discourse about EU norms so that this NPE discourse can go in both or even many directions (Diez 2005: 633). NPE thus also works in internal relations between member states, not only in external relations, as we can see from the example of sanctions against Austria in 1999 due to the extremist position of the FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs), which was the junior partner in the government coalition at that time (Diez 2005: 634).

The main point concerning NPE as a discursive practice is that the EU constructs its own identity against the image it has or constructs of others, i.e. external actors, which has implications on the EU's policies and how those other actors are treated in those policies, whose goal is to try to change others by spreading its norms (Diez 2005: 614). In the case of this thesis, this would concern how Africa or the US are treated in the EU's external digital policies, starting with the strategies and primary goals and also in the concrete policies that follow. The latter cannot be covered in this thesis, though, since this would highly exceed the scope of this research project on the one hand and on the other, at the moment, there are only strategies that can be analysed; one obviously will have to wait for the particular policies to be implemented based on those strategies. At that point in the future, it will be interesting to see if there are discrepancies between strategy and actual policies. This also relates to Diez's previously mentioned criticism concerning inconsistencies with the EU concerning its own norms. Diez (2005: 635) further claims that the analytic focus of mainstream social constructivism lies on the „role that norms play in the formulation of a European foreign and external policy“, neglecting that this NPE discourse contributes to the construction of the EU's identity. This aspect is actually at the heart of this research project since it is the image the EU gives itself and what is then perceived by others, which is at the centre of the analysis.

The NPE narrative does not only construct the identity of the EU itself but also the identity of the EU's others, i.e. of actors external to the EU (Diez 2005: 626-27), which is a poststructuralist reading of NPE entailing the need to construct an ‚other‘ opposed to the EU. He also mentions that apart from othering vis-à-vis an external actor, i.e. geographical othering,

there is also the ‚past as other‘ logic, with a past Europe versus the new Europe, the post-World War II Europe, in which values such as peace and respect for human rights have priority over power politics and war (Diez 2005: 634).

Regarding the EU’s external digital policy towards the US and Africa it is also relevant how the EU constructs the ‘Otherness’ of the respective targeted actor, since this can have an effect on the perception of the EU’s external digital policy by the respective ‘Other’. With respect to the two different forms of othering of the EU (past other versus external actor as other), Bahar Rumelili (2021: 199) highlights that the question of identity depends on difference, triggering a lively academic debate between critical and liberal constructivist approaches, with the former arguing that identity does depend on difference stemming from cognitive and discursive origins. The author explains this debate (Rumelili 2021: 199): The cognitive origin refers to actors using categories to understand the world, and the discursive origin refers to their making meaning through dichotomies. Liberal constructivists do not deny that there is a relation to difference, but they do not consider it sufficiently present and relevant in EU external action. They argue that the EU does not differentiate itself from other actors on the international scene but rather from its own past identity. The other of the ‘current EU’ is thus the ‘past EU’, as also outlined by Diez, as seen above. Uli Staeger (2016b: 990) rates this as a mistake since it leads to Europeans thinking, when looking at developments of regionalisation in Africa, that they look at Europe’s past when it regionalised itself. Thus, there is the danger of imposing the European form of regionalisation on Africa.

Diez (2005: 628-29) introduces the following forms of othering, i.e. strategies of constructing the ‘self’ as well as the ‘other’:

1. Representing the other as an existential threat (= securitisation)
2. Representing the other as inferior
The author gives the example of Orientalism, which represents the other as exotic. According to the author, this strategy of othering is strongly linked to the first securitising strategy of representing the other as a threat, particularly if the other is seen as undermining the norms of the self.
3. Representing the other as violating universal principles
The author interprets this as a stronger variation of the strategy of representing the other as inferior, since universality of norms is added to their (assumed) superiority.
4. Representing the other as different
In contrast to the other strategies, this strategy of othering does not include a value judgment on the other. However, it still imposes an identity on the other.

To underpin this categorisation with an actual example, Diez (2005: 630-32) takes the EU's Europe-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), in particular the Barcelona Declaration of 1995, as an illustration for othering in the form of imposing presumably universal standards on others and representing the other as violating said standards, which would correspond to the third strategy according to his categorisation.

One could also see those categories as forms of othering with increasing strength or intensity, for which one could list them in a different order (order of the author):

1. Representing the other as different
2. Representing the other as inferior
3. Representing the other as violating universal principles
4. Representing the other as an existential threat

Taking this second order, the first three are norm-related, with the first being neutral, while the second and third are linked to a value judgement and Eurocentrism or Eurocentric norms and values; the last can be considered security- rather than norm-related.

Rumelili's (2021: 203) framework seems interesting in relation to Diez's categorisation. In this four-fold table with only two types of the EU's representation of target states, those latter are combined with two possible reactions of the target states to obtain four ideal types of identity interaction. The author argues that, according to critical constructivists, there are different forms of 'Othering' that lead to different effects (Rumelili 2021: 201).

Table 5: Perception of normativity and relations between states

	EU construction of target state	
Reaction of target state	Inherent difference	Acquired difference
Recognition	Transactional cooperation	Normative convergence
Rejection	Conflict	Normative dissociation

Table based on Bahar Rumelili (2021: 203)

The author explains her four ideal types (Rumelili 2021: 202-03): on the one hand, the EU can construct the target state as inherently different, meaning that those particular characteristics of the target actor cannot be changed. On the other hand, the EU can construct a target actor as different because the actor has acquired certain characteristics in the form of values and policies that can be changed or adapted in the future. The reaction of the target actor can also be two-fold: either the actor recognises or rejects the EU's constructions. Thus, there are four possible combinations: inherent difference of the target state that can be recognised or rejected by the target state, called transactional cooperation or conflict respectively. In the case of the EU

constructing the target actor as having acquired different norms and values, she distinguishes between normative convergence if the target actor recognises the EU's depiction versus normative dissociation if the target actor rejects it.

From Rumelili's categorisation follows logically that in the case of seeing the target actor as inherently different, it would not make any sense for the EU to strive to diffuse its own norms since the target actor would not change its norms, values and policies anyway. Only when seeing its counterpart's characteristics as acquired and thus changeable does it make sense to try to externalise its norms with the help of the instrument of conditionality. Nonetheless, such projection of norms is always linked to „the notion of civilising others“, as Diez (2005: 627) argues.

Another interesting question is in how far the EU as a normative power is a unitary actor, meaning that all member states adhere to and hold the same values and norms in high esteem. In this context, Diez (2005: 631) mentions that some researchers overlook those differences between Germany, France and the UK, for instance, with the two latter having a „tradition of projecting power“, which is not the case for Germany. In connection to this, member states that do not stick to the EU's values, such as democracy or the rule of law, like Hungary or Poland, might be associated with EU-internal heterogeneity.

Ueli Staeger's (2016b) decolonial critique of the concept of NPE concentrates on Eurocentrism, which can, as we have just seen, be closely related to some forms of othering. Staeger aims to show that European norms are contested and not universal, making NPE a Eurocentric concept. Rumelili (2021: 204) argues along similar lines, writing that in case of attempts to externalise its norms, the EU constructs its norms as universal and itself as normatively superior to other actors, which constitute essential elements of the EU's identity construction. Staeger (Staeger 2016b) argues that not only European knowledge and experience but also African knowledge and experience have to be considered, which, in a nutshell, means that African voices have to be heard. African agency and pan-Africanism are essential to counter Euro-centric NPE and develop a post-imperial NPE.

African agency can be 'recovered' through “understanding NPE as discourse” by using Foucault's work on “discourse as power, and power as discourse” (Staeger 2016b) as a basis, which Staeger does in his article on EU-Africa relations and NPE. Sebhatu (2020: 41) claims that in a Eurocentric discourse, African agency and negotiating power are presented as weak

and that postcolonial approaches try to explain why this is the case and how it is done. (41) According to him, there is African agency, but it has not been treated and analysed extensively in the relevant literature (Sebhatu 2020: 42). Staeger (2016b: 982) closes this research gap and argues that it is not the EU's goal as a normative power to repress African agency. Still, Eurocentric political thinking alleges it to be post- or non-imperial. The status quo can instead be called 'postcoloniality'²⁰ expressed through a still Eurocentric approach to Africa, and this still basing foreign policy towards Africa on the idea that progress is only possible by imitating Western advanced economies (Staeger 2016b: 982), where we again see the presumed universality of Western or European norms. This is why Staeger argues that NPE should be conceptualised as a neocolonial episteme, referring to Foucault's definition of episteme: "the condition of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice" (Staeger 2016b: 983). So, the development of a society, a political system, or a nation can only be achieved through following 'Western' norms, which are considered universal, based on Kantian philosophy, seeing the values of European enlightenment as universal (Staeger 2016b: 985), also in the digital arena. This, in turn, is what makes NPE a neo-colonial concept based on its epistemic violence preventing thus "the emancipation of African subjectivity" (Staeger 2016b: 988). According to Staeger, this neo-Kantian and neo-colonial discourse of NPE needs an 'Other', while researchers from different schools of thought disagree if an 'Other' is a necessary pre-condition for an actor's or state's identity (Rumelili 2021: 199). So, it is not necessarily the EU's identity that needs this Other but rather the discourse of the EU as a normative power.

The location of NPE in four areas in EU-Africa relations (Staeger 2016b: 988-89) is relevant for the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. NPE can be seen in rhetoric, such as speeches and strategic documents. But NPE is also visible in institutionalised Africa-EU relations, such as joint declarations after summits or in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (Staeger 2016b: 988-89). Both mentioned types of documents, the rhetorical ones and those related to the institutionalisation of EU-Africa relations, are part of the empirical analysis carried out within this project. In the case of trade or economic partnership agreements, there might be conditionalities that include European norms that are 'imposed' on African states. According to Rumelili (2021: 21), the EU's conditionality frameworks are often one-sided, which implies

²⁰ definition coloniality: „[...] deep structures that maintain colonial legacies and their discursive power is known as coloniality.“ (Sebhatu 2020: 42)

that the EU is a normatively ‚better‘ actor. She further points out that some of the EU’s target actors rejected the EU’s discourse of acquired difference with the argument that the EU itself violates norms it tries to disseminate, in particular concerning the EU’s reaction to the migration crisis, not to forget individual member states diverging from those norms (Rumelili 2021: 25), Poland and Hungary being well-known examples.

The other two areas are foreign policy knowledge production, which ignores or marginalises African knowledge to the benefit of European observation and awareness, and the promotion of African regionalisms and the African Union, which follow the EU’s model and norm as a regional actor and also mirrors its institutions. Although these almost identical structures of AU and EU were “seen as enabling a stronger imposition of NPE” (Staeger 2016b: 992), researchers claim that the AU only selectively adopts those EU norms that serve African interests and that, increasingly, Pan-African norms will become institutionalised (Staeger 2016b: 992). Pan-Africanism tries to resist NPE on the one hand and, on the other, goes further and tries to create its own African polity and subjectivity independent of NPE. However, it does not aim to eradicate NPE (Staeger 2016b: 993). It seeks to follow a pluriversal logic rather than a universal one, the latter being the logic of NPE and the former helping to resist the epistemic violence of NPE (Staeger 2016b: 993-94). After highlighting the importance of those critical approaches concerning the EU’s construction of its counterparts in its external digital policies, the use of norms and interests for analysis in already existing literature, which fed into the creation of the research design as well as in the discussion of the results of this research project’s empirical analysis shall be presented in the next section.

3.4 Norms and Interests in literature on the EU’s foreign policy

Apart from Manners’ hypothesis on the EU’s predisposition to act as a normative global player, there is also Schimmelfennig’s hypothesis on norms being, in particular, used in rhetoric (Schimmelfennig 2001). This raises the question of whether norms are then rather used by the EU to further its positive image as a normative actor on the global stage, also concerning digital issues. At the same time, other global actors may not see the EU in such a normative way.

Masters and Landsberg (2021: 72-73) argue that the EU has seen itself as a normative actor for a long time, with a clear focus on normativity from the 1990s to the early 2000s. While the

Global Strategy of 2016 still contains these normative elements, there is a shift to more interest-oriented issues such as counterterrorism and cyber security, as well as a turn to ‘principled pragmatism’, which should help link interest and norms in the EU’s external relations. This probably is what one can also see in the EU’s external relations in digitalisation - an interplay and overlap of interests and norms.

Raffaella A. Del Sarto’s (2016) case study on the Arab Spring also shows a link between norms and interests in the sense that the EU’s normative policies actually serve its interests. According to her, the EU actually uses its allegedly normative policies to, on the one hand, present itself as a normative power, but on the other hand, it is those ‘normative’ policies that help the EU to actually pursue its interests, be it in the economic or the security realm. The concept the author conceives of for her analysis of the EU’s foreign policy is ‘normative empire Europe’, with which Del Sarto tries to underline the interaction or interlinkage between norms and interests in the EU’s external relations.

I conjecture this concerning the EU’s plans and policies regarding its external digital policies towards Africa. Though this is not restricted to the EU’s digital policies relating to Africa, since those policies are not planned and implemented in a vacuum, but the EU’s external digital policies towards different other actors are intertwined. If the EU, on the one hand, wants to develop its own digital giants, in particular, to become or stay competitive vis-à-vis the US or China, working together with Africa by expanding a potential African customer base for EU companies through, for instance, developing digital infrastructure and fostering African citizens’ digital skills, normative policies towards Africa and interest-orientation towards the US or China are intertwined, and the latter depends on the former. Del Sarto’s paper focuses on the EU’s policies towards its Southern Neighbourhood, while in this thesis, the focus is also on the intertwining of norms and interests towards different actors, not only less developed ones from the Global South.

Regarding this research project’s combination of realist and constructivist (as well as critical) approaches, Raffaella Del Sarto’s argumentation is relevant. As the author (Del Sarto 2016: 215-16) outlines, the academic debate concerning normative power Europe presupposes a distinction between realist and constructivist approaches, which she sees as a false dichotomy. She ascertains that the literature on norms and interests in the EU’s policies as a global actor confirms the normativity framework by referring to Whitman and Nicolaidis (2013) and Birchfield (2013) (Del Sarto 2016: 218). According to Del Sarto, though, what is missing in

this framework is the geographical aspect to capture geographical differences. This research project covers this aspect by looking at the EU's external digital policy towards actors of a different nature concerning their digital development and policies. The author mentioned previously found that in the literature on the EU's normativity, the focus is often on democracy promotion (Del Sarto 2016: 218) - it is interesting to see if this is also the case in the EU's external digital policy towards different other actors. Another aspect the normative framework literature concerning the EU overlooks are the EU's interests and unequal power relations between the EU and its partners since the focus of this literature lies on very broad norms, while Del Sarto highlights the regulatory convergence demanded or exported by the EU with regards to trade, efficient economic governance, border controls, and administrative practice (Del Sarto 2016: 227). The last three might be relevant to the EU's digital policy towards Africa.

Also, Diez (2005: 622) argues that separating interest and norms is not easy since they are often intertwined and linked - intentionally or unintentionally. According to him, a distinction between norms and interest is based on ontological assumptions and political choices, not empirical observation (Diez 2005: 625). The communication of this political choice, though, can be analysed since a political actor can decide where the focus of a strategic document should lie or what the communicated intended goal is - a value or an interest, which is why in this analysis, I scrutinise the mentioned goals, which is also what is advised by Nathalie Tocci, as is explained and outlined in detail in the chapter on the operationalisation of the used theoretical concepts, including examples from the empirical analysis as illustration.

This challenge of distinction between interests and norms is why, in this research project, there has been put a particular effort into said distinction on the one hand but also why I focus on the distinction between EU rhetoric and the view from the outside on the other. This second distinction relates to the fact that there is a difference between what the actual underlying motivation of a political actor is, which can only be determined by assisting internal debates and analysing the argument mentioned in those debates, which are usually not open to the public but rather happen behind closed doors. The arguments mentioned in the EU's official documents, i.e., in its external communication, are analysed. Thus, the image the EU gives itself is considered, not the actual motives behind the EU's external digital policies, as discussed between politicians and public officials in internal meetings, which would be another ontological approach than the one taken in this project. This is in line with Diez's claim that „normative power is not an objective category[, but] a practice of discursive representation“ (Diez 2005: 626), which also relates to Schimmelfennig's (2001) hypothesis on norms being

in particular used in rhetoric, as mentioned at the beginning of the subchapter on norms and interests.

Further, the possibility that interests and norms are linked or intertwined is also considered in this research project; both can be pursued at the same time with only one being present in the rhetoric, for instance - that would be one possibility of how norms and interests could be linked as also Diez (2005: 624) mentions. Others argue that norms and strategic interests are always combined in the EU's external relations, which necessitates a particular analytic approach combining both rationalist as well as constructivist elements to include both elements in the analysis (Diez 2005: 625), which is done in this specific research project, where interests and norms are scrutinised and also in how far those are or at least could be linked in the EU's external digital policies towards the US or Africa. To be able to distinguish them in the empirical analysis, also so that later one can discuss in how far they can be or are related and linked, I work with the following definitions of norms and interests: Scharpf's (1997: 64) definition of self-interest as a "basic preference of actors for self-preservation, autonomy, and growth" and Bartolini's (2018: 30) definition of self-interest as "material rewards or costs". In contrast, a norm is "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors", according to Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998: 891). The exact explanation of how those definitions are operationalised for the empirical analysis can be found in the chapter on the research design. Different researchers have worked with the distinction between norms and interests, such as Louise van Schaik and Simon Schunz (2012), Johanne Døhlle Saltnes (2021), and Raffaella A. Del Sarto (2016); the first two are outlined in the chapter on the EU as a global digital actor, the latter's work is described in detail in this chapter. Simon Schunz and Chad Damro (2020) also distinguish between norms and interests within a theoretical framework they designed, and Nathalie Tocci's (2008b) research is referred to and delineated in the chapter on research design.

Del Sarto's (2016) conceptual solution to the aforementioned challenges concerning the concept of NPE is analysing the EU as a normative empire, which should help explain the contradiction between the EU's norm-based discourse and its interest-based actions. The five characteristics of the EU acting as what Del Sarto (2016: 225-26) calls a normative empire are 1. a normative framing of its policies, 2. cooperation on the issue of migration as a condition for assistance, 3. communicating the EU's effort to support democratisation but at the same time continued cooperation with authoritarian regimes (meaning there is a conflict between a communicated norm and the actual interest-based policy), 4. a developmental model slightly

turning more to the actual needs and interests of the developing country in question but at the same time sticking to neoliberal, growth-based economic principles and 5. a very strong focus on regulatory convergence. Since the focus of Del Sarto is on the EU's borderlands, taking the case of the Arab Spring for her analysis, it seems likely that the results of her analysis might be similar to the results of my analysis concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa but not towards the US or China.

The central argument of Del Sarto thus is that the EU, in promoting its values, pursues its interests simultaneously, which I call complementarity of interests and values. In practice, this means that the EU exports rules and practices to serve its interests in its neighbouring states (Del Sarto 2016: 218). Taking specific norms, according to Ian Manners, as an example, good governance and the rule of law do not necessarily support the development of democracy. Still, they might help a positive business environment (Del Sarto 2016: 221), which already hints at the fact that norms can be used to pursue interests simultaneously. The author particularly points to „the compatibility of an actor's utility-maximizing strategies with its norm-based behaviour“ (Del Sarto 2016: 227). This potential compatibility of interest and norm-based policies also finds its way into my analysis of the possible complementarity of norms and interests, partly explicitly mentioned in the EU's documents, pursued by the EU in the digital realm.

On the other hand, norms and interests can also conflict, so pursuing a norm such as democratisation will not be adhered to if it runs counter to the EU's economic or security interests (Del Sarto 2016: 222-23). Further, the author also states the conflict between the EU's normative discourse and its actual interest-based actions (Del Sarto 2016: 228). Such conflicts and contradictions between norms and interests, as well as between rhetoric and actual policies, might also arise in the EU's external digital policy.

So, the exported rules do not always correspond to the norms mentioned in the normative power Europe debate. In addition to that, those rules usually focus on regulatory convergence, efficient economic governance and border control issues (Del Sarto 2016: 220). Regarding the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US, regulatory convergence is also an important goal. Concerning the EU trying to achieve regulatory convergence Del Sarto (2016: 221-22) delivers two possible explanations why the EU has this aim: on the one hand, it could be the EU's security interests and economic preferences; on the other, it could also be the EU's identity as a normative actor that leads to trying to make another country to stick to the EU's norms. The second explanation corresponds to the mission civilisatrice, which is emblematic of

empires; thus, for normative empires, the concept Del Sarto works within her analysis, as mentioned before. The first explanation means that the exported values and the interest complement each other since their export serves the EU's interest.

Naturally, there is not only the EU's interest as a community, but member states have different interests and act accordingly, as Del Sarto (2016: 225) outlines by, for instance, mentioning that Italy first was against a harsh reaction against Libya but in the end sided with France and the UK while Germany was against military operations in Libya. The reaction of the EU and its member states to the Arab uprisings shows nicely that different member states have different interests and, thus, policies.

While it makes sense to distinguish between a normative and an instrumental or interest-oriented logic theoretically, one will realise that in empirical studies, those two logics co-exist: they can „interlock, reinforce and constitute each other“ (Del Sarto 2016: 217), leading to „synchronicity and interconnectedness“ (Del Sarto 2016: 217), which is also what I conjectured will come up in my empirical data. Del Sarto calls this a „rationalist-constructivist“ approach, which combines well with the abductive approach as outlined in chapter 4.2 (chapter on research design). Ueli Staeger argues along similar lines, claiming that “norms and interests should be considered as neither fully discrete nor congruent. Their interplay and overlap matters”(Staeger 2016b: 984).

Another point worth mentioning with regards to this thesis' focus on how the EU sees and presents itself and how it is perceived by its partners and from the outside in general when it comes to its external digital policy is that Del Sarto found out in her analysis of the EU's policies with regards to the Arab spring that the EU perceived itself as a normative power even if its policies were interest-driven according to her analysis (Del Sarto 2016: 222).

Not only when it comes to the EU's immediate vicinity and less developed economies, but the EU might also put its interests first. Scholars have also often found that the EU prioritises its interests over its values when confronted with powerful actors such as China (Taylor 2022: 367). Max Taylor himself comes to the same conclusion in this article on the EU-China human rights dialogue, whose weakness is due to EU member states' lack of political will and the ineffectiveness of diplomats, according to the author. Following these results of academic analyses of the EU's behaviour as a global actor, the conjecture concerning the EU's external

digital policies towards digital leaders like the US or China would be that also in that policy area; the EU rather orientates itself towards interests than towards norms.

What is a challenge to the reader of Del Sarto's (2016) before mentioned article on the EU as a normative empire and its simultaneous pursuit of values and interests is her synonymous use of the terms 'rules' and 'norms' without explicitly mentioning them nor explicitly defining the terms. Also, Manners does not deliver a clear definition but offers a list of norms instead. This is also true for other articles on the norms and interests of the EU as a global actor. Having pointed to this fact, I again indicate that I use values and norms synonymously in this thesis and will operationalise actual definitions of norms and interests of different authors.

Apart from the presented concepts which are relevant for the entire empirical analysis, one concept is particularly relevant regarding the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, but also related to the EU's external digital policy towards the US: namely Africa's derivative power. Not only the EU and the US possess certain capabilities and power regarding the digital – the US particularly with regard to digital industries and companies, the EU particularly with regard to regulation of the digital. Africa is also endued with a certain power, which is very relevant in the digital field, since the EU, the US, and China have been engaging in a 'Scramble for Africa' in the digital field, for which the following concept is a useful analytical tool.

3.5 Africa's derivative power

This power concept can be used to analyse the EU's external digital policy towards Africa since the EU has to consider Africa's derivative power due to the interest other powers, such as China, have in Africa. Even if this power will not last forever, as Hodzi (2020) argues, for the time being, it is still relevant and might influence the EU's policy choices.

Obert Hodzi (Hodzi 2020: 257) claims that Africa does not have collective power due to a lack of material capabilities as well as structural power²¹. The author explains that individual African countries have no relevant influence in global politics, but what African states tried to do, though, is to add their power up to a collective power by forming the African Union and by

²¹ Susan Strange distinguishes between relational and structural power, with the latter being the one that matters most to her view. Relational power, a concept used by realists, refers to the power of an actor to get another actor to do something they would not do if it were not for the first actor's 'motivation' or coercion. Structural power, on the other hand, means that an actor can shape the structures of the global political economy within which all actors, such as states, companies, political institutions and others, have to operate. (Strange 1994)

acting as a continental block in the UN General Assembly as well as other multilateral for a (Hodzi 2020: 257). Unfortunately, it is not only the numbers that count in such multilateral processes but there are often hierarchical relations based on the before mentioned material capabilities and structural power (Hodzi 2020: 257). This is why, according to Hodzi (2020: 258), Africa's collective power is more of a myth than a reality, and Africa's relations with the EU or China are often asymmetrical, as can be seen in discussions and negotiations.

He further argues that African unity through the AU is induced from the outside, and due to heterogeneity within the African continent, there is a lack of consensus among African countries with very different interests and, thus, a tendency to solve problems bilaterally rather than on a continental level (Hodzi 2020: 258), to which Akokpari and Primrose (2020) agree. Hodzi (2020: 259) underpins his point with the example of the migration crisis, during which the EU first tried to find a solution on a continental level but then had to change its approach to a bilateral one, with separate deals with Libya, Tunisia, Niger and Chad.

Instead of this actually inexistent collective power, African states can use derivative power, which is power gained through association with great powers, in the case of Africa, for instance with the US, China, or Russia, who can all be used to „manipulate geopolitical rivalries“ (Hodzi 2020: 259) Such strategies have already proven helpful for African countries during the Cold War Era when African states either aligned with the US or the Soviet Union or they declared themselves as non-aligned, but nowadays, African states have a more extensive choice with different powers or emerging powers having interest in Africa, and thus giving Africa leverage and bargaining power vis-à-vis the EU and other global partners (Hodzi 2020: 259). This already shows that this derivative power of Africa is, more precisely, a derivative power not of Africa as a whole, i.e. of its citizens, but a power of the African elite, which should be considered when using this concept in an analysis.

Turning from what Africa could theoretically do to what Africa actually does is to use China's presence in Africa and its different approach to dealing with Africa (as opposed to the EU's approach), i.e. no conditionality concerning democratic values or human rights. China's focus on trade and investment rather than on development aid (a relationship of equals rather than a donor-recipient relationship) is used to manipulate the EU into changing its approach to Africa (Hodzi 2020: 260-61). This will limit the EU's normative influence on Africa (Hodzi 2020: 260-61), so the diffusion of its norms through conditionality will not be possible anymore, shifting relevance to the the measure of convincing African countries of the importance of

certain norms and values – also in the digital realm. Also, the general focus of the EU changes, according to Hodzi (2020: 262) , from development and aid to trade and cooperation. It remains to be seen in how far this is true for digital partnership between those two countries, since the African continent still has to develop its digital economy, which is also in the interest of the EU.

Nonetheless, the author concludes that Africa's derivative power is unsustainable because Africa is dependent on external funding and does not speak with one voice since there are different interests of different African countries, so Africa's derivative power will supposedly slowly diminish (Hodzi 2020: 263). Africa is very much dependent on funding from the EU, but also from the US and China. It is highly indebted to the last due to large infrastructure projects, also in the digital arena, while the first is its biggest donor.

3.6 Final remarks on the use of different approaches

Having outlined the different approaches building the basis for my research, the design of the research shall be presented and explained. Based on the stated concepts and literature, the empirical research will be carried out by first working with the dichotomy of norms versus interests, expecting the EU to follow two logics, as outlined by James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, (2008: 9), the logic of consequences (interests) as well as the logic of appropriateness (norms). I will not stop here, though: the question is whether one prevails in certain areas and what the interplay between norms and interests looks like (see section on research questions). So, the concepts of norms and interests, as used in Manners' concept of NPE and the realist critique, will be used in the principal analysis of this thesis. In contrast, concepts such as Eurocentrism and Othering will be taken up in the discussion of the results of the analysis to outline exciting aspects, which can already be seen after the empirical research in the course of this thesis but will still need to be studied in greater detail and would lend itself to further research. Also, Stephan Keukeleire and Tom Delreux (2022: 358) highlight - with regard to constructivist literature on EU foreign policy in general - that researchers should be aware of Eurocentrism, which might „undermine the analytical and explanatory value of EU foreign policy scholarship“; they, as well as other researchers thus call for „a stronger recognition of diversity, difference and European colonial legacies“, which can be achieved by giving space to an outside-in or decentring perspectives.

As Iddo Tavory and Stefan Timmermans (2014: 123) state in their seminal work on abductive analysis, it is imperative to scrutinise the empirical data using different theoretical lenses rather than only using one theoretical perspective. This is why in the research project at hand, not only a constructivist and normative perspective is used by working with the category of norms, but also realist and postcolonial theoretical lenses are used by using the category of interest and also by adopting a critical understanding of (European) norms and their supposed universality. The aforementioned authors also stress that theory and empirical research are part of the same act and thus cannot replace each other and should not be separated (Tavory and Timmermans 2014: 128), leading to the next chapter on research design, further explaining and outlining the abductive approach of this research project.

4 Research Design

4.1 Research Questions

The main questions of this research project concern the EU's orientation towards or motivation by norms and values on the one hand and interests on the other:

How does the EU present itself (projected image), and how is it seen by others (perception) concerning its external digital policy²² towards the US and Africa? Does the EU present itself/Is the EU perceived as a normative actor, i.e. an actor driven by norms or oriented towards interests? Which norms and interests are relevant for the EU's external digital relations, and how do those relate

- a) to the different perspectives (self-portrayal versus perception)?
- b) to the different domains of the EU's external digital policies?

The main issue is, therefore, **if and in how far there is an interest-orientation in the EU's external digital policies towards the US and Africa**. This is what one would **conjecture based on the slight turn towards interests already starting with the EU's Global Strategy**

²² As already explained in the introduction, when referring to external **digital** policies, all digital issues are included, thus the term 'digital' is used as an umbrella term also including what in some contexts and by some practitioners or researchers are called 'cyber issues'. In such a distinction 'digital' issues, are connected to more economic aspects such as the flow of data, digital trade or competition in the digital realm and the term 'cyber' is linked to cyber-security and -threats.

of 2016 (High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2016) as well as based on the **announcements concerning the EU's orientation towards power and geopolitics by high EU officials** (Borrell 2020; Breton 2021; von der Leyen 2020b). Further it shall be ascertained if this potential interest-orientation (or lack thereof) is also perceived: it shall thus also be assessed if there is a **tension between the way the EU portrays itself and how it is perceived** concerning the **driving factors** of its **external digital policy**.

Based on the literature, interests and norms drive the EU's choices concerning policies in international politics, with the realist literature focusing on interests and seeing norms as second-order concerns and constructivist literature focusing on norms or values²³. Thus, those two concepts – interests and norms – are used for the analysis. To understand the EU's communicated and perceived motivations more in-depth, the analysis includes different categories of interests, norms and domains, which will show **if Manners' core norms are also core norms concerning the EU's external digital policy** towards Africa and the US and which interests and domains are in the foreground. Another puzzle is added through the choice of cases: this research project looks at the EU's external digital policy towards the US, a digital leader, and Africa, a digital laggard. What are the **differences between the EU's presented and perceived driving factors in its external digital policy** towards a **digital leader** versus a **digital laggard**?

The results will be discussed regarding the relations and potential interplays between the different norms and interests (e.g. partial overlaps, complementarity, diametrical opposition) as well as regarding further issues which were ascertained as being related to norms and interests relevant in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US. The different types of Othering²⁴ (Diez 2005) and Rumelili's (Rumelili 2021) categorisation²⁵ of ways of cooperation or lack thereof are frameworks helping put the results into context. Regarding relations between the various norms and interests, it is also interesting to see how the EU communicates if there are overlaps – rather with interests or norms. The former would be following the demand for the EU to learn the language of power – as demanded by Josep Borrell and others (Borrell

²³ As already mentioned in the introduction, the terms norms and values are used synonymously in this research project.

²⁴ According to Diez (2005) the 'Other' can be represented as different, inferior, violating universal principles or as existential threat.

²⁵ The different ways of cooperation (or lack thereof) according to Rumelili (2021) are: transactional cooperation, normative convergence, conflict or normative dissociation.

2020). The second would be in accordance with what Ian Manners (2002) and Frank Schimmelfennig (2001) argue (see chapter three on theoretical concepts).

There might be a difference between the image the EU tries to give itself and how the EU is perceived by others, such as representatives of international organisations (IOs), other countries and regions, or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). I follow a non-foundationalist approach, i.e. I assume that there is not only one answer to my research question(s), which is why I am looking for different perspectives, not only the EU's perspective or the image it wants to convey. Further, I follow a constructivist approach in that I consider there is not one objective reality but different actors with different perspectives on the EU as a global digital actor, and thus, there are various 'realities'. Answering those questions might give rise to further puzzles, such as why particular norms or interests relate to each other or to domains the way they do or how and under which conditions those relations could be changed or influenced. As long as such subquestions are not beyond the scope of this thesis, they will be answered; if they are, their relevance for future research will be discussed.

Concerning the questions of norms and interests as potential motives of the EU's plans and actions in the global digital arena, it is essential to highlight that this should not be a mere juxtaposition of norms and interests in the sense that those two are always opposing: "The EU [...] has to pursue a wide range of policy goals that are not always compatible, such as the objectives to pursue trade or energy interests and to promote human rights." (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 140). Considerations concerning material power, such as economic or military power, on the one hand, and concerning social power, such as values, norms and leadership, on the other, can complement each other in some cases and exclude each other in others (Carr 2016: 184). So, interests and values might be conflicting, also within the EU's external digital policy. On the other hand, norms and interests can be behind the same action and might complement each other; they can also oppose each other but do not necessarily have to. Technological developments that lead to advantages for the online economy are sometimes detrimental to cyber security; technological development enhancing cyber security might undermine norms and values (Carr 2016: 3).

A case in point in relation to this research project would be the fact that supporting the development of African digital economies is not only subscribed to the norm of equality, i.e., helping those economies catch up with Western economies as far as digitalisation is concerned. This might also create a more extensive customer base for European digital companies. Thus,

this endeavour of economic development of another country or continent is not only based on the value of equality but also serves an economic interest of the EU at the same time. In this case, a norm and an interest perfectly complement each other. This does not mean that both are equally present in the EU's external communication or in how outsiders see the EU's motivations, though. One can be prevalent; for instance, if the EU wants to give itself a normative reputation, it might mention the goal of developing African digital economies more often than its own interest in broadening the potential customer base of European companies.

The perspectives mentioned (image versus perception) allow for an approximation to a realistic picture of the EU as a global digital actor. Views by outsiders and even insiders of the EU might be closer to what the EU actually does since what they see and evaluate is not (only) the picture the EU tries to give of itself in press releases, in the texts on its home pages, in speeches by representatives or even in publicly available strategic documents. Rather, the actions of the EU observed by said outsiders or insiders constitute their perceptions. Since the interviewees will be guaranteed anonymity, there is no reason for them to lie about or hide real motives (see Saltnes 2021: 558). Like this, a more holistic approach to what the EU actually stands for should be achieved than would be possible by looking at the EU's press releases or public strategic documents only. Integrating the perspectives of outsiders also aims at not only having a Eurocentric perspective but also having a more critical and decentring (see Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 357) perspective on norms and interests.

A further goal of this research project is to discover different orientations towards norms and interests in different dimensions of the EU's digital external policies or vis-à-vis different countries. For instance: Are the digital relations with one country more normative than with another? Is there a particular norm or interest that stands out in one domain of digital external relations or the relations with one specific country?

Analysing the different relations between norms and interests and also locating them in different domains will help to develop further research and theory-building in the realm of the EU's foreign policy since, as Kenneth Waltz (1990: 32) puts it:

“A theory is a depiction of the organization of a domain and of the connections among its parts. A theory indicates that some factors are more important than others and specifies relations among them. In reality, everything is related to everything else, and one domain cannot be separated from others. Theory isolates one realm from all others in order to deal with it intellectually. To isolate a realm is a precondition to developing a theory that will explain what goes on within it.”

Also, in the case of this research project, it is clear that the domains are intertwined, and the norms and interests are linked. However, to better understand the EU's external digital policies and strategies, one has to separate the elements from each other, see how they interact, and determine their roles and relevance.

As there is only scarce existing work in this thematic field, the thesis will take not only an analytic but also an exploratory perspective: not only will I look for answers to pre-defined questions, but I will also identify new important directions of enquiry arising underway, which could be covered in the project or recommended for further studies. This means that if there are any puzzling results of my empirical analysis, for instance, if there are issue areas in which the EU's external digital relations are predominantly norm-driven while in others they are predominantly interest-driven, or if concerning the EU's digital policy towards one country or region, there is an exceptionally high number of norms that are complementary with interests, I looked into those 'puzzles' (asking for the reasons and conditions) if the task is not beyond the scope of this thesis. Otherwise, these puzzles deliver research questions for future research.

4.2 Abductive Approach & Pragmatism

This empirical thesis does not follow a strictly inductive approach, since there is a deductive element in that Manners' concept of normative power Europe (NPE), particularly his suggestions of core and minor norms (see chapter three on theoretical lenses), are taken as a basis for the empirical analysis. Further, the whole debate around the concept of NPE is considered, which leads to the conjecture that interests and norms, the latter not necessarily universal, are involved, as mentioned before. Thus, this research project is modelled after an abductive approach as proposed by Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009) arguing that "abduction should be at the center of our methodological efforts while deduction and induction are important but auxiliary tools" (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009: 709).

According to Anna Dubois and Lars-Erik Gadde (2002: 555), abduction can be defined as „investigating the relationship between ,everyday language and concepts““ based on the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce (1931) and Ole Fogh Kirkeby (1994). According to Iddo Tavory and Stefan Timmermans (2014: 123), abductive analysis is a „systematic process of meaning-making aimed at theoretical generalizations“. A theoretical generalisation can, among

others, be typifications, such as in the research project at hand, where various types of norms, interests and global digital actors are differentiated.

Dubois and Gadde (2002: 555) also relate abduction to grounded theory since abduction „requires an integrated approach“ as the elements of the research work are interrelated, and thus, the researcher has to constantly alternate between working with the empirical data and working on the theoretical concepts. This is how I proceeded in this project where there was continuous work with the categories and the documents and interviews in alternance to evaluate the appropriateness and accuracy of said categories (i.e. the different types of norms and interests as well as the different domains).

Above mentioned authors (2002: 555) further explain that “[e]mpirical observations might result in identification of unanticipated yet related issues that may be further explored in interviews or by other means of data collection.” This relates not only to what is analysed within one research project but also to the possibility of using the results of the analysis of one project for future research. The latter can yield further results by using different methods and building up on what has already been uncovered and analysed. The goal of this research project is also to deliver results that inspire and lead to further research in this relatively new field of the EU’s digital external relations.

Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009: 707) argue that abduction constitutes a useful pragmatic approach in the field of International Relations. While pragmatism was proposed in philosophy first, IR researchers only formally embraced it in the 1990s. Abduction, one of three varieties of pragmatism²⁶, “overcomes the epistemological and methodological limitation imposed by ontological realism²⁷ and correspondence theory²⁸” (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009: 709). The goal of pragmatism is to gain a holistic approach to problems with the help of original and creative research designs using existing knowledge to analyse a particular situation to produce new knowledge (Katzenstein and Rudra 2008: 114). Such a holistic approach needs an eclectic research design, recognising and evaluating the concepts and analytic tools of different research

²⁶The other two varieties are theory synthesis and analytic eclecticism (see Friedrichs and Kratochwil: 2009 for details) Pragmatism generally relates knowledge of the world with agency within the world, thus relating the concepts of truth and usefulness, see for instance Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pragmatism/>, 11.10.2023)

²⁷ Ontological realism assumes mind-independent reality exists, thus at least parts of reality are considered to be independent of human minds. (see for instance Niiniluoto, Ilkka: 2002)

²⁸ Correspondence theory claims that true statements correspond to reality while false statements do not, see for instance the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth-correspondence/>, 11.10.2023

traditions²⁹ and thus scrutinising different aspects of the same issue, which might be intertwined empirically (Katzenstein and Rudra 2008: 126).

One of their most relevant advantages is that such eclectic approaches reduce the otherwise increasing gap between academia and urgent problems in the real world (Katzenstein and Rudra 2008: 125). This relates to the goal of abduction, which is to “enable orientation in a relevant field” (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009: 716), which will be, in this case, achieved by mapping the EU’s external digital relations with relation to norms, interests and different dimensions of external digital policy. An abductive approach consists in

“collecting pertinent observations and, at the same time, applying concepts from existing fields of our knowledge. Instead of trying to impose an abstract theoretical template (deduction) or “simply” inferring propositions from facts (inductions), we start reasoning at an intermediate level (abduction). (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009: 709)

“The ultimate goal,[...], is not statistical sophistication but orientation in a complex field of research. (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009: 720)

The following parts of this chapter will outline why the case studies were selected, how the abductive approach, according to Friedrichs and Kratochwil, is applied, which concepts are used, and how those are further developed.

4.3 Selection of Case Studies

To better understand the EU’s global digital actorness, countries that are relevant for the EU in the international digital arena and that are different concerning their digital development have been selected, i.e. I take case studies of a digital leader, the US, and a digital laggard, the African continent. The choice of having on the one hand a state on the other a continent is due to the difference in the EU’s approach. The EU addresses the US in its external digital policy. Regarding Africa it is more complicated: the EU’s strategic documents concerning digital issues or including digital issues address the African continent (not the African Union), the summit meetings are held with representatives of the African Union, though. Further, in the digital arena, there is not only the African Union that is relevant, but Smart Africa³⁰ is of great relevance. Further, there are also strategic papers targeting individual African countries, which

²⁹ see chapter 3 on theoretical approaches and concepts for details on the used concepts

³⁰ Smart Africa is an intergovernmental organisation with currently 37 member states focusing on the development of an African digital single market and the development of digitalisation in Africa in general.

also comprise digital issues, but those are modelled after the corresponding strategic papers addressing the whole continent, which exists in parallel. Thus, it made sense to not focus on one particular African country or the African Union but take the African continent as the case for this research project.

Africa seems to be of most significant interest among the regions still lagging behind, with all African countries being considered to belong to the class of digital laggards concerning digital infrastructure, skills and economy, as various indices, such as the Network Readiness Index (2020), indicate. Further, the continent is an essential partner for the EU, as the President of the Commission stated in her State of the Union speech in 2020, also mentioning digitalisation as a relevant field of cooperation between the two continents (von der Leyen 2020a). As opposed to Africa being a typical example of a global digital laggard, the US constitutes a typical case of an international digital leader, ranking fourth concerning the network readiness index (Network Readiness Index 2021), and is an important global digital actor. Further, the US are already in relations with the EU within the framework of the Technology and Trade Council, within which digital issues play a vital role.

Not only will the direct bilateral relations between the EU and the respective countries or areas be examined, but also the relations between the EU and the named countries/areas via international organisations (IOs) are relevant, mainly because officials working in those IOs might be essential interviewees regarding external perception.

The covered time frame should be as recent as possible and as far back as necessary. The focus hence lies on the past seven years, i.e. on the years 2017 until 2024 since the relevant documents identified lie within that time frame. Further, starting in 2017 is useful since the Global Strategy of 2016 marks a significant milestone regarding the inclusion of interest-oriented elements. Hence, it can be seen from this research project's analysis in how far interest-oriented elements have been included in the EU's external digital policies, which also relates to the demands for a powerful language of the EU (see for instance Borrell 2020).

4.4 Three Different Angles and Four Ideal Types of Global Digital Actor Europe

The aforementioned case studies will be analysed from three different angles, the first being the image the EU gives itself and the other being perceptions of the EU from two different

perspectives. As mentioned earlier already, the inclusion of perceptions of others into the analysis has the purpose of approximating to the ‘reality’ of the EU’s behaviour as a global digital actor since the perception of those EU-insiders as well as outsiders are not only based on the EU’s professional communication efforts and public strategic documents, i.e. those perceptions are not only based on the image the EU gives itself, but on the EU’s actions and behaviour, for instance in negotiations. So, this study should show if anything is done or said that is not coherent with the image the EU tries to convey and what discrepancies there are.

This approach of using different perspectives corresponds to a typical pragmatist approach. In contrast to positivists, pragmatists do not use standardised methods and techniques to verify or falsify hypotheses and do not share positivists’ view that an objective and value-free truth exists (Katzenstein and Rudra 2008: 115). Thus, also in this thesis, in which a pragmatist approach is used, the EU’s actorness regarding its digital foreign policy towards Africa and the US is not considered as a value-free truth, but different perceptions of the EU’s actorness shall be examined and compared.

Based on the empirical analysis, the EU can be allocated to one of four ideal types concerning the two dimensions of projected (=how the EU presents itself in its external communication) and perceived (perspective of EU-outsiders) orientation towards norms or interests. The EU can be a different type of actor in each of the analysed relations (EU-Africa, EU-US) and concerning each of the dimensions (through which a different orientation of the EU in different issue areas can be determined) of the EU’s external digital policy (see table 6).

Table 6: Ideal types of the EU's global digital actorness

		Image projected by the EU	
		<i>Norm-oriented</i>	<i>Interest-oriented</i>
External perception of EU	<i>Norm-oriented</i>	coherent normative actor presentation as normative actor, perception as normative actor	incoherent normative actor presentation as realist actor, perception as normative actor
	<i>Interest-oriented</i>	incoherent realist actor presentation as normative actor, perception as realist actor	coherent realist actor presentation as realist actor, perception as realist actor

Whenever the presentation and the perception contradict each other – one being norm-oriented and the other interest-oriented – the EU can be assessed as an incoherent actor³¹. A decision concerning naming those two incoherent ideal types had to be taken to distinguish them from each other. Which perspective shall be the name giver? Since it is the actual perception that, in the end, makes the EU a normative or realist actor, not the intentions or the wish of how to be seen, the perception of outsiders was used for the names of the two incoherent ideal types.

4.5 Steps of Research & Methods

4.5.1 Steps of research and different angles

To determine where the EU approximately stands within this model of four ideal types, the following steps of research shall be carried out:

1. Selection of relevant publicly available material for each case study
2. Analysis of selected documents
3. Conduction of expert interviews
4. Analysis of expert interviews

Those four steps will only partly be carried out in this order but will follow a circular approach. The selection of documents, such as strategic documents, fact sheets or speeches, is carried out through research on the EU's web pages. Since those documents are the basis of the analysis of the image the EU creates in public, only officially available documents related to the EU's digital policies towards Africa or the US are relevant. In order to avoid missing any digital policies concerning the mentioned third parties, the relevant newsletters of media outlets such as Politico and Euractiv, as well as of think tanks working in related fields, are regularly read. Articles, as well as papers mentioned in the newsletters, are used as additional sources for the selection of further relevant policy documents. Further documents might be added if relevant documents that had not been analysed before are mentioned during interviews. The following table should give an overview of the methods and documents used to analyse the three different angles of the global digital actor Europe.

³¹ The categorisation as corresponding to one type of actor was carried out for the different perspectives

Table 7: Perspectives: projected image, internal and external perception

Projected Image	EU-self representation – the image the EU tries to give itself	Documents of external communication, e.g. press releases, speeches etc. Publicly available strategic documents
Internal Perception	Perspective of relevant EU-insiders: perception by EU officials or officials from EU member states	Expert interviews with relevant EU representatives
External Perception	Perspective of relevant EU-outsiders: perception by e.g. representatives of third countries, IOs, NGOs, think tanks	Expert interviews with IO officials from non-EU member states, think tanks including plausibility checks

A careful selection of experts is, without a doubt, of the utmost importance to getting valuable data. The interviews are not about the interviewees' personal opinions but their assessment of the EU's motivations based on their expertise on the EU's handling of digital issues in its external relations. Their assessments have to be explicitly based on their knowledge, so experts must outline their arguments and justifications underpinned with specific examples taken from their experience to avoid biased information without any profound and well-founded reasoning based on precise and relevant examples.

Undoubtedly, not all EU-insiders have such specialised knowledge, so it is vital to find those that have, for instance, due to their involvement in confidential negotiations with representatives of partner countries and regions, in which they argue as representatives of the EU. As interviewees, they should not speak in the name of the EU, but they are asked to do their assessment as experts. This is why they are granted anonymity to make them comfortable enough not to replicate what is communicated in official documents but rather state what is actually argued in negotiations. Reasons given in actual negotiations might sometimes be more pragmatic than normative reasons declared in official documents and speeches. The same is undoubtedly true for EU-outsiders, where it is for instance employees of NGOs that have participated in meetings with EU officials discussing digital issues related to the EU's external relations with third countries and regions, who are relevant experts. They will also know about details of negotiations and contentious or controversial points, which, in the end, were not incorporated into official documents. They will further have heard EU officials who represent an EU institution giving arguments and justifications themselves as well as reacting to arguments from lobbyists or NGO representatives, which then might show which reasons are actually behind the EU's decisions and actions – normative or interest-based ones or both, and

in which domains the ones or the others prevail. The interviews with EU-insiders (internal perception) will only give additional information on the orientation of the EU's external digital policy. At the same time, the documents (projected image) and the interviews with EU-outsiders (external perception) will also help determine the type of global digital actor the EU can be assigned to (see table 6). The perspective of EU-insiders can neither be counted as a perception from the outside nor can it be assigned to the angle of a projected image; it lies in between giving us additional information on norms and interests in the EU's external digital policy, which can enlighten us further but which cannot be added to the determination of the EU's actorness without distorting the results. For this typology of varieties of global actorness regarding external digital policy, a clear juxtaposition of image on the one hand and the perception of outsiders on the other is needed. The critical quality of outsiders is that they do not feel the need to represent the EU since they do not work for one of its institutions or a member state.

Apart from carefully selecting experts with relevant knowledge and assuring they speak openly, honestly and freely by granting them anonymity, it is also vital to choose experts from different backgrounds. Concerning EU insiders, interviewees should come from different EU institutions and departments. EU outsiders should also work with various organisations and institutions, meaning international organisations, such as Smart Africa, or think tanks. Especially concerning EU-Africa relations, it will be useful also to have interviews with IO officials rather than officials from individual African governments since, for the former, it might be easier or more natural to be objective. Nonetheless, all interviewees will have the opportunity to talk openly due to anonymisation, so they are in a position to give a critical and not only a positive assessment of their respective organisations.

In addition to this balanced and elaborate selection of interviewees, the plausibility of the answers and information will be checked by confronting future interviewees with what has already been said in earlier interviews. Furthermore, experts will always have to give reasons and examples to underpin their assessments, allowing me to evaluate the plausibility of assessments made by interviewees. Withal, research in relevant sources will be carried out to control information given by interviewees if necessary, which completes the triangulation process. Apart from that, I will also be able to resort to my expertise – gained through document analysis and interviews – which will also help to decide on the answers' plausibility. More information on why the method of the expert interview was chosen for this research project,

how the interviews were conducted, details on plausibility checks and the coding and analysis of the interviews as well as the documents will be given in the following subchapters.

4.5.2 Methods: expert interviews and document analysis

This section should give the reader an insight into the reflections concerning the choice of methods used in this empirical research as well as regarding the choice of interviewees, the preparation and conduction of interviews, their analysis as well as the analysis of the documents. Those reflections were dedicated so much time and effort, and thus also space, in order to have data and results of the highest validity possible.

4.5.2.1 Why expert interviews?

Apart from the fact that there might still be unanswered issues after analysing policy documents, there are even more and maybe even more specific reasons that led to the decision to conduct expert interviews. As Kaiser (2014: 22-23) states, documents like party manifestos, white papers or policy proposals do not deliver the ‘whole picture’; there will always be gaps of information, which can be closed with the help of expert interviews. The author mainly refers to what he calls ‘Betriebswissen’, which he describes as the knowledge about internal organisational procedures to solve political problems (Kaiser 2014: 5). This ‘Betriebswissen’ cannot be extracted from policy documents. Still, the researcher has to talk to the persons within the policymaking institutions who have the necessary background knowledge needed to complement what was found out during the analysis of policy papers and to solve what Kaiser (2014: 23) calls the “dilemma of incomplete information”.

Apart from ‘Betriebswissen’ or background knowledge in general, analysing the perspectives of experts from within as well as outside the EU is essential for this research project’s goal to compare those three different perspectives: the image the EU gives itself, the perspective of EU-insiders as well as that of EU-outsiders. Only the first perspective is covered by the analysis of official documents, while the other two perspectives necessitate the conduction and analysis of expert interviews.

Kaiser (2014: 24-25) further explains that due to the high complexity of transnational decision-making processes, it is demanding to figure out the actual procedural background of those

processes. Understanding the workings of the EU, a multi-level system consisting of different institutions and complex rules concerning legislation and procedures, makes it challenging to grasp the actual decision-making process. The input of the various actors, who are of different natures (for instance, politicians, officials, NGOs, companies, lobbyists and others), have different interests and probably also values influencing the policymaking process. One could thus say that within an EU context, it can be beneficial to interview ‘insiders’ who can help to unravel the complexities of EU decision-making and the values and interests behind the policies or strategies.

In addition to the complexities of transnational decision taking, Kaiser (2014: 25) also mentions the challenges highly technical issue areas pose, demanding a certain amount of technical know-how. This undoubtedly holds true for the issue of digitalisation, the thematic field the dissertation project deals with. Again, this is another reason why clarification from an expert is highly relevant.

4.5.2.2 What type of expert interviews?

Having cleared the issue of the relevance and actual necessity of expert interviews, the choice of a specific type of expert interview shall be considered. As Bogner and Menz (2009b: 17) rightly state: “*Das Experteninterview gibt es nicht.*” – *The expert interview does not exist.* This means that researchers have not agreed on a standard definition or unique form of expert interview. Nonetheless, one can distinguish between three varieties of expert interviews according to the aforementioned two authors: exploratory, systematising and theory-generating interviews, which they explain as follows (Bogner and Menz 2009a: 64-66). The explorative interview can be qualitative or quantitative and serves the purpose of a first orientation within the field of interest. It should help bring structure into this field or generate hypotheses. This type of expert interview is often only complementary and thus combined with other methods. The second type, the systematising interview, is conducted to receive exclusive knowledge from experts, which could not be found anywhere else or with any other method than the interview. The systematising interview is the one that is most widely used; what the researcher is usually after and profits from, is the experience of the interviewed experts. The authors further underline that in this type of expert interview, the expert him- or herself does not constitute the subject of research but only delivers information. In contrast, in the case of the theory-generating interview, the expert not only provides information but also constitutes the

subject of research. The purpose of this last category of expert interview is to generate a formal theory inductively.

Kaiser (2014: 29,35) outlines another typology of interviews, distinguishing between the exploratory research interview, the guideline-based expert interview and the plausibility check interview. The first is the same as Bogner and Menz mentioned, and the second one aims at what the author calls 'hard facts' that one cannot get from other sources; so, the interviewer seeks to manifest information rather than at details on a latent level. It corresponds thus more or less to Bogner's and Menz's systematising interview. The last one, the plausibility check interview, is a very specific type of interview in which the expert is confronted with research results and is supposed to give their assessment concerning the plausibility of those results – as the name of the interview type already indicates.

Turning to the research carried out for the dissertation project at hand, the theory-generating interview can be excluded since the experts themselves are not the subject of study, and the purpose is not to devise a new theoretical approach. Exploratory interviews were used within this research project to further develop, refine, and adapt the first research design. Those interviews supported further development of the research design so it could be adapted to strengthen its usability and improve the analytical results.

Bogner and Benz's (2009b) systematising or Kaiser's (2014) guide-line-based expert interview are suitable for the research in question since the aim is to obtain experts' perspectives within as well as outside the EU concerning the EU's interests and norms involved in its external digital policymaking. While the systematising or guide-line-based expert interview is mainly used in this research project, parts of the later interviews were also used to carry out plausibility checks. This is only true for later interviews since the aim was to check the plausibility of information from earlier interviews by confronting later interviewees with the information gathered.

The use of three different types of expert interviews – exploratory, systematising and plausibility check interviews – the latter often within one interview, proves that those different types of interviews are ideal types that do not exist in isolation but rather in combination. When conducting the interviews, the interviewer might find him- or herself in a position of switching between those ideal types within the same interview or at least combining those, as was the case in this research project.

4.5.2.3 Who counts as an expert?

In addition to choosing the suitable type of expert interviews, the researcher must select the expert according to the researcher's research interest to receive the information they need to carry out the planned analyses. Bogner and Menz (2009a: 67-68) describe three concepts of experts according to three different approaches: the voluntaristic, the constructivist and the sociology-of-knowledge approach.

The voluntaristic concept of the expert refers to the expert as an expert of his own daily life, which means that everybody is an expert, even if only in this specific field of one's life. The constructivist approach focuses on the ascription of the role of an expert to a human being. It offers a subdivision into two conceptual approaches: the method-relational and the social-representational concept of the expert. The method-relational concept of the expert refers to the fact that the researcher ascribes the role of an expert to a person, meaning that the researcher decides who an expert is relating to his or her specific research interest. Experts according to this definition are usually found in lower ranks of hierarchies, since their knowledge is particular; usually, the higher one gets in a hierarchy, the more the specialist knowledge decreases while the general knowledge or overview increases. In the case of the social-representational concept of the expert, it is not the researcher but society that ascribes the role of the expert to the person in question, which means that this perceived expert is part of a functional elite. Within the sociology-of-knowledge approach, there is no consistent concept of the expert, but there are differing definitions. Nonetheless, those concepts have one aspect in common: their focus on the specific structure of the knowledge of experts. In a nutshell, one has to conclude that the expert concept is relational and that who counts as an expert depends very much, if not solely, on the research interest.

In the case of the research related to the dissertation at hand, the method-relational approach to the concept of the expert by the constructivist school of thought seems the most suitable. Since the expert interviews follow a thorough analysis of documents, which will deliver the image the EU aims to give itself, the interviews should convey insights from the other two perspectives. Those interviewees must possess specific knowledge of the EU's goals within its external digital policies towards Africa and the US. It is this knowledge which determines who counts as an expert. Thus, it will be the researcher, not society, who ascribes the role of the expert to the person in question. As the issues raised are of quite a specific but also strategic

nature³², it is also true that such experts will probably not be found in the lower ranks of the hierarchy of EU policy-making, where the focus is on implementation and measures, but rather in the middle and higher ranks. Specialists who know the strategies behind the policies, since those guide their daily work, are usually found on those levels. It is essential to select the interviewee carefully according to the outlined criteria, always putting quality before quantity to ensure valid results.

4.5.2.4 Types of knowledge

In addition to different concepts of experts, there are various varieties of knowledge which can be asked of and delivered by experts. Bogner and Menz (2009a: 71) outline a distinction between three distinct dimensions of knowledge: technical, process and interpretative knowledge. Technical knowledge relates to rules and routines within a specific field; in this case, the distinction between everyday and expert knowledge is quite apparent, with the latter being more systematic and specific. The second dimension, process knowledge, is less linked to a formal education, which applies to technical knowledge, but instead relies on an expert's practical experience, with routines and organisational constellations being examples of such knowledge. Interpretative knowledge refers to the expert's subjective attitudes and opinions rather than 'hard facts'. So, the last one refers to a latent rather than a manifest level and constitutes an analytical construction of the researcher; this type of knowledge is sought after in the case of theory-generating interviews.

Kaiser (2014: 5), who focuses on qualitative expert interviews in political science, which is the field the dissertation project at hand can be assigned to, devised a partly similar and partly different typology of knowledge. He distinguishes between 'Betriebswissen', contextual and interpretative knowledge. The first was already mentioned and explained before and is similar to Bogner's and Menz's process knowledge. Contextual knowledge refers to knowledge of the socio-economic and institutional framework, which does not have a corresponding knowledge type in Bogner's and Menz's typology and which is particularly relevant in political science; interpretative knowledge refers to subjective perspectives and perceptions, which corresponds to Bogner's and Menz' definition.

Coming now to the research project under consideration, it is mainly the last one, interpretative knowledge, that is relevant since it is the perspective of the interviewees that is interesting as

³² Strategic in the sense that knowledge about the goals that are pursued is of importance, since the unit of analysis are goals as will be outlined later in this chapter.

opposed to the official EU perspective covered by the analysis of documents. The first dimension is not relevant for the interviews since much of the technical knowledge can also be found in the literature, and issues related to such knowledge might be resolved by desk research. The second dimension, process knowledge, or what Kaiser calls 'Betriebswissen', and contextual knowledge, are relevant in the expert interviews. These types of knowledge can only be delivered by the experts themselves; no other sources could supply such information, particularly regarding the processes behind the policies. This is not necessarily relevant for answering the research questions of this project in a narrow sense. Still, it is crucial to put the answers to the research questions into context to evaluate the results of the analysis. Contextual knowledge will not only be covered by expert interviews but also by resorting to secondary literature, in particular newspaper articles and policy papers or reports regarding current issues, for historical contexts, which can still be relevant today as they are part of people's and also the experts' mindsets, academic literature will be consulted. Just as was highlighted already in the context of the different types of expert interviews, it shall again explicitly be stressed that, in reality, those ideal types of different knowledge do not exist as such; they interact with each other and cannot always be clearly distinguished in the actual fieldwork.

4.5.2.5 Interaction and roles during the interviews

Bogner and Menz (2009a: 75-76) distinguish between two main interaction structures during an expert interview: the archaeological and the interaction model. The first model has the implicit presumption that there is one absolute truth. The consequence of this model is that 'interaction effects' should rather be avoided whenever perceived as disturbing or distorting. The authors continue to explain that these distortions can actually be very productive and are necessary components and even constitute an essential part of the analysis in the interaction model, in which the different attitudes and expectations of the interviewed expert are considered crucial factors. Bogner and Menz (2009a: 76) conclude that there is no one way of conducting the interview or structuring the interaction; the interviewing technique depends on the context and must be chosen accordingly. Thus, the ways of interacting during interviews in the course of this research project will also have to be selected according to the expert consulted as well as the type of questions asked and may vary between or even within interviews according to the content and persons involved.

Nonetheless, probability is high that the tendency will often be in the direction of the archaeological model since, usually, the expert will be the only possible source, for the

questions concern a perspective the document analysis cannot deliver. Thus, whatever the expert says has to be considered the absolute truth because of a lack of possibilities of verification with the help of other sources, apart from further expert interviews, of course, in which another expert could give different explanations for the same issue. In such a case, the interaction model can be applied by addressing this contradiction in an interview and by confronting the expert with the contradicting views of other experts interviewed earlier.

As far as the various roles that could be ascribed to the researcher by the interviewed expert during an interview are concerned, Bogner and Menz (2009a: 88-89) distinguish six possible kinds of ascriptions: the co-expert, the expert of a different knowledge culture, the layperson, the authority, the critic and the accomplice. In the first two cases, i.e. whenever the interviewer is perceived as an expert – be it as a co-expert of the same or an expert of another knowledge culture – the situation of interaction is a symmetric one, which might lead to the interviewed person also asking questions, like in an expert discussion. Suppose the interviewer is perceived as a layperson. In that case, the communication situation becomes asymmetrical, which can have advantages like the possibility of asking ‘naïve’ questions, but also disadvantages like the fact that the expert will navigate the interview, not the researcher. This type of ascription is compatible with a theory-generating type of expert interview. Whenever the interviewer is seen as an authority, the situation of interaction is also an asymmetric one, but the other way round, which might lead to a lack of trust on the part of the interviewed person, who might see the researcher as a potential evaluator and thus may not address critical aspects. According to the authors, this type of interaction, or rather this ascription, should be avoided, which is also true for the next one, in which the interviewer is seen as a critic because of diverging ideological or world views. This then probably leads to a hostile attitude on the part of the interviewed person and thus to short answers in the best and a breakdown of the conversation in the worst case. The last possibility is the perception of the interviewer as an accomplice, which presupposes that the interviewer and the expert know each other quite well and personally. Although this sounds advantageous, it might also be tricky since, on the one hand, there is a significant amount of trust, so confidential information might be shared, but on the other hand, some issues are probably not mentioned explicitly because they are supposed to be transparent to the interviewer anyway, like normative assumptions; the latter might be pointed out to a critic, though, which is a rare advantage of being seen as such.

In the context of the research project at hand, a potential expert would be, for instance, an official working in policymaking within the European Union, which excludes the role of a co-

expert for the interviewer since the researcher is a political scientist, not a practitioner. Still, it makes the ascription of an expert of a different knowledge culture quite likely. This leads to the policy maker not mentioning mere technical details, which are supposed to be familiar to a political scientist specialising in EU studies anyway, but makes them focus more on their interpretative knowledge, which is the focus of the interviews, as mentioned earlier. Should there still be the need to get more information on technical details, asking explicitly is still a viable option.

There are no reasons that might lead to the ascription of the three remaining roles – authority, critic and accomplice – unless there are particular contextual circumstances leading to those ascriptions, such as the researcher and the expert knowing each other and thus knowing of their different ideological views. This could lead to the interviewee potentially ascribing the critic's role to the interviewer; hence, such circumstances have to be considered when preparing and conducting the interviews.

4.5.2.6 Analysis of documents and expert interviews

The documents and expert interviews were analysed following guidance and recommendations concerning coding and qualitative content analysis from Jochen Gläser, Grit Laudel (2009), Philipp Mayring (2015, 2016) , and Johnny Saldaña (2009).

The first (Gläser and Laudel 2009) is more open and flexible about building categories than Mayring, who is more closed and focused on frequencies. Gläser and Laudel (2009: 198-99) even criticized Mayring's approach to fixing the categories after analysing 10-15 % of the material. The two authors suggest being open to the creation of new categories and dimensions until the very end of the material analysis.

In this thesis, I follow an approach focused on frequencies based on Mayring: I count the number of appearances of norm-based and interest-based goals as well as the frequencies of the subcategories of norms and interests. The same is true for the different domains of external digital policy to which those goals can be allocated. Concerning building new categories, I follow Gläser and Laudel's approach of resting open until the very end of the analysis of the documents and the expert interviews.

Philipp Mayring prones the use of frequencies within a qualitative analysis; he writes that: „[...] unter qualitativer Inhaltsanalyse sollen ja Techniken verstanden werden, die auf die Beschreibung der qualitativen Analyseschritte besonderen Wert legen, ohne dabei quantitative

Schritte auszuschließen.“³³ (Mayring 2015: 106). The important qualitative steps in this project include, in particular, the distinction between the categories of norms and interests, which will be explained in the next chapter on operationalisation. Before that, the coding methods themselves will be explained further.

According to Mayring (2015: 15), the steps of the frequency analysis after having decided which material is used and what the research question is are the following:

1. Which elements of the text should be counted?
2. Definition of categories and stating examples of the different categories
3. Definition of analytical unit
4. Coding
5. Calculation and comparison of frequencies
6. Description and interpretation of the results

This strict, rigorous, and systematic approach distinguishes the qualitative content analysis from interpretive and hermeneutic approaches (Mayring 2016: 114). Nonetheless, as already mentioned, the approach in this research project opens up to the creation of new categories until the very end of the analysis, as recommended by Jochen Gläser and Grit Laudel (Gläser and Laudel 2009: 198-99) and as explained above, which is why step two is not only made at the beginning but continues throughout the whole coding process. This is necessary since only certain categories used were based on existing literature and supplemented by additional categories determined through coding. This relates to Johnny Saldaña's (2009: 45) explanation that coding is cyclical, not linear. This expert in qualitative analysis also stresses the possibility of using different coding methods and not just one (Saldaña 2009: 47), which is also done in this research project, combining suggestions by Mayring, Gläser and Laudel as well as Saldaña.

The latter outlines different coding methods in his book, and the most suitable ones for this project were provisional (Saldaña 2009: 120-23) and elaborative coding (Saldaña 2009: 168-79), a combination of which was used. This means that one has already determined specific categories before starting the coding. The provisional list of codes is anticipated before the fieldwork through preparatory studies, reading and the researcher's previous knowledge (Saldaña 2009: 120). In this project, the types of interests and the different domains were developed from the researcher's understanding of foreign policy and the study of literature on the EU's foreign policy and international relations in general, as well as regarding technology

³³ [...] qualitative content analysis should be understood as techniques place more value on the description of qualitative steps of analysis without excluding quantitative steps. [Translated by the author]

(see for instance Hill et al. 2017; Keukeleire and Delreux 2022; Ringhof and Torreblanca 2022). Potential dimensions of the EU's external digital policy were deduced and then used for coding in the text analysis. Those provisional codes were then revised, and new ones were included if necessary. Elaborative coding was also used since Ian Manners' (Manners 2002) types of norms were used as a starting point, which means that the researcher did not develop those through previous study. Instead, the results of another researcher's study, namely Ian Manners', were used and thus theory was further developed (Saldaña 2009: 168). Further, to identify themes that norms and interests are closely linked to, holistic and structural coding were used (Saldaña 2009: 66-70, 118-20): first, holistic coding to comprehend the main themes, then structural, meaning that collections of segments concerning said themes are built as a basis for thorough analysis.

As indicated before, the next critical qualitative steps are identifying and distinguishing the different categories, in particular norms and interests, within the material at hand – the documents and the expert interviews. Thus, the various core concepts and domains used for the creation of categories, as well as how the different categories are distinguished, will be outlined in the following chapters. This detailed delineation, combined with further explanations in the respective chapters on the empirical analysis, ensures intersubjective verifiability.

4.6 Operationalisation

The focus of this section shall be on how to operationalise the distinction between the two main categories – norms and interests – in the empirical data. The starting point of the analysis of documents is the distinction between norms and interests as motivators of the EU's actions. When Nathalie Tocci (2008b) contributed to the debate of normative power Europe, she also gave suggestions on how to distinguish between normative and interest-based foreign policy actors, which will be outlined below. In this context, it shall be shortly addressed – as has been done in the chapter on theoretical concepts – that apart from already mentioned Nathalie Tocci, various other researchers have already worked with the distinction between norms and interests in the field of EU foreign policy, such as Louise van Schaik and Simon Schunz (2012), Johanne Døhlle Saltnes (2021), Simon Schunz and Chad Damro (2020), or Raffaella A. Del Sarto (2016), whose works are outlined in the chapter on the EU as a global digital actor (all except for Del Sarto) and in the chapter on theoretical concepts (Del Sarto's research).

For the distinction between norms and interests within empirical data, Tocci (2008a: 7) refers to Wolfers' (1962: 72) distinction between milieu and possession goals. When pursuing the first, a state or state-like entity aims at shaping the environment in which global actors interact, while when pursuing the second, the aim is to preserve or improve its 'possessions' in the broader sense, such as tariff preferences or a seat in the UN's Security Council (Wolfers 1962: 67-80). In Tocci's words, milieu goals aim at the "wider environment within which international relations unfold." (Tocci 2008a: 7). On the other hand, possession goals are concerned with the actor's individual gains and can be of a geopolitical or economic nature (Tocci 2008a: 7).

Based on this beneficial suggestion, the goals mentioned in the documents and the interviews are the unit of analysis. In case a document does not mention any goals, it is of no use for this analytic step. Further, clear definitions of interests and norms are necessary to distinguish between normative and interest-based goals. Scharpf (1997: 64) defines self-interest as the "basic preference of actors for self-preservation, autonomy, and growth" and Bartolini (2018: 30) relates self-interest to "material rewards or costs". At the same time, a norm is "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 891).

As a potential additional step in the analysis, Diez's proposition of scrutinising justifications offers additional confirmation concerning this distinction, if needed or if possible. He states that "[...] an analysis of the justifications of policy moves, which would not be able to uncover the real motives of actors, but would at least demonstrate the different rationales provided for policies [...]" offers the possibility of distinguishing between norms and interests (Diez 2013: 201). Those two suggestions are combined in the empirical analysis at hand. The goals mentioned in policy texts are isolated and allocated to interest-based (possession goals) or norm-based (milieu goals). If justifications are mentioned in a document or interview, those can be used as further confirmation of the distinction. Concerning Diez's evaluation of justifications as not uncovering the real motives of actors, just as goals stated in official documents do not uncover those either, it shall be stressed that the research project at hand aims at approximating the real motives by analysing different perspectives: the image the EU wants to give itself, the perspective of its employees and how EU-outsiders perceive the EU's policies and strategies.

To isolate goals in the EU's relations with Africa and the US in the digital arena, one has to find relevant documents or sections of documents. Those documents were searched for on the EU's website, and the interviewees were also asked for relevant documents to ensure that no

relevant document was overlooked. Saturation was considered to decide whether scrutinising more documents helped gain new insights. In the case of the multi-annual indicative programmes (MIP) for individual African countries and regions, the MIP for sub-Saharan Africa and the MIP for Angola were analysed. Then, other MIPs were browsed through, and it was shown that those MIPs were similar. Thus, it was not necessary nor beneficial to examine all of them since this would be more of the same and, therefore, would neither improve nor enrich the gained insights.

Within those selected documents or passages, I searched for the explicit mention of goals – often, separate passages are dedicated to goals. In case there was no section explicitly devoted to and entitled “goals”, I was looking for the implicit mentioning of goals, i.e. the listing of future planned measures related to interests or norms, so a precise categorisation was possible. If the document was not exclusively dedicated to digital issues, I sought passages dedicated to digitalisation. If there were no such passages, I searched for the term *digital* in the document and read the respective passages to see if any explicit or implicit goals were mentioned.

The above-mentioned concepts and definitions were then operationalised, as seen in the following table.

Table 8: Conceptualisation and operationalisation of definitions of interests and norms for document analysis³⁴

1. Conceptualisation		
Norms & Interests	An actor's goal can be based on norms or interests. ³⁵	
2. Operationalisation		
	Indicators	Examples
Norms - Shaping the environment in which global actors interact - Adhering to what is considered appropriate (e.g. norms according to Ian Manners)	Goals referring to something considered ethically desirable and thus shaping the environment in which global actors interact in the digital field.	If a goal is norm-based, the EU either shapes the norms or it adheres to what is already considered appropriate. “Goal I. Accelerating the achievement of universal access to affordable broadband.” (report EU-AU digital Economy Taskforce, 2019, p. 19) “[...] supporting a human-centred and enabling policy environment fostering digital inclusion, [...]” (EU-AU summit 2021 p. 8)
Interests - Self-preservation - Autonomy - Growth - Improving and preservation of material and immaterial possessions	Goals referring to a desired improvement of the EU's situation regarding levels listed left-hand	Growth: “unlocking the potential of the digital economy for Africa and Europe” (EU-AU summit 2017 p. 2) Autonomy, growth: “boosting digital entrepreneurship” (EU-AU Summit 2022 p.4) Self-preservation: “[...] ensuring [...] cyber security [...]” (Communication Global Gateway p.4)

As can be seen in the table, in the case of a norm-based goal, the EU either shapes the norms or adheres to what is already considered appropriate, i.e. to already existing norms. If a goal is interest-based, it points at one or more of the listed interests. The table shows that the interests can be manifold. Thus, many different interests were derived from the definitions so that no interests can be overlooked in the analysis. Usually, the two broad categories of norms and the listed categories of interests should suffice to ascertain whether a goal is norm- or interest-based.

³⁴ Publicly available documents, such as strategic documents or press releases.

³⁵ If it is not possible to ascertain a normative or an interest-basis of a goal, it will be categorised as neutral.

If, for instance, EU documents (e.g. press releases, strategic documents) mainly refer to normative goals, the image the EU gives itself is that of a normative global digital actor. If the analysis of expert interviews with EU-outsiders shows that the EU is perceived as a realist actor, the EU could be categorised as an incoherent realist actor. In the unlikely reverse case, i.e., that the EU would give itself the image of a realist global digital actor, but the perceptions hint at a normative actor, the EU would be categorised as an incoherent normative actor (see table 6).

In short, the EU's orientation towards norms or interests was ascertained for each angle (projected image by the EU itself, EU-insider perspective, EU-outsider perspective) and for each case study, i.e., the digital external policies towards Africa and the US. This is only the first orientation, though. The norms and interests mentioned are categorised and linked to different domains of EU external action and to the various cases to see which norms and which interests are prevalent where to be able to make comparisons within but also across cases, as should be done in abductive research (see chapter 4.2). In some issue areas, there might be more coherence between image and perception, while in others, there might be less (see table 9 below).

Table 9: Mapping of norms and interests: Which (categories of) norms and interests are prevalent

in which perspective	EU's image vs. perception of EU-outsiders
in which case	vis-à-vis which third country/region (Africa, US)
within which domain of the EU's external digital policy	see table 10

Based on these results, the interplay between norms and interests will be ascertained – which norms and interests overlap or complement each other, and which ones contradict each other. As already mentioned, it could emerge that individual norms contradict or complement each other, as Johanne Døhlle Saltnes (2021: 558) has already ascertained concerning human rights and development norms (in this research categorised as norm of inter-regional solidarity), which are prone to clash. In particular the explicit combination of norms and interests in goals outlined in the EU' official documents shall be interesting to see.

4.7 From Concepts to Categories

As using an abductive approach means basing one's research on already existing knowledge and concepts, Ian Manners' well-known concept of normative power Europe (NPE), as well as its critique, is used as a starting point for the analysis. Thus, it is not only the core and minor norms suggested by Manners (2002: 242-43), which are used as categories, but interest and different types of interests are also essential categories based on realist critique of the concept of NPE, stating that the EU is an interest-oriented actor, not a normative one. Concerning interests, I start with the distinction Van Schaik and Schunz (2012: 178) between political, economic and security gains. This categorisation did not have to be extended during empirical analysis, but the three categories sufficed (see table 10). Ian Manners' core and minor norms were complemented by two more types of norms that seemed relevant for the digital realm: inter-regional solidarity and consumer rights. The second is self-explanatory; the first shall be explained: inter-regional solidarity can concern economic, political or security gains for the respective partner countries, which is why it is a norm, not an interest since this is not about the EU's gains, but gains for the respective partner country which the EU envisages to contribute to. This seems at first sight particularly relevant in the case of the EU's external digital policy towards digital laggards such as African countries and regions, but it transpired to be a very relevant norm also in the EU's external digital policy towards the US, a digital leader.

Table 10: Norms, interests and domains within EU external digital policy

Norms	Interests	Domains of EU external digital policy
Manners: • peace • liberty • democracy • rule of law • respect for human rights • social solidarity • anti-discrimination • sustainable development • good governance further norms determined through text analysis (if mentioned norms above are not sufficient): • inter-regional solidarity • consumer rights	• economic gains • (geo)political gains • security gains	• transregional governance in digital realm (e.g. standards concerning the internet) • (digital) industry (digital industry itself and effects of digitalisation on any industrial sector) • digital trade • security issues in the digital realm, e.g. cyberattacks, hybrid threats, cybersecurity • development cooperation in the digital realm • societal digital issues • digital issues in the public sector e.g. e-governance, e-health

The category of political gains includes geopolitical gains, which is why the term “geo” is included in brackets. For clarification and transparency, it shall be highlighted that I do not distinguish between geopolitical and geoeconomic gains³⁶, but I differentiate between economic and (geo)political gains. Economic gains refer to goals concerning the development and thriving of EU businesses and the EU’s market and economy itself. In contrast, geopolitical gains are based on broader, more strategic goals that are relative in nature and thus linked to rivalry in the global digital arena. This includes, for instance, the achievement of digital sovereignty or economic security³⁷, reducing or diversifying dependencies, avoiding being subject to weaponised interdependence³⁸, the development of one’s own leadership in the digital field or a subfield (e.g. regarding a particular technology) and increasing one’s influence

³⁶ There is a growing body of literature concerning the EU’s geoeconomic turn (see for instance Herranz-Surrallés et al. 2024). Herranz-Surrallés et al. explain the entanglement of geopolitics, geoeconomics and geopoliticisation of economic policies (pp. 921-23), of which follows that distinguishing between geoeconomics and geopolitics is hardly possible nor is it useful in the context of this research project. Following this logic, I distinguish between economic and geopolitical goals.

³⁷ Economic security is a broader goal than supporting the EU’s businesses and thus the economies of the member states and thus is categorized as a (geo)political gain.

³⁸ See: (Farrell and Newman 2019a) for an in-depth explanation of the concept of weaponised interdependence.

on other countries and regions. Security gains refer to strengthening cybersecurity, such as improving the resilience of critical infrastructure and deterring malicious cyber activities.

The distinction into EU external digital policy domains is based on the domains of foreign policy and external relations in general (see for instance Keukeleire and Delreux 2022) . It thus is based on those ‘typical’ domains of external policy, which were amended with further domains whenever useful based on the analysis:

- transregional governance in the digital realm, e.g. standards concerning the internet
- (digital) industry (digital industry itself and effects of digitalisation on any industrial sector)
- digital trade
- security issues in the digital realm, e.g. cyberattacks, hybrid threats, cybersecurity
- development cooperation in the digital realm
- societal digital issues
- digital issues in the public sector, e.g. e-governance, e-health

Assigning goals to different domains is essential to see where there is a norm- or interest prevalence. This is particularly important concerning the analysis of the interviews: due to the anonymity granted to the interviewees, it is not possible to refer to the sub-units or exact institutions they work for as well as their respective domains of responsibility, and thus differences in norm- or interest orientation cannot be discussed with relation to their respective domains of responsibility. This must be done by analysing the different domains mentioned in the interviews. Like this, a relation can be drawn between norms/interests and various domains, scrutinising in which domains the tendency is towards norms or interests and particular types of norms or interests.

The term transregional governance in the digital realm is mainly related to the governance of the Internet with the help of, for instance, international rules, such as ITRs (International Telecommunication Regulations) of the ITU (International Telecommunication Union). In this research project, allocating a goal to the domain of transregional governance refers to standard setting in any digital field outside of the EU. If such an export of standard is planned according to a goal mentioned in a document or an interview, and if there is no more specific goal, such as improving security, the goal is coded as belonging to the domain of transregional governance. If there is more specific information, the goal is allocated to the respective domain; in the stated example of ‘improving security’, this would be the domain of security in the digital realm.

The digital industry is an important issue since the most prominent and influential digital giants are mostly US-American companies, making digital industrial policy an essential area concerning geopolitical questions. Just as the digital industry has grown, digital trade has grown globally and is vital for the European continent's future and prosperity. As we have already seen, the number of cyberattacks and their sophistication have steadily been growing in recent years, with, for instance, attacks on the Austrian foreign ministry, Romanian hospitals and the US company Zoom, to name just a few (European Union Agency for Cybersecurity 2020). According to ENISA (European Union Agency for Cybersecurity 2020), the EU cybersecurity agency, the sectors most targeted are digital services, government administration, the technology industry, financial organisations, and healthcare. Those attacks are often based on economic motives, but also espionage, retaliation, disruption, or political reasons can lead to different types of cyberattacks. Another critical domain is development cooperation in the digital realm, which refers to any strategies or actions supporting the development of a country outside the EU concerning its digital sector. An example is the EU's Global Gateway with 150 billion Euros for the building of infrastructure in Africa, including – but not only – digital infrastructure (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2021). Another example is the Digital 4 Development Hub, which allows African countries to turn to the EU for advice concerning issues such as e-government, e-health, e-agriculture and many other digitalisation-related topics (interviewee 1/2).

The areas of cooperation between the EU and Africa are manifold - with trade and development being just two examples - and intertwined (Sebhatu 2020: 39), which is also true for the EU's relations with the US. So, although I compartmentalise the goals mentioned into domains, it must be clear that those domains are ideal types used for analytical purposes and are, in reality, intertwined. This categorisation aims to present an overview of the tendencies and foci of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US, as well as an understanding of relations between norms, interests, and the different domains of external digital policy.

5 The EU's Digital External Policy towards Africa

5.1 The context: EU – Africa relations from the past to the present

This chapter gives an overview of the history of the relations between the EU and its member states and African countries or the African continent. Thus, the chapter aims to deliver the historical context to understand the status quo better and to enable embedding the empirical

findings presented in chapter 5.3 into the historical context. The status quo of EU-Africa relations and the context oriented toward digital aspects will be covered in Chapter 5.2.

The outline starts with a chronological overview and then deals with different issues related or relevant to the digital arena, including a synopsis of the particular relation between the African continent and France, for instance, concerning currencies pegged to the Franc in the past and to the Euro now. Looking at those historical relationships is essential to understanding the current relations between the EU and Africa, the past legacies it has to struggle with, and in how far renewals and changes are necessary, i.e. why the EU undertakes those. The history of EU-African relations affects the EU's digital relations with or its digital policy towards Africa. The institutional relationship between the European and the African Union and the influence of the UN on those relations will also be discussed since the African Union also plays a role in the EU's digital ties with Africa.

5.1.1 From the Treaty of Rome to Cotonou

After WW II, European countries agreed that Africa was needed to reconstruct Europe's productive power. At that time, colonies were on the brink of starting decolonisation processes, and this particular relationship between Europe and Africa was called 'Eurafrica' (Sebhatu 2020: 42), parallel to the term 'Françafrique' for the relations between France and Africa. Only in 2007 was the explicit goal to move away from the „Eurafrrique“ approach of colonial times of interconnectedness between Europe and Africa in different spheres, and the Afro-Europa approach was developed. Since the individual member states of the EU still adhered mainly to their interests, working counter to giving African states agency according to this Afro-Europa approach, this approach was primarily reduced to a rhetorical one rather than one being implemented (Sempijja 2020: 249). African agency and the related approach of finding African solutions to solve African problems effectively is often put aside when the interests of France or the US are at stake (Sempijja 2020: 252-53). Again, we see that the value-based goal of giving African countries agency is related to the EU. At the same time, the (historical) interest-oriented approach of „Eurafrrique“ is somewhat related to the member states, as was also stated in interviews (see chapter 5.3 for the details and the discussion).

Even the founding text of the European Union – the Rome Treaty – already included provisions for an association of African countries, particularly those with special relations with EU member states. France played a vital role (Raimundo 2021: 60) in this regard since the founding

member maintained colonial ties with Africa during the treaty negotiations in the 1950s. However, the colonial age would soon later come to an end – at least formally. The links to African countries were considered necessary for economic, political and diplomatic reasons, and the prevalent ideology was influenced by associationism, including the belief in “complementarity between metropolises and colonies” and mutual benefits, as well as solidarity with Africa (Raimundo 2021: 60).

Paris wanted to avoid adverse effects of the EEC on its colonial trade arrangements with African countries as well as wanted to share the financial burden of aid, helping fight a pro-communist impetus in Africa (Raimundo 2021: 60), from which the Western international community, i.e. also other European countries, benefited and thus should also contribute financially. Nonetheless, other member states did not share France’s views, particularly West Germany and the Netherlands, wanting to avoid neo-colonial accusations and having a more global view less concentrated on Africa (Raimundo 2021: 60). Despite those objections, France did succeed in including the issue of association of African countries into the Rome Treaty, which was based on trade, financial aid – organised through the European Development Fund (EDF) – and formal relations (Raimundo 2021: 60). What is important to mention is that the EEC unilaterally determined the terms of this association without giving African countries a voice (Raimundo 2021: 60). Thus, one could categorise this association based on the EEC’s interests, or rather on the interests of some or, in particular, one member state of the EEC – France. The preferential treatment of African countries concerning trade was discriminatory since other parties did not enjoy such treatment, but this was still accepted, in particular by the United States (US), since they saw the EEC’s influence on African countries as a measure of containment concerning Russian influence and communism. Thus, this even corresponded to US interests.

The next step after the Treaty of Rome was the Yaoundé Convention of Association (1963-1975) between the EEC and 18 countries, the Associated African and Malagasy States (AAMS), which, in the meantime, freed themselves from (French) colonial rule. At that time in 1963, the Organization of African Unity was founded. A new element of this convention was an equitable approach towards those newly independent African states. However, ‘Eurafricanism’ was still criticised by anti-imperialists and Pan-Africanists since decision-making power still lay with the EEC rather than Africa and also because of the continuing existence of a paternalistic element, despite the previously mentioned equitable approach (Raimundo 2021: 61-62). Thus, the Yaoundé accord was seen as neo-colonial, although it at least provided for reciprocity

regarding trade, which was not the case with the following Lomé Conventions (1975-2000) (Farrell 2015: 780).

The negotiations of the Lomé Convention started with the surprise that ACP states wanted to negotiate it as a bloc of postcolonial states rather than as regional blocs, which improved their bargaining power (Sebhatu 2020: 43). Lomé I also was the convention that presented Africa and Europe as more or less equal partners since there was almost no conditionality and there was no European interference in ACP countries' economic policies (Sebhatu 2020: 43-44). The first Lomé Convention, signed by nine EEC members and 46 ACP countries in 1975, was characterised by a more liberal view influenced or even triggered partly by the entry of the United Kingdom to the EEC and supported by the Netherlands and West Germany, which were, as mentioned before, opposed to the French, more narrow attitude (Raimundo 2021: 62-63). The term 'equal partnership', newly introduced into the preceding Yaoundé Convention, was replaced by the term 'association' (Raimundo 2021: 63), and the reciprocity requirement³⁹ was dropped, which led to a lack of support regarding development (Farrell 2015: 780). The ideological influence of the Lomé Conventions can be found in Dependency theory, which focused on protectionist, state-led development, as well as the demands of support and special treatment for developing countries related to a New International Economic Order (NIEO) (Raimundo 2021: 63). While one focus lay on political neutrality, Lomé can instead be considered discreet than neutral because of a rapprochement with the United States (Raimundo 2021: 63).

The counterparts of the EC, the ACP countries, were not linked through common interests but rather by the fact that they were former colonies of European countries (Farrell 2015: 780). This ACP group was expanded to further associated countries under the Lomé Convention, which was renegotiated four times within the context of the Washington Consensus⁴⁰, structural adjustment programmes for developing countries, economic crisis, rising debt of not only, but in particular African countries and thus their steadily increasing dependency on the Western world (Raimundo 2021: 64). This neoliberal shift also led to the EU's obligation to evaluate and measure its development policy to secure the effectiveness of financial investments (Farrell 2015: 782). Further, a new wave of accessions and new member states of the EU led to an

³⁹ The first Lomé agreement contained a requirement for reciprocity of trade, in contrast to the following Lomé agreements.

⁴⁰ The Washington Consensus (a term coined by the British economist John Harold Williamson in 1989) was a reform package for so-called 'developing countries' prescribed by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the US Department of the Treasury in the 1980s.

increased variety of interests within the EU. This is interesting and relevant for this research since it was mentioned by some interviewees that interest plays a role for member states. At the same time, values are more critical on the supranational EU level.

While the Yaoundé Convention still had a clear hierarchical order between the EU and Africa, the Lomé Convention aimed at a more equal partnership. Nonetheless, there was still conditionality in Economic partnership agreements (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 73). In Lomé IV, the last Lomé Convention, conditionalities concerning human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law were included. One could see a changing focus from equality, solidarity and neutrality, which can be considered values or norms, to a focus on European objectives concerning its interests but also to its – specifically European, or some would call them Eurocentric – norms (Raimundo 2021: 64). Those conditionalities were perceived as an imposition of the EU's priorities onto African states (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 73). Apart from this shift to conditionality, there was a general shift to a strengthened focus on trade within European development policy. The EU was seen as a follower of the general neoliberal approach as professed by various global governance institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank rather than a worldwide leader in the development arena (Farrell 2015: 782).

The Cotonou Partnership Agreement (2000-2020) was signed in 2000 by fifteen EU member states and 77 ACP countries with a validity of 20 years, but review sessions were intended every five years. Within the EU, there were tensions between those members wanting to continue with the special ties between the EU and African countries as before and those aiming to normalise those links (Raimundo 2021: 65). Also, within the ACP group, the relationship weakened, and it was difficult to determine a common strategy due to diverging interests and political agendas (Farrell 2015: 781). New elements were the focus on poverty reduction, the change from non-reciprocal trade relations to reciprocal relations to respect the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the integration of African countries into the global economy (Raimundo 2021: 65). These latter two points were tried to be achieved through negotiating six individual Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) (Farrell 2015: 781) with different African regions and countries rather than with all ACP countries or the African continent due to the aforementioned differences in interests and political foci. Those EPA negotiations were harshly criticised for the pressure the Europeans put on the Africans concerning deadlines, which was considered 'imperial' (Farrell 2015: 781).

Further criticism of the EPAs concerned the potential locking in of the neoliberal development model (Farrell 2015: 783; Hurt 2012) and the implementation of neocolonialist views (Sebhatu 2020: 44). The EPAs did offer Africans access to the European market, though, so they could sell their agricultural products. In return, 80 % of the African market had to be liberalised, thus opening it to the EU's industrial and agricultural goods (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 123).

As mentioned, the neoliberal paradigm characterised Africa-EU relations from the 1990s onwards, meaning that it was assumed that trade and market liberalisation would lead to development, which could be seen in how the EPAs were negotiated. However, this liberalisation was perceived as a threat to trade liberalisation within African regional economic communities (Sebhatu 2020: 45). African states and civil society organisations in Africa and Europe claimed that trade liberalisation would negatively affect local economies in Africa. The agency of such civil society organisations is not covered by the analysis of mainstream positivist branches of International Relations, though, since these focus on state actors (Sebhatu 2020: 46).

The Cotonou Agreement was further conceived of negatively since it focused on a pro-poor development policy rather than a partnership of equals, with all its neoliberal conditionalities. However, the term partnership is omnipresent in the Cotonou Agreement (Sebhatu 2020: 44). There were differences in how this term was interpreted, though, with ACP states usually seeing partnership as cooperation between equals, meaning that there would not be any „paternalistic interventions“, while the EU used the term to show that African states are responsible for their development (Sebhatu 2020: 44). So, agency was attributed to African states, and, as a consequence, a failure to achieve development goals was ascribed to African countries' lack of ownership of neoliberal policies and reforms (Sebhatu 2020: 44).

Other novelties of the Cotonou Agreement were the focus on political dialogue, including new issues such as peace, security, migration and governance, and the involvement of non-state actors (Raimundo 2021: 66). On the whole, the Cotonou Agreement was often considered a reflection of the interests of the EU due to the asymmetrical negotiation process, which concedes a point to realists (Carbone 2022: 275) concerning the EU's motives and its supposed normative actorness. With relation to norms, though, ACP countries criticised the EU's Eurocentrism when imposing its norms concerning democracy and human rights on them (Carbone 2022: 276). All the mentioned agreements and conventions offered African countries the opportunity to export their agricultural products into the EU, which was very important

because African states have not been able to trade among themselves since they produce similar products (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 122). This constraint makes African countries dependent on trade with other continents, such as Europe.

A diminishing prominence of African states in the EU's global strategic considerations was due to Eastern enlargement, bringing in new member states without postcolonial legacies in Africa and thus oriented towards other parts of the world (Raimundo 2021: 66). But also on the African side, an orientation towards other global players emerged, and since trade and political issues were shifted to regional cooperation, EU-ACP cooperation was narrowed down to mere development cooperation (Raimundo 2021: 67).

A common reproach regarding the EU-African Strategy introduced in 2005 was a lack of consultation with stakeholders, leading to introducing a new strategy only two months later (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 73). Criticism concerning said lack of consultation regarding EU – Africa relations has been reiterated on many occasions, also lately highlighting the lack of involvement of civil society organisations in the run-up to and preparations for the sixth AU-EU Summit (Toia and Majorino 2022), which took place in February 2022.

The following strategy, the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) of 2007, aimed at a partnership of equals (Carbone 2022: 273), which was in concordance with the views of the so-called 'new Africans' also called Renaissance coalition, who saw Africa as increasingly independent due to a shift from neo-colonial North-South relations or intercontinental relations to South-South relations with new development partners; there is particular interest from emerging powers such as India or China (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 74, 77). This new scramble for Africa was a challenge to the EU, which did not want to lose out. Hence, the EU tried to assert itself on the African continent in the late 2010s with some new initiatives aiming at the African economy's growth and creating jobs. Still, African actors were only marginally involved in those projects (Carbone 2022: 273). Within the JAES, the EU focused on political issues such as democracy, while the African representatives concentrate on economic issues (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 74). The seemingly priority of norms only existed on paper, though, with the actual aim of European commitment to African economic and political development in exchange for African positions that are coherent with European wishes and needs (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 74-75). Such an exchange might also be helpful in the current context of Chinese and Russian suggestions for a more sovereigntist Internet form within the ITU. The EU has been trying to get African countries on its side, so they vote against this proposition.

One further facet of the JAES is the relation to the UN. Although the joint Africa-EU strategy should support a partnership between continents, the document instead addresses issues that are related to the UN, as Norman Sempijja (2020: 251) points out. Nonetheless, there was cooperation on conflict resolution and security issues, for instance, in Somalia, Mali and the Central African Republic, which made the EU a relevant actor in this regard and thus, unilateral action by EU member states declined, as can be seen by France's retreat in Mali (Sempijja 2020: 251). This collaboration between the EU and the AU benefits from legitimacy from the UN (Sempijja 2020: 251), as explained later in this chapter concerning resource dependency.

Another vital interest of the EU, also raised during the Cotonou agreement negotiation, was the management of migrant flows, which was relevant to the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (Farrell 2015: 784) and is still relevant today. Apart from the interests of the EU, the interests of individual member states were followed with the help of bilateral agreements between individual European and African states since the EU member states had distinct interests and priorities concerning foreign and, in particular, African policy (Farrell 2015: 783).

Besides the conventions and treaties organising EU-Africa relations, EU-integrated strategies have also impacted the EU's approach to and relations with African countries or the African continent, such as the European Security Strategy or the EU Global Strategy. As Lesley Masters and Chris Landsberg (2021: 72) outline, the EU perceived itself as a normative power from the 1990s to the early 2000s, focusing thus on normative elements, i.e. the dissemination of, for instance, peace, democracy or human rights. The policies and strategies related to this self-perception were the Common Foreign and Security Policy (1993), the European Defence and Security Policy (EDSP) (2000), and the European Security Strategy (2003). The Global Strategy of 2016 still contains these normative elements. Still, there was a shift in how those norms should be put into practice, and more interest-oriented issues were considered priorities, such as counterterrorism and cyber security (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 72). The change concerning how those norms should be implemented was a shift towards shared responsibility with like-minded partners (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 72,73). The Global Strategy addressed „growing international concern on the ability of the EU to reconcile foreign policy principles with practice through the inclusion of ‘principled pragmatism’.“ This principled pragmatism is a guiding principle that should help link interests and norms in the EU's external relations (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 73).

Since the Cotonou Agreement expired in 2020, the EU-Africa relations could be renewed with a new agreement, which constituted a challenge because of the EU's divide between regionalists and globalists and sensitive issues, such as migration and gender (Carbone 2022: 276-77). The ACP countries advocated for a less asymmetrical partnership⁴¹ than the preceding Cotonou Agreement and, thus, for the continuation of the EU-ACP configuration rather than a continent-to-continent approach (Carbone 2022: 277). The AU, on the contrary, prefers said Union-to-Union or continent-to-continent approach for different reasons: the disappointing achievements of the ACP Group concerning African development, the separation of Africa into North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, which slowed down the African integration process, and the fact that the AU is the only institution that can promote Africa's interests vis-à-vis any international actor, such as the EU (Carbone 2022: 277). France's President Emmanuel Macron hinted at the possibility of focusing more on the African Union, whose Commission is seen as an equal partner, which is not the case with the secretariat of the ACP countries. Not to forget, South Africa's decision to leave the bloc in 2022 also shows the organisation's growing weakness (Fox 2023). In the end, a compromise of the two different stances of the ACP countries and the AU was achieved with an approach on both levels: the continental and ACP levels.

Finally, there is a general part of the agreement (EU-OACPS agreement, OACPS = Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States), and three regional protocols were devised and agreed upon. There were continuous delays partly because of logistical and technical problems on the African side – problems that seem to persist in EU-African relations also concerning digital issues, as mentioned in interviews due to a lack of resources of mainly the AU – partly because of diverging opinions concerning sexual rights, gender identity and irregular migration (Carbone 2022: 278), showing again differences in interests as well as in norms, the latter not always being considered as universal by all negotiating parties. Nonetheless, the negotiations are said to have been less asymmetrical than previously, and the ACP states even succeeded in resisting the EU's efforts to further its own interests concerning various issues, such as the liberalisation of public procurements (Carbone 2022: 279). This EU-OACPS Agreement is planned to be in force for at least twenty years, and it is the first agreement since the Lomé Convention did not have a financial protocol attached since the EDP (European Development Fund) is now integrated into the NDICI (Neighbourhood,

⁴¹ The term 'less asymmetrical partnership' refers to Africa being considered an equal partner, also contributing and giving input to the agreement rather than being an inactive and 'receiving' counterpart to a 'paternalistic' EU.

Development and International Cooperation Instrument). Thus, ACP states have less influence on how development aid is managed (Carbone 2022: 278-79).

Hungary's veto postponed the conclusion of the post-Cotonou Agreement between the EU and the bloc of 79 ACP countries because of weak rules concerning the repatriation of migrants (Fox 2023). So, in this instance, a member state has a clear political interest, showing that interests sometimes come from individual member states, not from the EU, but influencing the EU's room for manoeuvre, as was also mentioned by some interviewees. Finally, the follow-up agreement to the Cotonou Agreement, the Samoa Agreement, was signed on 15th November 2023, during the 46th session of the ACP-EU Council of Ministers. While the provisional application of the agreement starts on 1 January 2024, entering into force depends on the consent of the European Parliament as well as the ratification by all EU member states and by at least two-thirds of the OACPS members. The press release of the European Council (2023a) suggests a focus on values, such as democracy, human rights and environmental sustainability, while there are also hints at interests for instance with relation to migration.

Apart from the EU-OACPS Agreement, the EU also maintains formal relations with North African countries through association agreements focusing on security, investment and culture and with South Africa through the Trade and Development Cooperation Agreements, as well as a strategic partnership focusing on mutual interests (Carbone 2022: 280). Further, the EU has formal relations with different regional economic communities, mainly in the form of EPAs (economic partnership agreements), which are still in place (Carbone 2022: 280), such as the SADEC countries (South African Development Community), as mentioned earlier. Regarding migration, there are policy dialogues with countries along the different migratory routes – the Rabat Process for the western one and the Khartoum Process for the eastern one (Carbone 2022: 280).

There is a divergence between principles and practice, which impacts EU-Africa relations (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 73-75), which could also be seen in the EU's relations with Africa concerning digital issues. Generally, there is consensus on European failures concerning its efforts in the field of security on the African continent (Farrell 2015: 784). However, the EU has been the primary supporter of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) by financing different military missions and capacity-building programmes, before through the African Peace Facility (APF) and from 2021 onwards through the new European Peace Facility, which brings together the APF and other peace and security instruments (Carbone 2022: 282-

83). Nonetheless, there are different explanations for the above-mentioned adverse outcomes of European peace operations on African soil, with realists arguing that differences between European and African interests are at the origin of those failures. In contrast, others put forward systemic reasons, referring to a lack of clarity concerning the role of the United Nations (UN) (Farrell 2015: 784).

Apart from this chronological historical overview, which focuses on the relevant aspects of this thesis, namely the interests and norms of the Europeans and the Africans in their past relations, further pertinent issues shall be outlined. Particularly French or Western influence through currency and monetary policy and the differences one can also deduce concerning different member states and how they acted as colonial powers shall be scrutinised and explained with the help of an excursus concerning the currency of the CFA (Communauté Financière Africaine) Franc in the next sub-chapter. This relates to what was also ascertained regarding the EU's external digital policy, which was qualified as being based on values originating from the EU and interests originating from interest-oriented member states, particularly France and Germany, at several occasions by interviewees (see chapter 5.3.4 for details).

5.1.2 Western currencies in Africa

This excursus to Western currencies in Africa outlines how a relationship with a certain degree of dependency was continued and even further developed after decolonisation, with positive and negative effects for African economies, as outlined below. This could be mirrored in the digital arena with the help of corresponding policies, which is relevant for the interpretation and discussion of the results of this research. This experience of an EU member state's monetary policies in Africa and their consequences for African economies might have an impact on the perception of the EU's external digital policies by EU-outsiders.

The West African Monetary Union was founded in 1973, and later, in 1994, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) was established based on the former. The Central African Economic and Monetary Union (CAEMC) is the second union. Both have the CFA franc - standing for Communauté Financière Africaine (African financial community) within the WAEMU and for Coopération financière en Afrique Central (Financial cooperation in Central Africa) within the CAEMC. The countries in those two unions were all French colonies

except for Guinea-Bissau, a Portuguese colony, and Equatorial Guinea, a Spanish colony (International Monetary Fund no year).

The CFA franc, created in 1945 by a decree of General de Gaulle, is considered by some as colonial relic African states have to abandon to develop economically, while others see it as a support for African economies (Sylla 2017). The currency was created by France in order to „control the cost of access to raw material from the colonies“ (Louati 2022). Such different views can also be found in the digital arena as can be seen from the results of the interviews.

France was not the only colonial power that used a currency to support the economic integration of its colonies and control their resources, political systems, and financial structures. However, the British and the Portuguese also did that in their respective sterling and escudo zones (Sylla 2017). The former British colonies were still similarly controlled by the UK, but the British pulled out entirely in the second half of the twentieth century. At the same time, the French continued their influence through the currencies, offering France substantial advantages such as a „guarantee of convertibility, fixed parities (then with the French Franc, today with the euro), free transferability and the centralisation of foreign exchange reserves.“(Louati 2022). The CFA Franc is still used in three areas: the West African DFA Franc or African Financial Community France is used by Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. The Central African Franc or Financial Cooperation in Central Africa France is used in Cameroon, Central Africa, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Republic of Congo.

Sovereignty is an important issue in the digital arena, just as in the field of monetary policy, indicating potential parallel future developments in the digital field. The critics underline the lack of monetary sovereignty since the European Central Bank dictates its anti-inflation focus on the respective African economies since the CFA franc is pegged to the euro (Sylla 2017). Yasser Louati (2022) explains that

„[...] the pegging of the region's currency to a strong currency like the French Franc yesterday and the euro today is unnatural and has direct implications on the economic development of the CFA Franc region: reduction in liquidity when governments need it, penalties in exports, reduced the margin for central banks to intervene, which in turn makes them focused solely on fighting inflation and not economic development, the scarcity of investment money for businesses and households face prohibitive interest rates.“

He continues outlining that

„To this day, the obsession of central banks is to fight inflation at the cost of investment and economic development. Suppose France can devalue the CFA Franc unilaterally and impose its decision on African leaders. In that case, they, in turn, can only proceed with “internal devaluation” by cutting public spending and letting prices rise.“

Ndongo Samba Sylla (2017) claims that critics also see the currency as a hindrance to industrialisation and structural development, while it does not improve trade integration between the respective countries. Further, it is considered a barrier to democratisation since heads of state who wanted to sever those monetary ties were removed or even killed (Sylla 2017).

On the other hand, it is said that the currency could have stabilised the region, which has not happened until now, though; not even the exchange between those fourteen countries with the currency grew, nor are those countries France’s preferred trading partners, which are all countries having their own currencies (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Nigeria and South Africa) according to Yasser Louati (2022). The advocates also defend the DFA franc, arguing that it is an effective tool to minimise inflation, which would be higher without pegging to the euro. In their view, under-development is due to inefficient economic policies of the respective African leaders (Sylla 2017).

Ndongo Samba Sylla (2017) seems to side with the critics, mentioning that the French and overseas corporations, but also African elites aiming at repatriating wealth profit from the CFA franc, but not those Africans who want to export competitive products, are in search of a job, or are in search of affordable credit. At least, the issue of the CFA franc, which has long been taboo, has recently entered a new phase of more open discussions about it (Sylla 2017).

Emmanuel Macron meanwhile wants to reform the DFA France with the so-called Eco (the proposed name of the future new and reformed currency for West African nations), which would still be pegged to the euro with the mentioned potential negative implications on the respective African countries as critics argue. However, critical voices in this regard are unwanted, as the sacking of the Togolese economist Kako Nubukpo from his post as Director of the International Organisation of La Francophonie shows (Louati 2022). According to Louati (2022), what is needed are truly African initiatives created and implemented by Africans to trigger what he calls „Africa’s awakening“ rather than solutions suggested by the French, Americans or Chinese.

Similar arguments as outlined by critics as well as proponents of French monetary policies in African states might be advanced concerning the relations between Africa and the EU in the digital arena, but only as soon as the first results of the EU's external digital policies towards Africa can be seen. By now, we only know the officially intended goals as communicated by the EU and thus can analyse those as well as how they are perceived, with both – the communication as well as the perception - happening against a historical background concerning various policy fields. After this insight into monetary policies, the institutional relations between the African Union and the European Union shall be scrutinised in order to deepen our understanding of EU-Africa relations, also in the digital realm.

5.1.3 The relationship between the African and the European Union

The purpose of organisations such as the EU, the AU, or the UN is that global issues cannot usually be solved by individual states; instead, a common approach and solution must be found to tackle them (Sempijja 2020: 241). This is also true for digitalisation, so an overview of the interactions and relationships between those organisations should be given.

The Organisation of African Unity, established in 1963, was transformed into the African Union (AU) in 2002. The main goal of this transformation was to shift attention towards collective efforts to develop the whole continent economically (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 121) , and the new institution had a more robust mandate concerning peace and security. At the same time, the former was primarily seen „as a cosy club for dictators“ (Sempijja 2020: 249) . Already, the first EU-Africa summit in Cairo in 2000 showed the goal of both continents to have relations on a continental basis rather than individual bilateral relations between EU member states and African states, respectively. The founding of the African Union in 2002 delivered further impetus for those intentions. Still, in the negotiation of the EU Strategy for Africa, only the AU Commission negotiated for the African side, with all other African stakeholders being excluded, leading to the negotiations for a new strategy, the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, which was adopted in 2007 (Carbone 2022: 272,81). So, although the focus of this chapter is on the African Union, it should be mentioned that further important stakeholders should and often are included in negotiations between the EU and the African continent, which is also true for digital issues.

Despite the wish to work together on a continental basis, the African states have been put in one regional group with the Pacific and Caribbean countries due to their common

characteristics, such as poverty, and their economies still under development (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 122). Thus, the African Union does not exist as the only grouping of African states, but there is the group of ACP states and regional groupings within the African continent as well. All those groups are competing groupings having relations with the EU. To further complicate matters, EU member states still have bilateral ties with African states. Nonetheless, Brussels is the critical interlocutor of Africa when it comes to Europe's engagements with Africa, particularly by developing policy frameworks within which EU member states can maintain their bilateral relations (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 121). Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the AU, or at least not yet. This lack of the AU or before the OAU to act as the main interlocutors in negotiations can already be seen by the fact that it was never the OAU or AU that signed the Yaoundé or Lomé conventions or the Cotonou agreement on behalf of the African states; it was the individual states that signed themselves (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 122). Not even the regional bodies representing, for instance, Western Africa (ECOWAS) signed for the respective member states (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 122). Apart from those different regional groupings, strategies can also be considered a potential competitor to the AU, such as the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES). The latter aimed at establishing a common Africa-EU policy framework advocating together values such as democracy, human rights, equality, and peace. In contrast, the AU-EU partnership mainly aims to tackle global issues and states' interdependence in the current international order (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 123). Regarding their different goals, the existence of both the strategy and the official relations between the AU and the EU seem to make perfect sense.

Regarding the aforementioned lack of the AU being the critical interlocutor in negotiations for all African states, John Akokpari and Z.J. Bimha Primrose outline the reasons for this weakness, primarily related to the lack of unity among the AU member states: the stance of African countries and regions towards the EPAs is one example showing this heterogeneity. African states could not agree on a common stance within regional groups or AU, showing that the AU was not the voice for Africa as the EU has been the voice for its member states until now. Regional integration was a further hindrance to the integration of the African continent (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 124). The authors also claim that African states were put into different groupings in relation to the EPAs further contributed to this challenge, alluding to the unfortunate association with the 'divide and conquer' policy used by the Western colonial powers to better control their colonies. They see dividing African countries into geographical groups as reminiscent of colonial times. Nonetheless, the AU did not intervene in the EPA

negotiations, again proving the organisation's lack of influence (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 125).

Another representative example mentioned by Akokpari and Primrose (2020: 125) proving the lack of the AU's influence, as well as the lack of unity with the EU, was the UN Resolution 1973 concerning Libya, establishing a no-fly zone with the official aim of protecting civilians and the fundamental objective of allowing NATO to topple Gadhafi's government. The AU decided not to support this resolution but instead to support its own roadmap to peace for Libya. Gabon, Nigeria and South Africa, who were then non-permanent members of the Security Council, nonetheless opted in favour of the resolution (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 125).

Further, not all AU member states are signatories to the ICC (International Criminal Court), while this is the case within the EU (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 126-27). The same is true for LGBTQI+ rights, concerning which African states do not agree with some saying those contradict African values and traditions and have been imported by the West. On the other hand, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights ensures the rights of all people (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 127). Only South Africa has laid down LGBTQI+ rights in writing in their legislation. There is, thus, no official declaration of the AU concerning LGBTQI+ rights.

This issue of heterogeneity already hints at the problem of the universality of norms and values. There are differences concerning values between the EU and Africa, as well as differences among African states regarding norms. The same is valid for interests, so whatever logic is used to decide on policies and stances towards policies – the logic of consequences or the logic of appropriateness (see chapter on theoretical concepts for details), there are divergences between the EU and Africa as well as within Africa and also within the EU – as was mentioned before concerning the different interests of EU member states. This can also be seen by the fact that it is essential that EU member states have their individual development programmes rather than only an EU-wide development strategy (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 77).

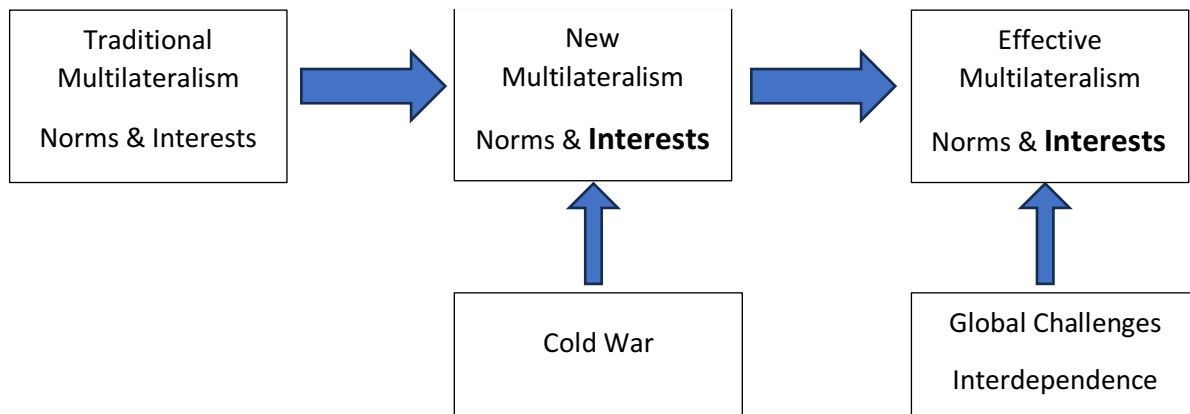
With relation to values such as democracy and good governance, which are values Ian Manners (2002) mentions as essential norms of the EU, one has to say that those are also norms mentioned in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, as well as in the Protocol on Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the African Union, both adopted in 2000 and 2003 respectively, which prove the official commitment of African states to the values of democracy, good governance and peoples' rights (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 126). Nonetheless, African

states have not achieved the AU's good governance goals according to statistical data (Akopari and Primrose 2020: 126) since they often fail to adhere to rules and norms (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 76). This is also the case in the EU, but indeed not that frequently.

Apart from the differences between the EU and the AU concerning norms and interests, there are also several similarities. As mentioned earlier, the institutional setup of the EU and the AU are pretty similar. Further, both the EU and the AU are considered bureaucratic, technocratic and top-down organisations (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 76). There are also parallels concerning their approaches to foreign policy, with both the EU and the AU favouring multilateralism. Nonetheless, the EU focuses on its role as a normative power, while the AU focuses on North-South inequality and continental issues (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 75). This again hints at potential differences in their approaches to digital policies, which might also have different foci and norms or interests or even a different balance between norms and interests as their basis. Regarding their positive approach to multilateralism, one can also see that both the EU and AU consider the UN to be a vital actor in global governance. However, neither the AU nor the EU has full membership (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 76).

Since both the EU and the AU have a tendency towards multilateralism, it seems necessary to define and scrutinise the term briefly in an excursus. Norman Sempijja refers to Keohane (2006:1) when defining multilateralism as „institutionalised collective action by an inclusively determined set of independent states“ (Sempijja 2020: 244). Other authors linked the concept of multilateralism with a strong collective identity and shared interests, according to the author (Sempijja 2020: 244). So, multilateralism has to do with both norms – since collective identities have common norms – as well as shared interests. Thus, when it comes to digital issues that are solved multilaterally, both will supposedly play significant roles.

Figure 2: Development of multilateralism & norm/interest-orientation



This traditional form of multilateralism has already been substituted by a more recent form of multilateralism, namely new multilateralism, a more interest-oriented type than traditional multilateralism during the Cold War (Sempijja 2020: 245). An even more recent concept of multilateralism is effective multilateralism, used in the European Security Strategy (ESS) of 2003 (Sempijja 2020: 244). The need for such effective multilateralism was felt because of rising global challenges and threats due to increasing interconnectedness and interdependence (Sempijja 2020: 245). This is particularly true for digitalisation, which does not know any borders and thus constitutes a genuinely global phenomenon; this is also relevant for the EU's digital policies towards Africa and the US or China, whenever those potential partners are willing to cooperate on a multilateral level. Effective multilateralism was also associated with combining a normative with a more interest-oriented approach (Sempijja 2020: 245). This would then also make sense in combination with the EU's efforts to not only act according to values but also more pragmatically and according to its own interests, as was indicated in the Global Strategy (High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2016) as well as officially announced by different EU politicians such as Juncker (Juncker 2018), von der Leyen (von der Leyen 2020b) or Borrell (Borrell 2020). Effective multilateralism has combined various aspects of traditional and new multilateralism, respectively. It should help strengthen the EU's role in international politics with a focus on the shared interests of the EU member states (Sempijja 2020: 246). Again, we see the focus on interests, particularly those of the different member states. However, not all of those interests are shared by all member states, which might also be the case concerning digital issues. Within the ESS, there was a particular focus on institutions and, thus, on multilateralism between international bodies rather than between states (Sempijja 2020: 246).

Apart from the heterogeneity issue, as mentioned before, another reason why the AU is a weak leader for the African continent might be that the OAU, its predecessor, was an intergovernmental organisation focusing on the abolishment of colonialism and the protection of African states against neocolonialism rather than on the economic development of the African continent, which was different in the case of the EU, because its predecessor, the EEC (European Economic Community) already aimed at economic integration and development of the European continent (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 127). Also, the number of member states - at the beginning, there were only six member countries of the EEC. Now, there are 27 member states of the EU, which are still far fewer than the AU, which has 55 member states (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 127). It is sometimes tricky within the EU to find common ground and consent; this is understandably far more difficult with twice as many members – in any aspect, be it digital, geopolitical or security issues – or all three, since those issues are often related.

In a nutshell, the African Union is still a weak leader on the African continent. However, much support for Africa from the EU has been administrated through the AU: the EU's development assistance was organised through the EU Delegation to the AU (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 124). The heterogeneity on the African continent regarding different issues - cultural, political or social - impedes further integration and speaking with one voice on a global level or with the EU (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 128), which would give the continent more leverage. While the AU, for instance, wants to have a voice in the G20 (maybe soon to be G21), and while the EU supports this bid (Fox 2022), the AU has to work on this lack of having a unified voice for its members before it can have such a voice on a global level and in multilateral fora.

Another issue which does not help to solve this problem of lack of unity is that whenever countries did not adhere to the AU's decisions, there were no negative implications or sanctions (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 126). All mentioned issues contribute to the fact that until now, the AU has the voice of unity of the African continent only in theory, not in practice, in contrast to the EU, which achieved this role for the European continent (Akokpari and Primrose 2020: 128). Apart from the AU's weakness as a leader for the African continent in opposition to the EU, which has achieved this objective in certain areas, there is another difference between the two institutions, namely that the EU focuses on normativity. At the same time, the AU aims at both normativity and pragmatism (Masters and Landsberg 2021). The resulting challenge is the difference between norms mentioned in documents, i.e., in theory, and what happens in real life, i.e., in practice.

What all international organisations, be it the EU, the AU, or even the UN, have in common is that they are—at least to a certain extent—dependent on their members and how far those are willing to find common solutions together with other partners to global challenges. They also depend on each other's resources and expertise and thus have to work together (Sempijja 2020: 241-42).

In the theory of resource dependence, which is one theoretical approach to research on inter-organisational relations, „resources are physical or non-physical materials transmitted from one organisation to another.“ (Sempijja 2020: 243). Physical resources can, for instance, be military support, and non-physical materials can be a legitimising authority of an international organisation (Sempijja 2020: 243). In former Yugoslavia, for example, there was an exchange of resources between NATO, which delivered military staffing, and the UN, which delivered the legitimising authority. This issue of resource dependence and the exchange of resources of different natures between organisations are essential to the context in which the EU's digital policy-making towards Africa is situated. Thus, this aspect of cooperation between the EU and the AU or other organisations like Smart Africa must be considered during the analysis. What is relevant concerning resource dependence is that over 60 % of the AU's budget has come from the EU, China and the US (Akopari and Primrose 2020: 124).

There is also cooperation between the UN and the AU, with the latter relying on financial as well as legitimising support from the former. At the same time, the AU delivers the workforce mainly (Sempijja 2020: 250-51). So, we see a high dependence of the AU on the UN, which is also the case in relations between the EU and AU due to the high financial support the EU gives to the AU. Despite this dependency of the AU on the UN, the former organisation did develop agency in conflict resolution due to its cooperation with the UN (Sempijja 2020: 251).

As mentioned, the other important issue apart from mutual resource dependence is that such international institutions depend on their member states' willingness to work together through those institutions. The EU has been cooperating intensely with the UN since the end of the Cold War, recognising the UN as the leading international actor in maintaining peace and security (Sempijja 2020: 246). This willingness to cooperate is also partly due to the fact that its member states have interests in different conflictual regions, such as France's interest in Western Africa. Thus, this willingness to cooperate with the UN in peace-keeping missions cannot only be linked to norms but also to interest (Sempijja 2020: 247).

The approaches of individual member states of the EU towards Africa or particular African states are also often different: Belgium instead follows an interventionist approach towards Africa, while Eastern European states instead consider Russia a relevant external threat that has to be tackled (Sempijja 2020: 252) and thus do not put so much effort and attention towards the African continent in general. Those general stances might also impact digital policies towards or digital cooperation with Africa.

Nonetheless, a lack of political will to cooperate is not always behind a lack of cooperation: the lack of a procedure for handling sensitive information by the UN, for instance, impedes cooperation between the EU and the former. Thus, this information sharing, as well as cooperation in general, is handled case-by-case in different manners (Sempijja 2020: 248).

Another essential facet when scrutinising the relations between international organisations is the fact that the Global North leads international bodies like the UN and the EU. As such, both organisations fostered the opening of markets and the development of democracy (Sempijja 2020: 243). When it comes to digital relations between such institutions, ideas and norms like democracy or open markets might also be relevant.

In summary, the interests of the UN, the EU and the AU are generally aligned, and the first has positively impacted the relations between the latter two (Sempijja 2020: 252). Nonetheless, resource dependence between international organisations persists, so which resources are shared largely depends on state interests and the political will of respective member states (Sempijja 2020: 252). Another critical point is that EU-AU relations represent 80 states; thus, leverage can be used in international organisations (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 77). The EU and AU's common stances are, hence, crucial in pushing through European and African interests.

5.1.4 Current relations between the EU and Africa

After the scramble for Africa in the 19th century, when European powers were competing with each other to gain land and resources on the African soil, particularly from the 1880s onwards, there is now again a scramble for Africa with new actors on the ground countering the EU's efforts on the continent (Farrell 2015: 780). One important rivalling actor are the Chinese, also or maybe even in particular in the field of digitalisation, which might lead to a geopolitically motivated more substantial presence of the EU on the continent. In contrast to the EU, China is not so concerned with attaching human rights or other conditions to its development policies

(Farrell 2015: 785), making it an interesting partner for many African countries. China rather focuses on transference⁴² for their norm diffusion, so norms are literally ‘exported’ through exports of for instance surveillance software while the EU focuses more on a procedural diffusion, thus a more obvious diffusion through conditionality in trade- or other agreements. Regarding interests, coordination of or even cooperation between Europe or Western countries and China or India seems possible since security- and other interests converge. Still, also South-South cooperation is mentioned more and more often in the literature (Farrell 2015: 785).

Since China is a particularly active actor on the African continent, a short excursus on China-Africa relations should help to understand the context within which the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa is developed. Alex Vines and Jon Wallace (2023) give an overview of the history of China-Africa relations, saying that Africa is strategically essential for China, which makes sense with regards to its „aspirations to be a global power“ (Vines and Wallace 2023), but Africa has been a relevant element of Chinese foreign policy since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1947 already. The authors explain that China was an essential supporter of African liberation movements during the Cold War. In 1971, it needed the votes of African countries to take control of its seat in the UN General Assembly and Security Council rather than Chinese nationalist forces who now govern Taiwan. Due to continuous Chinese efforts, only one African country is left, namely Eswatini, which still recognises Taiwan’s government (Vines and Wallace 2023).

Chinese economic engagement in Africa is related to the Chinese ‘Going Out’ Strategy of 1999, encouraging Chinese companies to invest outside of China, according to Vines and Wallace (2023). China’s focus on Africa can also be seen by its tri-annual Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summits, starting in 2003 and the fact that the first visits of Chinese foreign ministers usually take them to Africa, as Vines and Wallace (2023) further point out. The latest big project, first focusing on the East African coast but then including other African states, is China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was launched in 2013 and aims at the development of infrastructure projects in Africa, including projects in the digital realm, but not restricted to digital issues.

The loans the Chinese offered to African governments were often criticised as being untransparent and very extensive, making it difficult for African states to repay them, which is

⁴² One type of norm diffusion according to Manners (2002).

generally called ‘debt trap diplomacy’ by critical voices in the West (Vines and Wallace 2023). Nonetheless, one should not forget the responsibility of African states taking out such loans: some African states have succeeded in keeping their debts manageable, while others have not (Vines and Wallace 2023). Vines and Wallace (2023) also claim it is not in the Chinese interest to force repayment since that would harm its reputation as a supporter of developing countries. Based on their analysis, the two authors conclude that while it might be that China does use debt strategically to gain influence in different areas, such as trade, resources or locations for its military bases, there does not seem to be strategic planning and coordination of the BRI projects.

On the other hand, China did not explicitly try to export communist ideology and did not interfere in interior politics (Vines and Wallace 2023). So, China did not expressly export its norms via, for instance, conditionality as the EU has done. However, the EU has not done that until now regarding digital issues. Nonetheless, there are ideological links between China and Africa, as the National People’s Congress maintains formal relations with 35 African parliaments, and the International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party maintains formal relations with 110 political parties in almost all African countries (Vines and Wallace 2023).

Apart from China, other actors without the historical baggage of colonialism exist, such as India, Brazil, Turkey, South Korea and Argentina (Farrell 2015: 785). This allows Africa to leverage this competition between different actors on its soil to improve the offers of said actors, having the opportunity to choose the one from which African countries profit the most (Farrell 2015: 786). This leverage might also come into play regarding the EU’s plans concerning digital policies towards Africa.

At the same time, the EU has to redefine its role vis-à-vis Africa for the same reasons, considering past but also current criticism and questioning the image the EU gives itself (Farrell 2015: 787) concerning criticism of alleged Eurocentrism and ‘civilising missions’ of an only supposedly normative actor. The current situation almost mirrors the situation during the Berlin conference in 1884, with Europeans seeing Africa as serving their interests in the role of a supplier of specific resources as well as a market, only nowadays, this market-supplier has not only to be divided between EU member states but also has to be shared with others (Farrell 2015: 787), such as China or Russia. Finally, the EU might have to reconsider its role vis-à-vis its African partners and its global role in general. Another challenge for future EU-Africa

relations and the EU's policies towards the African continent is the high level of heterogeneity of the African continent with countries with different interests, foci and geographic and economic situations (Farrell 2015: 787). Also, concerning digitalisation, those differences, if they also exist in this sector, have to be considered by the EU.

The EU must contemplate the aforementioned challenges when designing strategies for cooperating with Africa. The Joint Africa-EU Strategy, adopted in 2007, should already help overcome the donor-recipient relationship in favour of what is usually called a 'partnership of equals' (Carbone 2022: 272,81), which is still essential in the most recent strategy, the Comprehensive Strategy with Africa, adopted in 2020. This current strategy is based on five key areas of cooperation between Africa and the EU, digitalisation being one of them. However, the EU's relations with Africa seemed to be of high priority, as Ursula Von der Leyen's heading to Addis Ababa for her first trip in office suggested. Nonetheless, the sixth AU-EU Summit was cancelled, demands of Africa for support of exports of finished products rather than raw materials were not heard, nor was the opportunity for vaccine diplomacy seized by the EU. At the same time, Russia and China were relatively quick in delivering vaccines to Africa (Carbone 2022: 284).

After this scrutinising look at how the relations between the EU and the African continent developed over time, the following chapter will outline the current status of the relations, showing how relations in the past affect the current relations, in particular with regard to digitalisation.

5.2 Status Quo of EU-Africa Relations and Digital Issues

After the overview of the historical development of the relations between the EU and the African continent and relevant issues in their current relations in the preceding chapter, the chapter at hand focuses on the status quo concerning digital aspects within the relations between the EU and African countries. The reader is thus presented with the second part of the context within which the empirical results (chapter 5.3) are situated and discussed.

As outlined by Gilles Pécout, French ambassador to Austria during France's presidency of the EU Council, there is a new relationship between Europe and Africa, which he considers very important, further explaining that relationships of Europe with other continents and countries

on other continents will be more relevant in the future, when a new vision of multilateralism will find its way to international relations (Wright et al. 2022). Dietmar Schweisgut, Secretary General of the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe, highlighted the relevance of the EU-African summit in February 2022, which was unfortunately not very visible; the focus was immediately on the invasion of Ukraine (Wright et al. 2022). Nonetheless, Schweisgut sees the summit as a reset of the relationship with several new ideas and initiatives, such as the Global Gateway programme, putting Africa at the centre of the EU's infrastructure projects. According to Schweisgut, the digital agenda is one of the most critical issues to be addressed jointly with Africa, which remains a priority partner for the EU.

This chapter delineates the current relations between the Global North, particularly those before-mentioned 'new' relations between the EU and Africa, focusing on digital issues. The chapter starts with the relevance of colonial history for current challenges, which include digital matters. It continues with an account of the 'digital' status quo of the African continent as well as the EU-Africa relations, which are sorted according to different functions within the digital field, showing where there are potential needs and issue areas that should be covered in the EU's external digital relations with Africa. Finally, relational aspects will be scrutinised regarding the activities of other 'powers' and countries than the EU on the African continent, especially China and the US, since those ventures might also affect the EU's digital policies towards Africa, particularly regarding geopolitical considerations. In this context, the EU is important for its member states helping to 'balance'⁴³ against those global powers, the US and China. The decision for one or other type of norm diffusion is also linked to the presence of other actors, with the Chinese preferring the diffusion of norms through transference, which is also preferred by African states, since they are critical towards the EU's use of conditionality, namely procedural diffusion.

5.2.1 Colonial history and its connection to the present

The joint EU-AU statement of 2014: "the abuse and cruelty of European colonialism is of course not forgotten, but [has been] put to one side to leave room for new forms of cooperation", unfortunately sounds utterly different from what some European politicians claim, such as Boris Johnson: "the problem [with Africa] is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in

⁴³ According to the realist concept of 'balancing'.

charge any more“ and Emmanuel Macron saying that Africa has a civilisational problem and that an African Marshall plan would not work because women had so many children (Russell 2021). In relation to such claims and to Europe’s and Africa’s former colonial relations, it is not surprising that in surveys, one can see that the view of Europe in Africa is worse than the view of the US or China. This research project sheds light on perceptions outsiders have on the EU in a specific and rather new field, namely its external digital policy towards Africa, which shows outsiders viewing the EU not as a value-based actor, but rather an actor oriented towards its own interests, which relates to the results of said surveys. However, the EU invests much more in Africa and has more trade with Africa than the US and China (Russell 2021). It proved difficult for European nations, or the respectively responsible politicians, to apologise for atrocities that happened in the past to open new doors. This is particularly surprising since this would not only make sense concerning European norms and values – for instance, the norms of respect for human rights, liberty, anti-discrimination or good governance would be relevant in relation to the colonial past – but also regarding European interest given the current scramble for Africa. This is an example of values and interests that coincide or complement each other. Notably, in France, one can see a change in this regard, since it was long seen as too sensitive to deal with former colonial possessions in Africa. At the same time, nowadays it is the other way round with France being an excellent example of trying to upload its interests onto a European level, particularly concerning the security situation in the Sahel region (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 177).

Nonetheless, there have been attempts of apologies, but they unfortunately sometimes seemed half-hearted and thus were not very successful (Russell 2021). Oz Russel (Russell 2021) believes that what is actually needed are bold and big moves „such as Willy Brandt kneeling before the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto“ or „Helmut Kohl holding hands with François Mitterrand at a war memorial“. Although those actions were taken out of self-interest, they were still successful (Russell 2021), so it is not even problematic that not only values but pure self-interest was the primary motivation of such gestures. Russell (2021) also portends that some of those significant steps have already been taken, such as returning artefacts from French museums - more could be done in this regard.

Regrettably, missteps, as mentioned before, happened repeatedly, mainly because Africa was not that important for Europe. Still, European leaders now realise the importance of Africa more and more, since Africa nowadays has more of a choice among potential partners (Russell 2021). This is again where interests come in, which are compatible with values, as mentioned before.

One of those potential partners is China, as can already be seen by China's massive investment on African soil, particularly in infrastructure – also digital infrastructure. This helped develop what Obert Hodzi (2020) calls the China effect and derivative power – a type of power Africa derives from the fact that more middle or global powers are interested in partnerships with the continents or parts of it (see the chapter on theoretical approaches for more details).

European and Chinese firms only rarely work together, the EAST African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) being a case in point. France's Total Energies is the leading investor and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation has also invested (Sheftalovich and Wheaton 2022). MEPs called for a halt of an oil project for this pipeline in a European Parliament Resolution (European Parliament 2022) because of concerns about human rights violations and risks. Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, as well as Ugandan MPs were outraged by what was seen as MEPs directing patronising commands at African countries (Sheftalovich and Wheaton 2022). According to the two authors, this resolution can be interpreted either as neo-colonialism or as a genuine concern for African interests being thus superordinated to European interests, namely to get cheap oil and gas. A genuine concern for African interest is considered a value or norm in this research project, the norm of inter-regional solidarity⁴⁴, to be precise, since economic gains and the development of African economies are the goals.

5.2.2 Status quo in Africa concerning digital issues

This chapter shows where there is room for improvement regarding digital issues and thus shows where what I call 'inter-regional solidarity' is useful or even needed in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, which would add to Africa's digital sovereignty and greater independence. Not only values, but also the importance of interests, in particular geopolitical interests, which are related to Africa's digital sovereignty as well as to its role in the development of global digital norms are outlined. Allowing Africa to contribute to the latter would also mean that the EU would have to restrict itself as 'Normative Power Europe', meaning rather than diffusing its own digital norms to Africa it would have to support Africa in its own contributions to norm-development and diffusion.

According to the Digital Development Compass (United Nations 2022), a tool helping to specify the stage of the digital readiness of nations, based on the United Nations Development

⁴⁴ Inter-regional solidarity is one norm category used in this research project as outlined in the chapter on research design.

Programme's (UNDP's) 'Digital Transformation Framework', most African countries are categorised as being in the basic (=1) or opportunistic (=2) stage of digital development. There are three more stages, namely systematic (=3), differentiating (=4) and the highest is called transformational (=5). The tool considers different dimensions of digital development: people, connectivity, government, regulation, economy, and digital public infrastructure, and there is an 'overall' evaluation of the respective countries, aggregating all the aforementioned dimensions. The averages of all African countries as well as of all EU-member states in the respective dimensions were calculated by the author based on the data given on the website of the Digital Development Compass. An overview of all African countries and their scores can be found in the annex and the scores of all EU-member states can be found in the chapter on the differences and similarities between the EU and the US in the digital realm (chapter 6.2.2), where the individual scores of the EU-member states were more relevant than in comparison to Africa.

Table 11: Africa and EU averages based on the Digital Development Compass

State	People	Connectivity	Government	Regulation	Economy	Digital Public Infra-structure	Overall
Africa: Average	1.8	2.0	2.3	2.4	0.8	2.9	1.6
EU: Average	4.2	3.7	4.3	3.8	1.8	4.3	3.2

Source: <https://www.digitaldevelopmentcompass.org>, 10.11.2024

Several other indices also indicate that the African continent has to be considered a laggard concerning digitalisation, as mentioned briefly in the chapter concerning operationalisation, such as the Network Readiness Index (Network Readiness Index 2022). The latter shows that, within the African continent, South Africa, Mauritius, and Kenya are the top three countries, ranked in places 68, 72, and 77, respectively. As a comparison, the highest-ranking European countries are Sweden, Netherlands and Switzerland, a non-EU country, ranking in the places 3,4 and 5, respectively. The US occupies the first rank worldwide, and China the 23rd rank. The four dimensions included in this index are technology, people, governance and impact.

Geopolitical gains are an important aspect of digital policies, not only for the EU or the US, also for Africa. Chloe Teevan and Lidet Tadesse Shiferaw (2022) analysed Africa's status in relation to digital geopolitics. They found the following: there is acceptance of and contribution

to digital issues by institutions of the AU, and there are already sectoral digital strategies which now have to be implemented. The authors explain that the implementation has been driven and supported by the AU, for instance, by offering technical support and ensuring vertical buy-in. The authors see the Data Policy Framework positively since it helps African countries benefit from data and digital technologies. According to the two authors, an intermediary regional level between national and continental levels might be helpful with digital strategies and infrastructure. They further find it vital that Africa contributes to developing global digital norms rather than being a mere norm taker. For this, African countries have to harmonise their rules and approaches to be able to present common African positions (CAPs). This could be achieved by the cooperation of a few like-minded African countries and then moving this a step further on the AU level. But this also means that the EU cannot act as the exclusive normative power regarding digital norms, but would have to consider Africa an equal partner rather than an ‘inferior Other’⁴⁵. Certainly, bridging the digital divide and developing digital infrastructure are still essential points on the African continent (Teevan and Shiferaw 2022), which would strengthen Africa also regarding digital geopolitics by making it less dependent.

Regarding inter-regional solidarity and its focus, the five pillars for digital transformation should be considered particularly in the case of a digital laggard such as the African continent: an enabling environment, effective policy and regulation development, digital infrastructure, human capacity and digital literacy, and digital innovation (Collins 2022). With relation to internet connection, in particular mobile broadband coverage, there are still gaps in Africa, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa, which should be closed as soon as possible since mobile payments are widely used and would be used even more if there was a fast and well-working internet connection (Kimeria 2021b). Besides mobile connections, submarine cables are of the utmost importance for internet connections on the African continent. Private firms, such as Google, are present in this market. Equiano, Google’s subsea cable will connect Togo, South Africa, Namibia, and Nigeria. According to Togo’s minister for digital economy and digital transformation, Togo’s digital strategy is first and foremost based on digital infrastructure, the plan being to bundle power with fibre connections (Onukwue 2022b). Nonetheless, both mobile and fixed internet connections are necessary, and the government has to contribute to financing since leaving it only to private companies such as Google will necessarily lead to higher prices

⁴⁵ Representing the ‘Other’, in that case the EU’s representing Africa, as inferior refers to one of Diez’ ideal types of Othering.

and the internet should also be affordable for people living below the poverty line (Onukwue 2022b).

Also, connectivity and digital infrastructure are essential in the digital cooperation between the EU and the AU. There is the Global Gateway⁴⁶, an EU strategy to boost investments in connectivity, not only digital connectivity, and the AU Digital Transformation for Africa Strategy, which uses digital technology to develop Africa's economy for the benefit of its people. Since only 33 % of African citizens use the Internet compared to 63 % worldwide, it is a main priority to close this digital gap between the EU and Africa (Apofeed 2022). The Global Gateway also seems to be an opportunity for exporting European digital norms 'à la chinoise', meaning through transference, which is preferable to using conditionality (=procedural diffusion) due to a potentially more positive perception on the African side.

Further, reducing internet connection costs is vital on the African continent. According to a report by Quartz Africa⁴⁷ (Ngila 2022a), one can find the most expensive and cheapest mobile data on the African continent. According to this report, the global average cost for 1GB of mobile data is 3.12 \$, with Africa being the cheapest region with a price of 1.05 \$ and Algeria being the most affordable country at 0.48\$. Nonetheless, the sub-Saharan region (4.47\$) ranks directly after North America (1GB costs on average 4.98) regarding the highest prices for mobile data. So, Africa has eight of its countries among the fifty cheapest countries and five of the most expensive ten countries in the world. Fortunately, the cost of mobile data is sinking in Africa, but the continent also has the slowest internet in worldwide comparison, although there is a roll-out of 5G. There are two categories of countries that are among the cheapest: those that have a high quality of broadband and infrastructure, which leads to high amounts of data and thus a low price per gigabyte, and there are those that have lower-quality broadband networks but still the prices are low because otherwise, people could not afford it, as Faustine Ngila (2022a) concludes. Uganda's plan is to reduce internet costs by half to achieve financial inclusion (Kimeria 2023b).

With relation to internet speed, even the African country with the highest internet speed, South Africa, only ranks 46th globally and is thus far below the global average internet speed (Kimeria 2022a). Internet speed, or rather the lack thereof, is part of the concept of internet poverty, which is defined as follows: „Under this expanded definition (see below image), a person is

⁴⁶ This strategic document was analysed in the course of this research project, see chapter 5.3.

⁴⁷ Quartz Africa is a business news outlet frequently reporting about digital issues.

considered internet poor if s/he cannot afford a minimum quantity (1 GB) and quality (10 Mbps download speed) of internet services without spending more than 10 per cent of their disposable income on these services“ (Cuaresma et al. 2022). The authors thus claim that 709 million African people live in internet poverty.

A working and reasonably fast Internet connection is also necessary for various purposes – for certain products, the African diaspora, and initiatives from civil society. Afropolitan, a group to create what they call a ‘sovereign, blockchain-based network state’ for the African diaspora, for instance, is dependent on such working and fast internet connections (Robertson 2022). As Derek Robertson reports, such a state or even states should start as countries existing only online but then gradually „take shape in the real world“, as Derek Robertson (2022) reports. The group’s backers are affluent Africans (Robertson 2022), so the group does not represent the majority of Africans who partly do not even have access to the internet or do not own a computer but only access the net through their phones. According to Robertson (2022), the reason for this planned creation is the group’s frustration with African states and their governments, who do not do enough and are too slow. They have taken things into their own hands, so to speak, meaning rather than changing the old system, they prefer to create something new, which they consider easier than doing the former (Robertson 2022).

Apart from the internet connection itself, another question is who actually benefits or who else, apart from Africans, benefits when there is improved internet access in African countries. According to Daniel Akinmade Emejulu (Emejulu 2021) from Quartz Africa, there are 3.7 billion unconnected people worldwide, 700 million of which live in sub-Saharan Africa; with an investment of 97 billion dollars, everybody in sub-Saharan Africa could have an Internet connection by 2030. The author argues that there have to be certain conditions met and measures taken so it is not the superpowers like the US that profit from the value of data from African citizens: Net neutrality⁴⁸ has to be secured as well as data protection and access to the value of one’s own data. African universities, NGOs, governments, etc., must have access to data that must be protected. The same norms concerning privacy, security and safety as in developed countries have to apply in Africa, as Daniel Akinmade Emejulu argues.

Further, there are often internet shutdowns in Africa, which breach digital rights if African people receive essential information concerning emergencies, such as Twitter (Emejulu 2021).

⁴⁸ Net neutrality refers to the principle of treating all internet traffic in a neutral, i.e. equal, manner, rather than granting certain data transfers priority over others.

This, of course, also should be true when it comes to cooperation with the EU – the same human-centred and norm-driven approach to digitalisation should be applied like in the EU itself, which seems to be the EU’s plan, as can be seen in the empirical analysis of this research project. Moreover, there is a coverage gap and a usage gap (Emejulu 2021), so an essential goal of the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa should also be to close this usage gap, which could probably be tackled by developing African citizens’ digital skills and knowledge. Skills development is also relevant concerning the untapped resources of potential workers (Signé and Heitzig 2022) who do not yet have the digital skills to work in African start-ups in the digital sector.

Another relevant aspect is the African digital market – just as the EU’s digital single market is relevant, the African digital market is also an important aspect to consider when it comes to African digital development. Alexander Onukwue (2022c) claims that the African market is not ready for some products that sell well in European or US-American markets. One of them is the offer of a prime membership in exchange for an exemption from the delivery costs of purchased products online. This is what the company Jumia, Africa’s Amazon, so to speak, the largest online retailer in Africa, ascertained, which is why Jumia changed its priority from high-end and high-cost electronic products to more everyday products, in particular food, emerging as a successful strategy (Onukwue 2022a). Apart from products, Africa might also not be ready for specific regulations, as mentioned in the expert interviews (see chapter on empirical analysis for details). Onukwue’s colleague Ciku Kimeria (2023b) also argues that Africa is not yet ready for the metaverse since people and businesses do not know how to use it to improve their lives and businesses. Further, it is pretty expensive because of hardware like virtual reality headsets; high costs of data and slow internet speeds are hurdles, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Regarding all those weaknesses and limited development of the African digital market, the consequential limits to pursuing economic interests as well as norm diffusion shall be highlighted, since business opportunities of (future) European digital companies or start-ups are limited and thus also diffusion through transference.

Apart from high-speed connectivity, the African digital market also needs funding and investment. Due to its young population and fast-growing regions, the African continent is attractive for international business, and there are already technology hubs in Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. Further rapid urbanisation leads to the development of ‘megacities’, such as Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lagos in Nigeria, or Johannesburg in South Africa, which may well lead to economic growth and integration of

Africa, according to Tapfuma Musewe and Kyle Hiebert (2022). Nonetheless, there are still challenges:

„[...] a resurgence in armed conflict, illicit financial flows, mounting environmental crises and that half of the continent is unbanked. This last point, financial exclusion, affects most of the population in two of Africa’s leading tech hubs —Nigeria, which has more than 212 million people, 70 per cent of whom have access to the internet, and Kenya, a nation of 55 million people, 83 per cent of whom have internet access.“(Musewe and Hiebert 2022)

The authors continue pointing out that Africa is not a homogeneous bloc but very diverse because of a different colonial past, uneven development of digital markets, and linguistic differences. Despite all those challenges, the two authors are convinced that „the opportunity cost for not engaging with the African fintech market is likely much more significant than is realised, even by experts“ (Musewe and Hiebert 2022). However, Fintech⁴⁹ has not been mentioned extensively in the interviews led for this research project (see chapter on empirical analysis for further information and details).

It is in particular start-ups that need funding. Most funding goes to a few African countries only, though, and primarily to fintech, particularly mobile payment (Ogunjuyigbe 2022b). Also, Takambou (Takambou 2021) states that Investment for start-ups is usually directed towards fintech start-ups. The distribution of funding to various African countries and digital sectors would be a step in the right direction since this would avoid further heterogeneity among African countries and sectors with different workforces, i.e., workers with various educational backgrounds. Higher diversification would help create jobs for African citizens from diverse backgrounds. Apart from that, Telecom companies Vodafone, Vodacom and Safaricom argue that mobile financial services in Africa contribute to financial inclusion and thus help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (Vodafone et al. 2022).

An example of a planned investment in African start-up is Google’s plan to invest 1 billion dollars in Africa, as Mimi Mefo Takambou (2021) outlines. Google geographically focuses on only four out of 54 African countries: Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Ghana. Experts disagree on whether this is positive or not. Development economist Shuaibu Idris, for instance, views Google’s engagement positively and sees it as a sign that the African continent is taken seriously, as Mimi Mefo Takambou (2021) reports. She further writes that Maximus Ametorgoh, a Ghanaian IT specialist, is more cautious and thinks that such investors might rather try to acquire those start-ups that they first support at a later stage. Further, they might

⁴⁹ The term ‘fintech’ refers to financial services and instruments using innovative technological solutions as well as to companies offering such services.

pay off the innovator, and then they own what is extremely valuable namely the codes. The question thus is who will, in the end, own the companies? According to Mimi Mefo Takambou (2021), experts also disagree if Africa needs such FDI investment or foreign aid: the political analyst John Ako attaches more importance to FDI, while the development economist Shuaibu Idris considers both equally important for Africa at this point. In any case, Google will have to grapple with the usual challenges, such as microeconomy and political instability, poor infrastructure, corruption and bad governance. Further, the tech giant will have to search for contact with policymakers (Takambou 2021), where the expertise of the EU would come in handy, and EU officials could offer valuable advice on how to deal with those digital giants and the issues related to them.

Apart from investments in African digital businesses, cybersecurity and resilience are important issue areas that should be mentioned in the goals of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. The lack of cyber resilience and -security also has to be managed to avoid rising inequality and cybercrime (Signé and Heitzig 2022). This is particularly true for fintech, a rapidly growing market in Africa, and traditional financial business, which is primarily digitalised. An example is South Africa, where a growing financial sector comes with a growth in hacking activities (Ngila 2022b). Faustine Ngila (2022b) reports that approximately half of South Africa's insurance companies are unprepared to counter cyber-attacks, because they do not use DMARC (Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting, and Conformance) for email authentication. The attacks are getting increasingly sophisticated, so the mere increasing of budgets is not enough. According to Interpol, South Africa has the most cyber threats on the African continent and ranks third worldwide. What is needed in South Africa, according to Faustine Ngila (2022b) – and supposedly also elsewhere – is more public awareness, a well-functioning cyber defence governance policy, and training in the field for experts. A cyber monitoring centre is being built in Togo to protect the African continent's cyberspace as a whole.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is another aspect that has to be considered from a policy perspective. Leo Komminoth (2023) alludes to the fact that AI, for instance ChatGPT, is primarily trained with 'Western' data and explains the implications as follows. Since AI can only learn from data it is biased towards Western perspectives, values and interests, since data only seldom comes from African countries and people, also because there are far fewer people having internet access compared to Western countries. Even if there is a considerable number of African tech start-ups already, those have to feed their products data mainly produced in the West, or they

have to use AI products trained with data from the West, so the question arises in how far African countries can achieve digital sovereignty, even if they have their own tech firms, as long as there is not enough AI trained with African data.

This chapter provided an overview of the African digital landscape with all its strengths and weaknesses which should or could be taken into account in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. If those issue areas as outlined in this chapter actually feature in the EU's plans concerning said policy can be seen in the chapter 5.3.1 on the goals the EU outlines in its documents. Said strengths and weaknesses are particularly important for the EU's possibility to pursue its own interests, particularly its economic interest of supporting business activities of European companies. Fostering African digital development, which falls under the norm of inter-regional solidarity, is closely linked to this economic interest as well as to norm diffusion through transference. European aspirations for economic gains and diffusion of norms are also strongly related to the presence of other actors, who are already active in Africa in the digital arena, which is what will be scrutinised in the next section.

5.2.3 Other powers than the EU in Africa

The presence and activity of other powers in Africa in the digital field should be a relevant factor regarding the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. The more other actors are interested in and active on the African continent, the higher Africa's derivative power and the more effort it will take the EU to convince Africa of its digital offers.

Visits to the African continent are, not surprisingly, a sign for a country's interest and with so many leaders from different countries visiting the continent – Chinese, Russian, US American and of course also European leaders – von der Leyen's first visit during her term as President of the Commission led her to Addis Ababa, the continent's geopolitical and strategic importance seems quite obvious. Since digital issues also play an important role in geopolitics nowadays, interests and values within the digital realm are certainly relevant factors in the international digital arena, again showing the importance of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa in a larger geopolitical context and scramble for Africa.

As Stephan Keukeleire and Tom Delreux (2022: 227) rightly put it: "The West does not have a monopoly on donorship or on buying African exports, particularly oil and commodities. Donors

such as China and India are willing to trade and to provide aid without the constraints of Western-style conditionality. Moreover, their aid is potentially more effective and visible to the local population than the EU's." Africa is relevant and interesting for many great and middle powers since it has the fastest growing population in the world, with future consumers, but also future employees, who might not have the skills yet that are needed for digitalisation, but those skills can certainly be developed (Signé and Heitzig 2022). Thus, policies aiming at developing African citizens' digital skills should be an essential element of the EU's digital policies towards Africa. Due to the aforementioned reasons and increasing urbanisation as well as a growing middle class, China, Japan, and Arabic states are pretty active in Africa. While the US has scaled down its activities for a while (Signé and Heitzig 2022), it is now already scaling up its efforts, showing that the US is also aware of the relevance of the African continent, which is briefly described later in this chapter.

Since Africa becomes strategically crucial for great and middle powers, as has been explained, the EU has to take initiatives to ensure its presence and cooperation with Africa continues or is even expanded, be it in the digital or any other geopolitically relevant sector. Pryial Singh (Singh 2022) further notes that the voting pattern of African states concerning the UN resolutions of the 11th Special Emergency Session on Ukraine shows they have a different view of the conflict than Western states have. The votes of African states are – not only in this instance – necessary, though, so African states are not only seen as new markets and potential suppliers of rare materials but also as swing states concerning changing or maintaining the current world order (Singh 2022). This can also be extended to the governance of the Internet. With essential votes that took place in the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in September 2022 concerning its Secretary General as well as a vote on the Chinese suggestion for a less open and more nationally governed internet, it is vital for the EU and Western powers as well as for China and Russia to have the support of African states. However, interest in the ITU within Africa is relatively low since Africans have not yet realised the importance of this UN agency. At the same time, Europe, the US and Asia are aware of its strategic relevance (interview 2/1). Africa's strategic importance can also be seen by visits from Olaf Scholz, Antony Blinken, Sergey Lavrov, and Emmanuel Macron recently to consolidate the ties of the respective states with African countries (Singh 2022).

The relationship between China and Africa has been quite strong since the 1960s when many African countries gained independence from European colonial powers (Alicia Garcia Herrero et al. 2022). The relationship has often been portrayed as a win-win relationship, an image that

started to crumble because of the asymmetrical relations between Africa and China (Alicia Garcia Herrero et al. 2022) , as explained below. For China, the ties with Africa are not only significant when it comes to raw materials but also concerning China's international position (Alicia Garcia Herrero et al. 2022); for Africa, on the other hand, the fact that it can leverage China's interest in negotiations with other partners, such as the EU, constitutes a clear advantage, as outlined in reference to Hodzi's (2020) concept of derivative power.

China is the biggest provider of UN peacekeeping troops on the continent and if compared to individual EU member states, China is Africa's biggest trading partner, which is also because China focuses on trade not aid. Nonetheless, 54 % of China's assistance goes to sub-Saharan Africa, according to the author. Hodzi compares China with individual EU member states, but if one takes the whole of the EU for comparison, the EU is still Africa's biggest trading partner, though. According to the European Commission (2022a), the EU's total trade with Africa increased by 20% between 2016 and 2019, to €280 billion, making the EU Africa's first trading partner, accounting for 28% of Africa's total trade in 2019. The EU market also outpaces China, India and the US regarding Africa's exports, proving that Africa was a key geographical priority and still is in the new EU trade strategy (European Commission 2022a). China exports more to Africa than it imports from Africa, with goods worth \$254 billion traded between the two countries in 2021 (Kimeria 2022b). To balance this out, Rwanda and Ethiopia have developed creative marketing techniques on the Internet, and more African countries will probably follow (Kimeria 2022b). Apart from trade, the EU is also the largest foreign investor in Africa, with over €212 billion in FDI stocks in 2018 (European Commission 2022a). By the way, Japan also switched to FDI in Africa to counter not only Chinese but also US and EU influence (Kimeria 2023b). In contrast to the EU, China's strong point and, thus, a supportive factor in its relations with African states is that China does not have a colonial past in Africa (Hodzi 2020: 256).

As is widely known, China mainly invests in infrastructure, but debt and the secretive nature of the loans are recurring issues concerning Africa-China relations (Kimeria 2021a). While Chinese foreign direct investment is still minimal, those African debts vis-à-vis China are excessively high, and it remains to be seen how Africa will repay those loans (Alicia Garcia Herrero et al. 2022: 27). In January 2023, though, China waived debt on 23 interest-free loans that were due in 2021, thus providing at least some financial relief to, on the whole, 17 African countries (Kimeria 2023b). As this gesture shows, China is the second biggest lender in Africa and seems to want to stay a long-term partner for Africa (Kimeria 2023b). The EU counters these Chinese investments in infrastructure – also digital infrastructure – with its own

programme, the Global Gateway, which also focuses on infrastructure investment not only but particularly in Africa and also includes digital infrastructure; 60 per cent of projects are to be in sub-Saharan Africa, 20 per cent are dedicated to Asia and Latin America respectively (Torreblanca and Melguizo 2023). Seemingly, Africans are critical towards China to a certain extent, as a survey shows, in which it was asked if the US or China has the better development model; most respondents said the US (Kimeria 2021a). It would be interesting to know the answer of African people when asked about the EU's model compared to the Chinese or the US American development model. The official stance of China, as Wang Yi, the Chinese foreign minister, outlines, is that Africa does not want geopolitical struggles and a cold war mentality but amicable cooperation, and it seems he argues that this is what China offers to Africa while Western countries do not (Kimeria 2023b). According to Ciku Kimeria (Kimeria 2023b), leaders from former French colonies might agree.

Apart from high debts based on intransparent loans, there is also another negative side effect of Chinese influence in Africa, namely democratic backsliding. This democratic backsliding in Africa is due to various causes, not only Chinese influence (Hess 2022). Steve Hess argues that China has the role of a black knight and makes it possible for transitional African states to resist pressures coming from Western donors concerning democratisation. Those pressures come from the procedural diffusion of norms often used by the EU through conditionality, while China rather uses transference through exports of software and other digital products and infrastructure, a less obvious form of norm diffusion and thus more acceptable for African states.

China does not only offer loans but also has a lot to offer African countries concerning digital tools – surveillance software and tools, as well as 5G phones. Chinese manufacturers of 5G phones are actually in the lead in Africa, where more and more people are getting such phones, substituting their 4G phones (Ngila 2022c). Although 5G infrastructure development in Africa is slow, enthusiasm for 5G phones is high, and due to this high demand, prices are sinking (Ngila 2022c).

Russia also aims to expand its presence on the African continent, so Russian foreign minister Lavrov visited South Africa in January 2023, shortly after Russia, South Africa, and China announced they would carry out joint military exercises (Hanke Vela 2023). He also visited Mali two weeks later to discuss military support, which seems to concern in particular the Russian mercenary group Wagner, which had been present in Mali for a while and which has

been accused of violating human rights according to the UN human rights representative who had been expelled from Mali in the meantime (Hanke Vela 2023).

Guido Lanfranchi and Kars de Bruijne (Lanfranchi and Bruijne 2022) from the Clingendael Institute conclude that while there is international concern about Russia's growing presence on the African continent, at least its presence in the economic realm is very limited. Thus, the problem seems to be an overreaction. Another critical point, according to the authors, is that Russia does not have a clear strategy for Africa (in contrast to the US and the EU, authors note). Still, it does have interests, and Russian private companies also have their own particular interests concerning Africa. The researchers assess Russia's actions as opportunistic since "Moscow's presence tends to grow when relations between African governments and their international partners (especially in the West) deteriorate, often in the wake of authoritarian turns".

Instead, the EU and its member states should focus on their own relations with Africa rather than what Russia does on the continent; in particular, imbalances between the EU and Africa must be dealt with, according to Lanfranchi and Bruijne (2022). This is what the EU already does with its focus on an equal partnership between the EU and Africa and with its own infrastructure investment-package of the Global Gateway and other actions, such as the digital4development hub. The EU should also leverage the engagement of European companies on the continent to pursue its own interest in an increasingly multipolar international context (Lanfranchi and Bruijne 2022). This is where band wagoning – although this is a slight stretching of the concept – can become potentially relevant by cooperating with the US, for instance using US business power and presence in the digital field on the African continent, and thus lining up with the US to counter Chinese influence, bringing us to the next issue: the US' activities on the African continent.

Not only the EU but also the US makes an effort to counter Chinese activities and initiatives on the African continent. The US strategy reads, „The People's Republic of China (PRC), by contrast, sees the region as an important arena to challenge the rules-based international order, advance its own narrow commercial and geopolitical interests, undermine transparency and openness, and weaken U.S. relations with African peoples and governments.” (Executive Office of the President and National Security Council 2022). Biden was even on a tour in Africa in 2022, while China sent a high-ranking diplomat on a tour through Africa (Lau 2022c). Also, Antony Blinken's visits to the continent in 2022 and the year before show the importance the

US puts on Africa: he visited Senegal, Kenya, Nigeria, Morocco, Algeria, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda (Schneidman and Signé 2022). Further, there was a US - Africa Leaders' Summit in December 2022, including an Africa Business Forum, since private business plays a vital role in the US' Africa strategy consisting of four pillars: 1. fostering openness and open societies, 2. delivering democratic and security dividends, 3. advancing pandemic recovery and economic opportunity, and last conservation, climate adaption and just energy transition (Schneidman and Signé 2022). Concerning the first pillar, fighting digital authoritarianism is an important point (Schneidman and Signé 2022) that also relates to the EU norm of democracy, at least on the surface; norms can also be linked to interests but used in rhetoric.

Not only the US and the EU but also Arab countries have stepped up their efforts in Africa. Some Arab countries grouped up with African states and founded the Digital Cooperation Organisation (CDO) in 2021 to cooperate with innovation in the digital realm (Kimeria 2023a). In 2023 already, the second General Assembly took place. The organisation has thirteen member states: Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Jordan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Pakistan, Djibouti, The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Morocco. African states want to further support their tech-savvy and early-adopting citizens with the help of the assumed empowering nature of digitalisation, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women (Kimeria 2023a), which corresponds to European anti-discrimination values towards women or other vulnerable groups of citizens. If this is done together with Arab states, also known for a lack of integration of women in society, this would be a step in the right direction. European digital policies could again be taken as a model. However, even within the EU, there is still a certain digital divide between men and women, particularly regarding women in jobs related to information technologies. Further, African states want to build on past successes concerning mobile money and crypto, which have already experienced rapid growth on the continent; the power of such digital tools and inventions should also be leveraged in the future to help African nations develop economically (Kimeria 2023a).

In conclusion, some of the EU's member states' past colonial relations with Africa might still influence the EU's current ties with Africa. However, there has been a great effort to renew those relations, with the effects still to be seen, also in the digital realm. The current status of 'digital laggards' of all African states – some more than others – is an essential element that will or should affect the EU's digital policies towards Africa, which have to tackle the lack of appropriate digital infrastructure, digital skills, digital divides, cyber-resilience and many other

issues. At the same time, there is not only African interest in its development that is important to the EU but also that other actors are interested in digital partnerships with Africa, such as China, the US and others. So, based on the status quo, one might think that in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, quite probably also European geopolitical interests will play a role, as well as the interests of European businesses which would profit from African citizens' data, not only the development of Africa's own digital economy and society.

Thus, we can assume that not only inter-regional solidarity but also economic and geopolitical interests will be at the forefront of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. An important issue influencing the EU's policies is Africa's derivative power, i.e. its use of the interest and presence of other powers, such as China and the US, as leverage vis-à-vis the EU. Another one is the fact that member states (and their national companies) can profit from the EU since the latter balances out the power inequalities concerning Chinese and US presence in Africa, at least to a certain extent. Further, there is the EU's possibility to 'band-wagon, i.e. to cooperate with the US to counter Chinese influence, which might not only influence the EU's external digital policy towards the US but also the one towards Africa.

Now that the status quo and how this status quo was achieved has been scrutinised regarding different digital issue areas as well as regarding Africa's derivative power and the EU's possibilities of band wagoning and balancing, the EU's goals concerning its external digital policy towards Africa, as well as how those are perceived, shall be analysed.

5.3 Norm versus interest-orientation in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

This chapter presents the results and relevant aspects of the empirical analytical process, which is structured based on the research question. First, the analysis based on the frequency analysis⁵⁰ concerning norms and interests as well as their subcategories and the domains of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa⁵¹ is presented for each perspective – projected image,

⁵⁰ According to Mayring, Gläser-Laudel as well as Saldana as outlined in the chapter on research design.

⁵¹ The reader shall be reminded that Africa cannot be considered a unitary actor, but as the EU's external digital policy takes place within the framework of its relations and exchanges with the African Union in summit meetings and partly also with Smart Africa, the external digital policy can only be assessed as one addressed to the whole of Africa, notwithstanding the heterogeneity of the continent. This heterogeneity of African states, and the differences also within the African Union, has already been discussed in preceding chapters and will also feature in the discussion of the results of this research.

perspectives of EU-insiders and EU-outsiders. After that, the different perspectives are compared and contrasted and the EU's type of digital actorness is assessed and discussed, also concerning additional themes that could be identified as related to norms and interests.

5.3.1 The EU's projected image in its external digital policy towards Africa

At this stage, the focus is on how the EU presents itself regarding its external digital policy towards Africa. Subsequent subchapters will analyse the perception of this policy.

5.3.1.1 Process of document analysis

To ensure intersubjective verifiability, the process, steps, and manner of proceeding shall be outlined in detail in this subchapter and throughout the whole empirical chapter whenever relevant. The selection of documents was made by researching the internet pages of the European Commission and based on suggestions made in exploratory interviews held in January and February 2022. Different types of documents were analysed, for instance, communications of the Commission, press releases, multiannual indicative programmes (documents laying down what the EU plans to do in the following years in Africa as a whole and also in individual African countries), staff working papers, declarations after EU-AU summits, reports and strategies. The prerequisite was that the document be an 'official' one, i.e., published on EU websites and accessible to everyone having access to the internet. On the whole, thirteen documents have been analysed with which saturation was achieved, i.e., no new types of norms or interests could be analysed anymore, and no new results concerning the share between norms and interests could be ascertained.

Table 12: List of analysed documents (EU's external digital policy towards Africa)

	Document	Year
1	Commission staff working document – Digital4Development: mainstreaming digital technologies and services into EU Development Policy	2017
2	EU-AU Summit, final declaration (Abidjan, Ivory Coast)	2017
3	New Africa-Europe Digital Economy Partnership, Report of EU-AU Digital Economy Task Force	2019
4	Africa-Europe Alliance: European Commission and African Union Commission welcome the Digital Economy Task Force report (text on website)	2019
5	European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy: Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa	2020
6	Factsheet: towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa	2020
7	European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy: Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank – The Global Gateway	2021
8	Sub-Saharan Africa multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2021-2027	2021
9	Republic of Angola - Multi-annual Indicative Programme 2021-2027	2021
10	Press release MIP: Global Europe: the European Union sets out priority areas for cooperation with partner countries and regions around the world	2021
11	EU-AU Summit, final declaration, (Kigali, Rwanda)	2021
12	Second ministerial meeting: Joint press statement of EU and AU foreign ministers (Kigali, Rwanda)	2021
13	EU-AU Summit, final declaration (Brussels, Belgium)	2022

When analysing a document, the procedure was always as follows: if the document was not only concerned with digital issues, the relevant parts on said issues were identified. If there was not a particular part of the document or specific paragraphs explicitly dedicated to digital issues only, I searched for the term ‘digital’ in the whole document to isolate the relevant passages. Having done that, I searched for a part of the text explicitly dedicated to goals; if there were none, I sifted through the relevant passages to identify the goals mentioned by looking for formulations indicating a goal (as opposed to a mere measure). As mentioned in the chapter on the research design, the reason for this focus of analysis on the mentioned goals is that those are supposed to show the norm or interest-orientation most clearly. Unfortunately, no goals

were mentioned in one document (document 6), which was sifted through thoroughly but did not deliver any results.

As mentioned in the chapter on research design, there are two dimensions: first, the norm versus interest dimension with the two categories of norms and interests and subcategories of specific types of interests and norms, and second, a topical dimension (see tables below with different categories in the subchapter presenting the results as well as in the chapter on research design). So, after the outlined steps, it was determined if the relevant goals were norm- or interest-based, i.e. if a value or an interest of the EU was the driver behind these goals. Again, the officially mentioned driver is analysed in the research project at hand; those might or might not correspond to actual drivers as discussed, for instance, in internal or even informal meetings. The focus here is on how the EU presents itself, i.e. which goals and motivations are mentioned officially. Then, the type of norm or interest to which the goals can be ascribed was further analysed (see again the respective tables with lists of the different categories of norms and interests in the following subchapters and the chapter on research design). The topical domain to which the respective goal should be assigned was assessed in relation to the second – the topical – dimension.

The exact numbers are only tools to be discussed in searching for relationships and detecting tendencies of the EU's external digital policy towards norms or interests, towards a specific type of norm or interest or one particular domain. If the result were the mentioning of 30 norms as opposed to 32 interests, there would be no clear focus but broadly equal attention towards norms and interests, while mentioning 10 norms and 50 interests would show such a clear focus.

5.3.1.2 Mastered challenges of the document analysis

As with all analyses, this procedure was challenging, which could be surmounted successfully, though, by finding satisfactory solutions to enable a clear and valid analysis. The analytical distinction between norm- and interest-based goals in the empirical material has been unexpectedly smooth and efficient thanks to the rigorous operationalisation of the concepts and the adherence to recommendations of the literature⁵². It was the assignment of the goals to topical domains which constituted more of a challenge due to domains – as all ideal types – overlapping in reality, i.e., some goals could be ascribed to two different domains. Generally, it was clear which domain of the two was the more relevant, which was the domain to which

⁵² The recommendations referred to the use of goals as unit of analysis (possession versus milieu goals)

the respective goals were ascribed. More details and examples will be given in the part on domains further below.

Assigning the norms and interests into the different categories of norms and interests only rarely constituted a challenge. The norms ‘anti-discrimination’ and ‘human rights’ are linked but are two categories of norms as distinguished by Ian Manners in his seminal article (Manners 2002). This distinction further enhances the informative value of this research regarding the EU’s driving factors in its external digital policy towards Africa. To take one particular example of the analysis of the document on the comprehensive strategy with Africa: one goal that was mentioned was that it should be achieved to “ensure full digital inclusion for women and marginalised communities” (European Commission 2020: 4). Suppose the goal is not to discriminate against women and marginalised communities. In that case, this also means that the human rights of women and people belonging to said communities should be guaranteed just like for all other citizens. In a sense, the category of anti-discrimination can also be seen as a sub-category of human rights. Nonetheless, the two categories of human rights and anti-discrimination were kept to unearth and make visible which goals related to anti-discrimination, not just human rights in general.

5.3.1.3 Results of analysis – the EU’s projected image of its external digital policy towards Africa

Table 13: Norms versus interests: the EU’s projected image of its external digital policy towards Africa

	Numbers	Percentages
Norm-based goals	151	93%
Interest-based goals	12	7%
Total number of goals mentioned	163	

The differentiation between norms and interests in the EU’s official documents will help to determine if the EU has already learned the language of power and even has developed into a geopolitical actor, as announced by EU-leaders such as Josep Borrell (Borrell 2022) or Ursula von der Leyen (von der Leyen 2020b) in the digital realm, which some experts doubt (Youngs 2022). In the thirteen analysed documents, 163 goals were identified, of which 151 were categorised as norms, and only 12 were interest-based; none were classified as neutral. The latter shows that operationalising the definitions of norms and interests and focusing on goals as a basis for the categorisation were valuable and effective groundwork for this empirical analysis. In percentages, 93 per cent of the goals are given a normative basis, while only 7 per

cent are presented as motivated by an interest. The EU presents itself as a normative actor in the digital field in terms of its relations with the African continent or African countries. This confirms what has been found in literature scrutinising norms and interests in the EU's policies, as mentioned in the chapter on theoretical approach with reference to Raffaella A. Del Sarto (2016: 218) – a normative orientation.

Interestingly, the document with the highest number of interests mentioned, namely six, is the first document, a Commission staff working document. While the document is accessible on the internet, it is still of a more 'internal' nature, with probably fewer people downloading or reading it than, for instance, a press release or the final declaration of an EU-AU summit, which is typically read by many journalists, publishing articles and programmes reporting on related events. In most of the rest of the documents, which can be considered as 'less internal' but of a more external or official nature, no interests were mentioned at all. In a few cases, interests were mentioned, but fewer than six. This leads to the conjecture that the more official a document, the more the EU is inclined to present itself as a normative actor, with less of an inclination in the case of documents of a less official nature.

The Multiannual Indicative Programmes, two of which were analysed in the framework of this thesis, the one for the sub-Saharan region and the one for Angola, are part of the new development policy instrument NDICI – Global Europe (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe). This policy is said to be based on European interests due to a geopolitical context by some external observers (Di Ciommo 2023), which does not correspond to what is communicated in said Multiannual Indicative Programmes since only normative goals are mentioned, not geopolitically-based ones.

Table 14: Norm categories in the EU's projected image of its external digital policy towards Africa

type of norm	Numbers	Percentages
peace	0	0%
liberty	0	0%
democracy	3	2%
rule of law	2	1%
respect for human rights	22	15%
social solidarity	6	4%
anti-discrimination	19	13%
sustainable development	22	15%
good governance	11	7%
inter-regional solidarity	63	42%
consumer rights	3	2%
sum total	151	

Note: The percentages are rounded figures; thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100. The norms are not presented alphabetically but according to Manners' order as he listed them in his seminal article (Manners 2002) until his last norm category, 'good governance'. The two additional norm categories are mentioned in the order in which they appeared during the analysis.

As one can see from the table showing the types of norms mentioned in the analysed documents, the EU's focus is on the development of the African continent regarding norms, as the prevalence of the norm of inter-regional solidarity shows. As mentioned in the chapter on research design, the five norms at the top of the list are core- and the following four are minor norms, according to Ian Manners (2002: 242-43). At the same time, the last two, inter-regional solidarity and consumer rights, were added during the analysis due to goals that could not have been allocated to Manners' norms. Manners' norms and the added norm of consumer rights seem self-explanatory, while the added norm of 'inter-regional solidarity' might need some clarification.

The norm of 'inter-regional solidarity' refers to the EU's goal to support African interests, for instance, supporting Africa in developing its digital economy or cybersecurity. It was shortly considered if subtypes of the norm of inter-regional solidarity were functional. Still, since the norm of inter-regional solidarity, as are all other norms and interests, is allocated to domains related to the topical dimension, this was not deemed necessary. Combining the two dimensions (norm versus interest- and topical dimension), one sees which topical domain a goal based on the norm of inter-regional solidarity refers to. One concrete example of the norm 'inter-regional solidarity' that appeared in the documents is 'job creation' in Africa in the digital field, such as in the Commission staff working document (document 1) from the year 2017 on page 15: "Digital for Development is an opportunity to address EU development policy priorities, e.g.

Job creation [...]” From an African perspective, this is an interest, an economic gain; from a European perspective, which is the perspective of the analysis, since it is the EU’s digital policy towards Africa and its goals that are analysed, this is a value-based goal: the EU supports Africa to achieve its goals.

One could argue that specific interests of Africa might also be in the interest of the EU and that the EU’s support of Africa in achieving its goals might not be utterly altruistic. The creation of jobs in Africa in the digital field might also be in the interest of the EU, particularly in the interest of European companies in the field of digital technology, which could export their goods and services to African firms or could use the data produced by those employees for the development of AI, which needs massive loads of data, to state just two examples in connection with the goal mentioned in document 1 (as well as in many other documents). This can be said concerning many African interests that might also be in the interest of the EU. Nonetheless, the analysis focuses on which goals are mentioned and how they are presented, not if any potential ulterior motives have not been mentioned in the official documents. The research focus of this project lies on how the EU presents itself and how it is perceived rather than on real versus underlying motives that are not communicated. It is also highly challenging, if not impossible, to receive information on underlying motives not communicated to the public.

In percentages, the norm ‘inter-regional solidarity’ was the basis of 42 per cent of the goals mentioned in the documents, while ‘peace’ and ‘liberty’ were not the basis of any goals; thus, those two norms are not that relevant with relation to digital issues in the EU’s external policies towards Africa. With regard to the problem of surveillance and manipulation in elections, it seems interesting that democracy is also only rarely related to in goals. Suppose one adds the goals associated with the norm of anti-discrimination, which can be seen as a subcategory of respect for human rights, as mentioned before and the ones related to human rights. In that case, they represent around 27 per cent of the goals declared in the analysed documents, more than sustainable development with about 15 per cent. Interestingly, democracy promotion, which Raffaella A. Del Sarto (2016: 218) detected as the EU’s focus regarding norms, disappoints in relation to the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa, with only three out of 151 norm-based goals related to the norm of democracy. This corresponds to only two per cent of the total number of norm-based goals and below two per cent of the total number of goals (163). So, either the EU’s normative focus has changed, or the EU’s focus within the digital realm is different, at least in relation to its external digital policy towards Africa.

One might also think that consumer rights would be more important since the digital market and digital business are essential elements of the EU's digital policy towards Africa, as one can deduce from the importance of the digital industry in said policy, which is what the table with relation to domains shows further down in the text.

An exciting aspect of the results is that what Manners identified as core norms (peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights) are not necessarily all core norms in the digital realm. According to the results of this thesis, only human rights could be considered a core norm in the digital sphere. Sustainable development and anti-discrimination, which are minor norms according to Manners, are more important than some of what he called core norms. The most crucial norm – the norm of inter-regional solidarity – was not even a norm identified by Manners but was a category added inductively since goals related to this norm are frequently mentioned in the documents studied.

Table 15: Interest categories in the EU's projected image of its external digital policy towards Africa

type of interest	Numbers	Percentages
political gains	2	17%
economic gains	9	75%
security gains	1	8%
sum total	12	

The types of interests seem self-explanatory apart from political gains, which can be related to international migration or voting rights in international bodies. The kind of interest most relevant to the EU in its digital strategies towards Africa are economic gains, accounting for 75 % of the interest-based goals, which makes sense when one thinks of the fact that the EU is a laggard when it comes to digital business, with most of the digital giants being based in the US. The EU could also use its digital relations with Africa to develop its own digital economy, not only Africa's digital economy. The latter is an essential driver for the EU, as seen in the high number of goals based on inter-regional solidarity mentioned in the documents analysed (see table before). At the same time, the first is present but less important in comparison.

Table 16: Domains of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa in the EU's projected image

Domain	Numbers	Percentages
transregional governance	45	28%
industry	40	25%
trade	2	1%
security	10	6%
development cooperation	43	26%
society	19	12%
public sector	4	2%
	163	

The aim of assigning goals to different domains is to determine where there is a tendency towards norms or interests and towards which type of interest or norm. Like the types of interests and norms, the various categories of domains also seem self-explanatory. Three may not be a hundred per cent clear to the reader, so they shall be explained: transregional governance refers to standard setting or regulation on a global level, with the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) being a prominent example. An example of a goal allocated to the domain of society is the ‘guaranteeing of essential skills’ concerning citizens (not employees – in such a case, the goals would instead be classified as belonging to the industry domain) as mentioned in the report of the EU-AU Digital Economy Task Force (document 3, p. 28). A goal belonging to the public sector is, for instance, the ‘improvement of access to health services in remote areas’ through digital means, as mentioned in the ‘Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council - Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa’ from the year 2020 (document 5, p. 5). So, any goals concerning e-government or e-health fall, among others, under this category.

With most of the goals based on the EU's wish to support Africa in developing its digital economy (see table on norm categories), it is not surprising that development cooperation ranks relatively high in relation to the related domains, namely second. Nonetheless, transregional governance is represented the most, and industry comes third. The least relevant domain is digital trade. Referring back to the issue areas in which the EU could or should become active as delineated in chapter 5.2.2. on the status quo in Africa concerning digital issues, several of those needs and issues are covered in the goals the EU presents in the relevant documents. Thus, the EU's plan is oriented towards relevant goals, but what will actually be done remains to be seen.

The differentiation between domains was sometimes challenging since domains overlap and cannot always be clearly demarcated immediately. One telling example is a goal mentioned in the Global Gateway Communication: “The EU toolbox for the cybersecurity of 5G networks will guide investments in digital infrastructure. These will also be linked with standards and protocols that support network security and resilience, interoperability, and an open, plural and secure internet.” (doc. 4, p.4). This whole sentence includes several goals, one being the support of a secure internet. Particularly, the mentioning of standards before hints at the domain of transregional governance since such standards of security are not necessarily restricted to one country but refer at least to a region if they are not even global. Thus, the domains of security and transregional governance would be suitable. The former was determined to be even better suited since what the standard setting actually refers to is the even more specific and relevant information, and the goal was allocated accordingly.

Another goal mentioned in the same document was also difficult to allocate and is also interesting concerning the aspect of integrating a norm- and interest-orientation within one goal: “[...] strengthening secure and trusted digital connections within them and between Europe and the world. [...]” (doc. 4, p.4). First, this goal can be allocated to the domains of security or transregional governance likewise, since such cybersecurity issues can also be regulated on an at least regional level. Nonetheless, it seemed more suitable to assign this goal to the security domain for the reason given before. As mentioned, this example also illustrates the integration of a norm and an interest-orientation within one goal since the security of said digital connections should be achieved within underserved regions (which is what ‘them’ relates to), referring to areas in Africa and between Europe and the world, the first can be considered a norm, namely a norm of inter-regional solidarity, and the other an interest, namely a security gain for Europe.

As one can see from the results of the analysis, the EU’s interests are rarely mentioned, but the focus is on norms, including supporting African interests (the norm of inter-regional solidarity). In the rare cases that EU interests are mentioned, those are linked to African interests, for instance, in the AU-EU press statement from 2021 (document 12): “[...] secure the creation of decent jobs, as well as research, technology and innovation to drive a sustainable socio-economic recovery and foster more resilient societies on both continents.” The quote mentions several interests concerning both partners, the EU and Africa. So, the EU’s interests are never mentioned in isolation, at least not in the analysed documents, but always in connection with Africa. Thus, although it has been said that the EU should strengthen its language of power

(Borrell 2020), meaning communicating its strategic interests rather than presenting itself as a normative actor, the focus in the analysed documents is still on presenting itself as such a normative actor and Europe's interests are not put in the spotlight but are instead put away from the spotlight by mentioning the interests of other actors simultaneously.

This example of a European interest presented together with an African interest also proves that interests and norms can be combined. They often do not exclude each other; thus, an actor's motivation can be based on both (Schunz and Damro 2020: 130). Notably, the norm of inter-regional solidarity is suitable for such a combination, as seen from the example. Whenever there is a combination of an interest of the EU with an interest of Africa, the EU's interest and the norm of 'inter-regional solidarity' are linked. There are also other examples showing this compatibility or even complementarity of interests and norms, as the following goal mentioned in the Commission staff working document (document 1, p. 15) shows:

"Made-in-Europe" solutions can help address the needs of developing countries and, in parallel, promote EU policies and standards, as well as create opportunities for European companies to extend their presence in new markets.

So, on the one hand, this goal is about values or norms that are already put into standards and about the interest of Africa ("the needs of developing countries" – document 1, p. 15), which from the perspective of the EU is the norm of inter-regional solidarity as explained before. On the other hand, this also corresponds to the interest of European companies, which can thus find new markets on the African continent more easily. It might also be in the interest of the EU as a 'regulatory power' to extend and diffuse its policies, strengthening the so-called Brussels effect (Bradford 2020). However, this second interest of the EU is not explicitly mentioned. This also corresponds to the 2017 New European Consensus on Development, stating that although poverty eradication was still the primary objective of the EU's development policy, the latter can also be used to advance the EU's interests regarding security or migration (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 239-40). This complementarity further aligns with the 2016 EU Global Strategy's goal of linking development and security policies (High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2016: 50). This security-development nexus leading to the complementarity of goals in those two policy areas corresponds to a strategic autonomy–development nexus found in this analysis of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, as the above-stated explicit quote in an EU document shows. Such complementarity or at least the parallel existence of value-based and interest-based goals can also lead to a clear prevailing of interests, undermining value-based foreign policy goals (Keukeleire and Delreux

2022: 245). To ascertain if this is the case in digital policy, further research is necessary to compare strategic documents, policy output, and policy outcome.

Since norms prevail in the analysed documents, looking at the results through the critical lens of post-structural and postcolonial approaches seems crucial. As outlined in the chapter on theoretical approaches, post-structural and postcolonial critiques of the concept of normative power Europe question the universality of norms. This issue arises whenever the EU's norms in the digital arena are, at least partially, already enshrined in laws with an external effect, such as the Digital Markets Act (DMA), the Digital Services Act (DSA) or the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This external effect means that actors from other countries must also adhere to those norms, insinuating at least a certain degree of universality. As can be seen concerning the problems of finding an agreement concerning data flows between the US and the EU, even 'Western' countries and regions have different norms, in this case regarding data protection and privacy, so one cannot automatically assume African countries have the same norms as the EU in the digital arena. In the case of Africa, the visions and conceptions of African citizens and experts about digital issues might still develop since the continent is not yet as digitalised as Europe or North America. With further digitalisation, those visions will develop, and we do not yet know in which direction. So, enough room should be given within the EU's external digital policy towards Africa to allow African citizens, politicians and experts to develop their own normative approach in the digital sphere.

With relation to *Othering* - the second 'critical' concept already explained in the chapter on theoretical approaches – one could say that Diez's category of 'representing the other as inferior' might be the most suitable one since the norm 'inter-regional solidarity' is disproportionately highly detected in the documents. This norm refers to Africa supposedly needing support from Europe, as part of the example already mentioned above shows: "Made-in-Europe" solutions can help address the needs of developing countries [...]"'. Europe thus delivers solutions to help African countries who cannot create solutions themselves. Concerning Rumelili's table with the four different categories of relations between the EU and target states (see table 5), one will have to wait for an African reaction to determine the type of relationship between the EU and Africa concerning digital policy. Still, a first tendency might be detectable thanks to the interviews held as part of this research project (see the respective subchapters on the results of the analysis of interviews).

Overall, all twelve goals based on an EU interest mentioned in the analysed documents were mentioned in combination with an interest of Africa, which means that every interest-oriented goal was also norm-oriented (norm of inter-regional solidarity) simultaneously. Thus, those twelve identified European interests are combined with norms. There might be even more cases of complementarity of norms and interests, which have not been explicitly mentioned in the documents. Unfortunately, only those explicitly mentioned can be analysed; it can only be conjectured which of the mentioned norm-based goals might also be in the interest of Europe, but it cannot be detected through this analysis.

The table below shows which types of norms were combined with which type of interests and to which domains those belong.

Table 17: Combinations of norms and interests related to domains in the EU's projected image of its external digital policy towards Africa

	society	industry	development cooperation	security	sums
interregional solidarity &	2	7			9
interregional solidarity &	1		1		2
interregional solidarity &				1	1
Sum total					12

As one can see, it is always the norm of inter-regional solidarity, which is explicitly combined with an interest since it was always a European and an African interest that were mentioned as a combined goal. It was mainly the EU's economic gain, which was combined with an African interest. Concerning interests, economic gains are the focus within the EU's digital policy towards Africa in general, as we have already seen in the interest table above, and thus, it is not surprising that this type of interest also prevails when it comes to explicit complementary combinations between norm- and interest-based goals. The mentioned political gain related to the reduction of migration (doc. 1, p. 15) and the support of more resilient societies (doc 12, p. 1). The security gain related to secure digital connections (doc 7, p. 4). The economic gains are related to the economy's development, such as creating jobs, fostering business opportunities, extending businesses to new markets and the like. This complementary combination of norms and interests speaks well to Raffaella A. Del Sarto's (2016) argument that the EU often pursues interests and norms simultaneously, as explained in the chapter on theoretical concepts.

To understand the relevance of such explicit combinations of norms and interests compared to the total number of norms and interests, we shall look at the respective percentages. The following table shows the combinations of norm- and interest-based goals compared to the

totality of norm-based goals. The table after shows the percentage of those combinations compared to the number of interest-based goals. We can thus see that although only a few interests are referred to in the EU's documents, **all of them** are combined with norms. It can, therefore, be inferred that it is considered necessary for the EU to combine interests with norms in its rhetoric, but not the other way round, hinting at a strategic use of the EU's normative discourse. Combining each interest with a norm also aligns with this general normative rhetoric in the image the EU gives itself.

Table 18: Explicit combinations of norms with interests compared to the total number of norms in the EU's projected image of its external digital policy towards Africa

Total number of norm-based goals	151
Number of combinations of norm- and interest-based goals	12
Percentage of combinations of norm- and interest-based goals	8%

Table 19: Explicit combinations of interests with norms compared to the total number of interests in the EU's projected image of its external digital policy towards Africa

Total number of interest-based goals	12
Number of combinations of interest- and norm-based goals	12
Percentage of combinations of interests with norms	100%

The opposite type of relationship between norm and interest, a conflictual or contradicting relationship, cannot be detected in such documents since it is not very probable that in strategic documents where norm-based goals are listed, those are classified as incompatible with the EU's interests. That would mean there was a conflict of objectives, which would have to be discussed and resolved before publishing a strategy. Resolved means, in this case, that there is a decision to prioritise one goal over the other and to accept the trade-off.

Table 20: Domains and types of norm/interest in the EU's projected image of its external digital policy towards Africa

	Domain							
	Develop- ment coopera- tion	Trans- regional gover- nance	Industry	Public sector	Security	Society	Trade	Sums
Norm type								
Anti- discrimination	7	4	2	0	0	4	2	19
Consumer rights	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
Democracy	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
Inter-regional solidarity	23	3	26	0	8	3	0	63
Good governance	5	4	0	2	0	0	0	11
Liberty	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Peace	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respect for human rights	1	14	2	1	1	3	0	22
Rule of law	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Social solidarity	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	6
Sustainable development	4	15	2	1	0	0	0	22
Sum Norms	42	45	33	4	9	16	2	151
Interest type								
Economic gain	0	0	7	0	0	2	0	9
Political gain	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Security gain	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Sum Interests	1	0	7	0	1	3	0	12
Sums total	43	45	40	4	10	19	2	163

As seen from this table, most of the norms mentioned in the documents can be assigned to either transregional governance (45) or development cooperation (42). The first is not surprising since the EU is often called a regulatory power (cf. for instance Bradford 2020); neither is the second since the EU is Africa's primary donor. Thus, it seems consistent with the EU's past strategies that development cooperation is also a priority in the digital realm. Nonetheless, the latter does not suit the EU's assumed focus on having an equal partnership with Africa, as has often been pronounced recently.

Industry ranks third and thus can still be considered relevant concerning normative goals, while the fourth rank, society, is already less relevant in comparison, with only half the mentions. The remaining domains do not seem normatively relevant in the digital realm. The relevance of norms in the digital industrial sector is quite evident, as also Shoshana Zuboff (2019) argues concerning what she calls ‘surveillance capitalism’, within which there are certain asymmetries of power and knowledge: digital giants, such as Meta or Google, use information about their users to try to influence, shape and change the behaviour of those in the future to the advantage of said companies. The EU certainly tries to reduce those companies’ power by regulation, for instance, with the help of the ‘Digital Services Act’ and the ‘Digital Markets Act’, and seemingly also wants to spread this regulatory basis to other regions and countries, so not only European but also African citizens benefit from the protection of their data and fair competition. Interestingly, the domain of trade ranks last, which is surprising. One would assume that norms should have a particular relevance regarding digital trade.

Turning to the different types of norms, it is not surprising that the norm of inter-regional solidarity was often allocated to the categories of development cooperation or industry. Examples of both combinations can be found in the final declaration of the EU-AU Summit 2022 in Brussels (document 13). The goal of ‘boosting digital skills’ was classified as belonging to the development cooperation category, while ‘boosting digital entrepreneurship’ was allocated to the industry domain since the latter related to business. At the same time, the first is broader and does not only relate to business.

The norms of human rights and sustainable development rank next after inter-regional solidarity, so how those two combine with the different domains will also be commented on. Most goals categorised as based on the respect for human rights fall under the domain of transregional governance, which seems consistent with human rights being considered universal and thus, they should also be considered universal in the digital realm. The same is true for goals based on the norm of sustainable development. It makes sense that sustainable development can only be achieved by a combined worldwide effort – be it in connection with digital or other issues.

Scrutinising the interest-based goals, it can be seen that more than half of the interest-based goals were assigned to the industry domain. The industrial sector, particularly the digital industrial sector, is relevant in restoring control over digital or technological supply chains, particularly concerning semiconductors. With the main big digital companies being located in

the US and China, it also seems important to foster European start-ups as well as small to medium enterprises to enable them to scale up.

This is important not only when it comes to industry and the economy but also from a geopolitical as well as security perspective; this is vital, as we can see when considering Henry Farrell's and Abraham L. Newman's argument regarding weaponised interdependence (Farrell and Newman 2019a: 55-56), saying that states or also state-like entities such as the EU can use two forms of network power: the panopticon effect and the chokepoint effect. The first refers to obtaining information through access to or jurisdiction over hub nodes. The latter refers to limiting or penalising the use of hubs by other actors, i.e. other states or companies from other states. Since this is only possible when a state has jurisdiction over hub nodes, there must be hub nodes, such as many big digital companies within the state's jurisdiction. Thus, the state can make use of the data collected by those companies or use chokepoints created through export controls hindering those companies from delivering essential parts or products, such as semiconductors or machines necessary for the production of the latter, to other countries, as has been done by the US towards China in October 2022 (Vinocur 2023). For the EU, this is currently only possible to a certain extent. Having Africa as a partner and since developing Africa's as well as the EU's digital industry simultaneously and jointly seems to be the plan because Africa's interests and the EU's interests are often mentioned linked to each other, this might give both continents more leverage over other actors, be it US-American or Chinese companies or governments.

Surprisingly, geopolitical ambitions do not figure prominently in the analysed documents. However, it is clear that different actors are present and very active on the African continent, particularly China, as outlined in the chapter on the status quo of EU-Africa relations concerning digital issues. Those issues have probably yet to be discussed openly, and the interviews might shed some light on this aspect of geopolitical problems and interests. Said interviews are the focus of the next section of this chapter. As in this section, the process and the challenges will first be described, and after that, the results of the analysis will be presented and discussed.

The following table shows the reader at one sight the result of this first step of the analysis. Also, it serves as a guiding visualisation through the following steps of the empirical research carried out within this research project. The first step was to assess the image the EU gives itself concerning its external digital policy towards Africa (= projection), which can be categorised

as norm-oriented. The perception by EU-insiders as well as outsiders are the next two steps of this analysis.

In summary, the EU documents show an overwhelming majority of norms, focusing on the norm of inter-regional solidarity. This demonstrates the EU's goal to support the development of Africa's digital connectivity and its digital sector in general. The following chapter will present the EU's norm- or interest orientation as viewed by EU-insiders.

Table 21: The way to assess the EU's global digital actorness

		Projection versus Perception	
		<i>Image projected by the EU</i>	<i>Perception of EU-outsiders</i>
EU external digital policies towards	<i>Africa</i>	Norm-orientation	To be analysed in the next subchapters
	<i>United States</i>	To be analysed in the next empirical chapter	

5.3.2 Perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa by EU-insiders and outsiders

5.3.2.1 Process: conduction and analysis of interviews with EU-insiders and outsiders

Finding suitable interviewees was challenging since experts had to know the goals and strategies of the EU's digital policies towards Africa, which constitutes specific knowledge. Officers higher up in the hierarchy working on strategic issues and thus familiar with the actual goals behind policies are challenging to reach. They have very dense schedules, so one is sometimes referred to their team members. Persons further away from strategic concerns rather deal with particular projects and their implementation, and thus sometimes know the goals behind policies, sometimes they do not. Ultimately, it depends on who they meet with and whether the actual goals are discussed in the meetings with superiors. This already shows that finding interviewees with relevant knowledge is a challenging task. It is essential for the validity of the outcome, though, to find suitable interviewees with precisely the knowledge needed. Quality is prioritised over quantity; if an interviewee did not have the required expertise, they were not considered just for the sake of quantity.

Regarding African interviewees, further hurdles had to be overcome: infrastructure (telephone and internet) that is not working correctly and understaffed institutions (African Union, Smart Africa). Thus, it was unfortunately impossible to reach anybody from the African Union. Despite many unanswered calls and e-mails, as well as calls of such lousy quality that the person at the other end of the line could hardly be heard, let alone be understood, no expert of the AU could be interviewed. This problem was confirmed by researchers also working on digital issues in Africa and experiencing similar challenges. They advised me to contact Smart Africa⁵³ instead. This is what I did in the end, but even then, similar challenges lay ahead but could be surmounted after many e-mails, WhatsApp messages and cancelled interview dates. I also tried to reach people from think tanks and consultants working in Africa, which ultimately led to additional interviews for analysis.

In sum, eighteen expert interviews have been conducted: seven were exploratory interviews (first interview series) to deliver information for the creation and finetuning of the research design and the choice of documents for analysis; eleven were expert interviews used for the analysis (second interview series). Of those eleven interviews, six were conducted with EU-insiders, and five with EU-outsiders. The table below lists all expert interviews conducted during the second interview series. The process and the challenges during the interviews were similar for both types of interviews – those with EU-insiders and those with EU-outsiders. Thus, process and challenges are outlined and discussed for both angles – internal and external perception – at this point.

⁵³ Smart Africa is a commitment of African Heads of State and government to provide leadership in order to accelerate Africa's socio-economic development through Information and Communication Technologies. The founding document is the Smart Africa Manifesto, which was adopted by seven African heads (Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Mali, Gabon, Burkina Faso) of States in October 2013 and endorsed by all Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) in January 2014. Since then, the Smart Africa Alliance has further grown and now includes 30 African countries representing more than 700 million people. The Alliance - a partnership between the respective African countries (represented by the AU), the ITU (International Telecommunications Union), World Bank, AfDB (African Development Bank), ECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa), the GSMA (GSM Association (Groupe Special Mobile), ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) and the private sector - is aiming at implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Smart Africa Manifesto. Further interested countries and organisations can still join the Alliance, which is based on five pillars (policy, access, e-government, private sector/entrepreneurship and sustainable development) as well as four enablers (innovation, communications and advocacy, capacity building and resource mobilisation) in order to implement Smart Africa. The main goals of the Smart Africa Manifesto are economic growth and job creation.

Table 22: List of exploratory interviews, interview series 1

Interview	Interviewee	Date	EU-insider/outsider	Institution
1/1	1	14.2.2022	EU - insider	EU Commission, INTPA ⁵⁴
1/2	2	14.2.2022	EU - insider	EEAS
1/3	3	24.2.2022	EU - outsider	Think Tank
1/4	4	28.2.2022	EU - insider	EEAS
1/5	5	3.3.2022	EU - insider	EU Commission, INTPA
1/6	6	17.3.2022	EU - insider	EEAS
1/7	6	13.6.2022	EU - insider	EEAS

Table 23: List of expert interviews, interview series 2

Interview	Interviewee	Date	EU-insider/outsider	Institution
2/1	2	10.11.2022	EU - insider	EEAS
2/2	7	11.11.2022	EU - outsider	Think tank
2/3	8	17.11.2022	EU - insider	EU Commission, INTPA
2/4	9	18.11.2022	EU - outsider	Consultant
2/5	10	18.11.2022	EU - insider	EEAS
2/6	11	21.11.2022	EU - insider	national development agency of European MS
2/7	12	23.11.2022	EU - insider	DG Connect
2/8	13	11.12.2022	EU - insider	EEAS
2/9	14	13.12.2022	EU - outsider	Smart Africa
2/10	15	15.1.2023	EU - outsider	Think Tank
2/11	16	25.1.2023	EU - outsider	Smart Africa

The expert interviews were semi-structured, so questions were prepared beforehand but not necessarily asked in the same order. Questions for more details—if necessary and unexpectedly exciting information was given—were added spontaneously. Further, questions were added that served as plausibility checks concerning exciting pieces of information given in interviews before to control whether other interviewees agreed and confirmed the provided information or disagreed. As an additional step, such pieces of information were also checked by researching relevant sources, such as media reports, to complete the triangulation process.

⁵⁴ DG INTPA = Directorate General for International Partnerships

After all interviews had been conducted, the interviews were coded based on norms and interests, including subcategories. Like this, interruptions between the coding of different interviews were avoided, and continuous work on the coding was secured to improve intra-coder reliability. After the first round of coding, categorisations within the interviews were compared with the coding of the documents. After that, all coding was again controlled another time from beginning to end several times. All those mentioned precautions and steps were made to ensure the highest intra-coder reliability possible in the research setting at hand.

5.3.2.2 Mastered Challenges: interviews with EU-insiders and outsiders

One of the biggest challenges when conducting the interviews was that the interviewees were experts, sometimes already having their own categorisations in their minds, which they talked about and explained. Nonetheless, the objective of the interviews was not to deliver categorisations on an abstract level, which is the researcher's responsibility and was done through the analysis after the interviews. What was needed was the naming of goals, which can be categorised according to this research project's research design and categories. Thus, I sometimes had to get interviewees back from an abstract level of their own 'theorising' to a more concrete one, just telling me goals.

On the other hand, interviewees sometimes became very specific and described concrete measures rather than goals. In that case, I had to find strategies and methods to get them back to a more abstract level so they would tell me what I actually needed to carry out the analysis, namely the EU's goals in its external digital policy towards Africa.

Another possible answer when the question was about goals was that different thematic issues were listed without mentioning specific goals. Such an issue often cannot be ascribed to a norm or an interest; the formulation as a goal is essential to make a categorisation possible. I prioritised the quality of the data over quantity so that only those utterances that could be analysed and allocated to a category were used. I thus only analysed goals and not measures mentioned since the latter could falsify the results due to the difficulty of categorising them as norm- or interest-based, as outlined in detail in the chapter on research design. Even if the interviewees categorised concrete measures themselves as norm- or interest-based, this was not taken into account for the analysis to keep the quality and accuracy of the analysis high, even if that meant having fewer items for the study, which relates to the argument of prioritising quality over quantity.

The mentioned challenges also have their advantages, though, since these led to the mentions of various illustrations and explanations, giving the researcher essential contextual knowledge and concrete examples of different categories. Further, the interviewees' explanations concerning the EU's goals within its external digital policy towards Africa could be used to discuss the analysis results more deeply. Further, plausibility checks of background information and explanations given by interviewees could be carried out. Such plausibility checks could not only be done based on remarks and explanations the interviewees gave proactively but those plausibility checks were also done by explicitly mentioning what was said in past interviews and then asking for a reaction. Sometimes, interviewees confirmed what was said in earlier interviews, and sometimes, they disagreed. These specific cases will be discussed later in this chapter.

Another critical issue are leading questions, which I aimed to avoid; nonetheless, some 'leading' to a certain extent can happen in an interview situation. Sometimes, I had to ask questions very explicitly to get answers I could use for my analysis. I scrutinised the transcription of the interviews for such instances. Then, I decided if those answers should be included in the study, depending on whether the questions could already be considered leading questions or only questions for more details. If questions already became leading questions, even if only very slightly, I did not include the collected data in my analysis. As an illustrating example, I want to mention two interviewees (2/5, 2/10) who explicitly and initiatively mentioned European companies when talking about the EU's external digital policy towards Africa in general but presented this linked to the goal of developing the African digital industry. They did not explicitly refer to the positive effects for European companies and the economy but focused on the advantages for the African companies and economy only. As an interviewer, I reacted by saying that this sounds as if norms and interests complement each other perfectly since also European companies would profit, not only African ones. This is not what the interviewees brought up themselves, who only talked about normative goals. Nonetheless, the interviewees did agree in the end, which was still not categorised and counted as a 'complementary' combination of norms and interests since too many questions were needed until this answer was finally given.

If the same goal was mentioned several times, each mention was counted since this also shows how the EU is perceived and that this specific goal is considered particularly important. If a goal that had been mentioned at an earlier point of the interview was discussed again later due to a particular question of the interviewer – for instance, my question concerning the

complementarity of different goals – this re-mentioning of a goal was not counted, though, since the initiative came from the interviewer by asking a question which necessarily refers back to goals that were discussed before. If new goals were mentioned as an answer to this or other questions, those were coded and counted.

What has to be clarified, though being a rather obvious limitation true for any interview, is that some interviewees talked more and took more initiative in telling various pieces of background information and explanations, some less. Thus, some interviewees gave much more contextual information and hence mentioned fewer actual goals; others stuck to goals, so there were more elements for the analysis. Some gave many smaller goals others only a few main goals. As the interviewer, I always tried to balance out the interviewees' various tendencies, which was often effective. Still, at other times, people did not react in ways that would have been helpful for analysis. Nonetheless, even if fewer goals were mentioned, the background information helped me understand the workings behind the scenes and thus enriched this thesis.

Some of the EU outsiders, in particular those of Smart Africa, were worried when asked about the EU's goals concerning its external digital policy towards Africa in that they felt they did not know the EU's goals but what was needed for this study, was not actual knowledge of the EU's goals, but their perception on what the EU's goals are. They were not supposed to know what is written in EU documents but to answer according to what they see and perceive in their work as partners of the EU. The EU's official goals were analysed with the help of the official documents and the perspective of EU-insiders was covered through the interviews with EU-officials. The interviews with EU-outsiders aimed to see how the EU is perceived regarding its goals in relation to its external digital policies towards Africa, not what the EU actually planned to achieve.

5.3.2.3 Results of analysis and discussion – internal perception: interviews with EU insiders

Table 24: Norms versus interests – internal perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

	Numbers	Percentages
Norm-based goals	38	78 %
Interest-based goals	11	22 %
Total number of goals mentioned	49	

First, a general overview of the goals' norm- and interest orientation should be gained, as in the case of the projected image in the previous chapter. This shall shed light on in how far EU-insiders follow the summoned conversion toward an interest-oriented language of power (Borrell 2020). Just like in the case of the image the EU tries to project with its strategies and publicly available documents, also the perception by its own staff or staff within EU member states is predominantly norm-oriented, as can be seen in the table above. No relevant difference between staff of the EU institutions in Brussels and EU-staff in other locations, such as Switzerland or Africa, and staff of member states could be encountered: all see and present the EU's digital policy towards Africa as predominantly norm-based. This contradicts one of the main arguments of realists: norms are only second-order concerns and corroborates Ian Manners' argument of the EU as a normative power, or at least as a normative actor since we only look at the EU's (communicated and perceived) motivation rather than its capacity to diffuse norms.

The conclusions one can draw from the similarity of results of analysis of documents and those of interviews with EU-insiders are two-fold: on the one hand, it could be that EU officials had not encountered any interest-based goals in their daily working lives that were actually pursued but were not mentioned in strategic documents. Goals, as pursued in reality, correspond precisely to what is written in strategic documents. Thus, the norm orientation of the strategic documents would also be reflected in the interviews with EU-insiders.

On the other hand, it could also be that EU-staff and EU-member states' staff deliberately aimed to communicate what is written in strategic documents rather than what they encountered in their daily working lives, seeing the interviews as a means of external communication. Since interviewees were given anonymity and were encouraged not to stick to official documents but rather give information based on what they experience in their daily work, the expectation was to get different information and data than the one gathered through the analysis of documents. This was achieved since it can be seen that although there is still a predominance of norms, it is less pronounced than in the study of documents. As explained in the chapter on research design, the interviews with EU-insiders deepened the insight into the EU's norm- and interest orientation regarding its digital policy towards Africa. The results will not be used to assess the EU's ideal types as a global digital actor, though (see chapter on research design for explanations).

Table 25: Norm categories⁵⁵ in the internal perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

Types of norms	Numbers	Percentages
peace	0	0 %
liberty	0	0 %
democracy	1	3 %
rule of law	0	0 %
respect for human rights	12	32 %
social solidarity	4	11 %
anti-discrimination	0	0 %
sustainable development	2	5 %
good governance	0	0 %
inter-regional solidarity	19	50 %
consumer rights	0	0 %
Sum total	38	

Note: The percentages are rounded figures; thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100.

Concerning the mentioned types of norms with relation to the EU's goals in its external digital policy towards Africa, one can see that half of the goals are concerned with the African continent's development in the digital sphere (inter-regional solidarity), with interviewees often referring to the developing the connectivity, such as interviewee 2/5, and a third with respect for human rights, with the openness of the internet being referred to very frequently. Only three more types of norms were mentioned, namely social solidarity, sustainable development and democracy, in the order given. Inter-regional solidarity being in the lead is what we have already seen in the case of the projected image. Still, fewer categories were mentioned by staff compared to a higher diversity of goals introduced in documents. So, it is again a norm category introduced during the analysis within this research project, which was the most prominent one, rather than a norm introduced by Ian Manners; the other norms which could be categorised had already been detected and named as EU norms by Ian Manners (2002: 242-43). Concerning Manners' distinction between core and minor norms, there is only one core norm, human rights, which can also be said to be a core norm in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, the other original core norms being not relevant (peace, liberty, the rule of law) or very minor (democracy).

⁵⁵ For details concerning the different categories of norms (based on norms identified by Ian Manners in his research on Normative Power Europe and further developed within this research project) see the chapter on operationalisation. The list of norms follows Ian Manners' list of core norms (from peace to respect for human rights) and then going on with what he called minor norms (from social solidarity till good governance) and in the end norms added during the process of analysis: interregional solidarity and consumer rights.

Table 26: Interest categories in the internal perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

Types of interests	Numbers	Percentages
political gains	2	18 %
economic gains	7	64 %
security gains	2	18 %
sum total	11	

The vast majority of interest-based goals were related to economic gains, so when it comes to interests, there is a clear focus on the EU as a market and a global economic player looking for opportunities in Africa. Political and security gains were mentioned equally, so the EU has interests in those realms, nonetheless to a lesser degree than in the economic sphere.

Table 27: Domains of the EU's digital external policy toward Africa – internal perception

Domains	Numbers	Percentages
transregional governance	11	22 %
industry	16	33 %
trade	0	0 %
security	9	18 %
development cooperation	4	8 %
society	8	16 %
public sector	1	2 %
sum total	49	

Note: The percentages are rounded figures; thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100.

Assigning goals to the different domains is significant for analysing the interviews. Since interviewees were granted anonymity, they cannot be referred to the exact subunits they work for. Thus, their topical competence is not evident, and the topical reference has to be covered through an analysis concerning the different domains of external digital policy.

As mentioned in the document analysis chapter, the category of development cooperation is also used when there is not enough specific information for a categorisation under the domain of security or industry. One specific example is the improvement of digital connectivity as a goal that was mentioned by interviewee 1, with a lot of details on where there are different connectivity projects but without a specific goal towards one particular domain, such as fostering digital industry or making it possible for citizens to use offers of e-health. Thus, the improvement of digital connectivity was categorised under development cooperation.

Although development cooperation was also used to categorise goals lacking specific information, as indicated above, other domains were mentioned more often, with the digital industry being in the clear lead, corresponding to the dominance of economic gains within interests (rather than security or political gains) and the dominance of the domain of development cooperation within norms. Not only are economic gains closely linked to the digital industry, but also the norm of inter-regional solidarity is since the general digital development or digitalisation of a country is related to the development of its digital industry.

Table 28: Combination of norms and interests related to domains in the internal perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

	society	industry	development cooperation	security	sums
inter-regional solidarity & economic gain		4			4
inter-regional solidarity & political gain		0.5	0.5		1
inter-regional solidarity & security gain				2	2
sum total		4,5	0,5	2	7

A combination of norm- and interest-based goals was identified in seven cases, with the majority being the combination of the norm of inter-regional solidarity and economic gains, so the most frequently mentioned norm and the most commonly mentioned interest were also the ones that seem to be the most compatible. But also security gains can be combined with inter-regional solidarity, as noted by interviewee 2/1, saying that the strengthened defence against cyber-attacks was jointly developed with Africa, thus having a security gain for the EU as well as for Africa as a goal, the second corresponding thus to the norm of inter-regional solidarity from the EU's perspective. Hence, one can also assume that there might be even more complementarities since supposedly not all cases of combinations of norms and interests could have been identified in this analysis; since the research design focuses on the distinction of norms and interests, only explicit combinations could be analysed. Future studies with research designs focused on such combinations might deliver further knowledge in this regard.

Table 29: Relations between domains and types of norms/interests in the internal perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

	Domain							
	Develop- ment coopera- tion	Trans- regional gover- nance	Industry	Public sector	Security	Society	Trade	Sums
Norm type								
Anti-discrimination	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Consumer rights	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Democracy	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Inter-regional solidarity	3	2	8	0	6	0	0	19
Good governance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Liberty	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Peace	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respect for human rights	0	8	0	0	1	3	0	12
Rule of law	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social solidarity	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
Sustainable development	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Sum Norms	3	10	9	1	7	8	0	38
Interest type								
Economic gain	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	7
Political gain	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Security gain	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Sum Interests	1	1	7	0	2	0	0	11
Sums total	4	11	16	1	9	8	0	49

The results concerning the combination of norm- and interest types with the various domains show us that it is the norm of inter-regional solidarity and digital industry that combine particularly often, as do economic gain and digital industry. So, the domain of the digital industry prevails in the normative and interest-oriented external digital policy of the EU. The combination of transregional governance and respect for human rights reflects the EU's focus on a human-centred type of digitalisation, which it wants to spread into other countries and regions, in this case, into African countries.

In a nutshell, EU-insiders view the EU's external digital policy towards Africa as norm-oriented (but less pronounced than in the EU's projected image), focusing on inter-regional solidarity and human rights. The following chapter concerned with the view of EU-outsiders shows a different picture.

5.3.2.4 Results of analysis and discussion – external perception: interviews with EU-outsiders

Table 30: Norms versus Interests in the external perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

	Numbers	Percentages
Norm-based goals	6	23 %
Interest-based goals	20	77 %
Total number of goals mentioned	26	

As can be seen in the table above, the majority of the goals indicated in the interviews with EU-outsiders, i.e. with persons working for Smart Africa or for think tanks, are interest-based, in contrast to the two perspectives before – the image the EU gives itself as well as the perception of EU-insiders, which were both dominated by norms and values rather than interests. The image the EU gives itself in strategic and other publicly available documents is thus not reflected in what EU-outsiders perceive. Interestingly, although there is no tendency towards a more robust and interest-oriented language, EU-outsiders still perceive it as such.

Table 31: Norm categories in the external perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

Types of norms	Numbers	Percentages
peace	0	0 %
liberty	0	0 %
democracy	0	0 %
rule of law	0	0 %
respect for human rights	1	17 %
social solidarity	0	0 %
anti-discrimination	0	0 %
sustainable development	0	0 %
good governance	0	0 %
inter-regional solidarity	5	83 %
consumer rights	0	0 %
sum total	6	

Only two categories were mentioned regarding norm-based goals of the EU in its digital policy towards the African continent: inter-regional solidarity – which accounts for the majority of the mentions – and human rights, counting for less than a fifth. Thus, the focus on the norm of inter-regional solidarity is clear and again an interesting empirical result, and the small number of goals directed at human rights relates to the EU’s commitment to a human-centred internet and digitalisation in general. Interestingly, sustainable development was not mentioned as the norm on which the EU bases its goals concerning digitalisation. However, this could have been conjectured due to the connection of the green and digital transitions as twin transitions. In the internal perception before, the norm of sustainable development was present, for instance, with regard to the sustainability of data centres. Although the apparent dominance of interests does not correspond to the results of the analysis of the two other perspectives (image and EU-insiders), the supremacy of the norm of inter-regional solidarity concerning the types of norms is a characteristic shared by all three perspectives. Concerning Manners’ distinction between core and minor norms, we see again that the only one of the original core norms being relevant in this context is respect for human rights, which was only mentioned once by interviewee 2/11 referring to the protection of African citizens’ rights in the digital as one of the EU’s goals. According to the analysis results, none of the other original core norms seem relevant in the context of the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa.

Table 32: Interest categories in the external perception of the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa

Types of interests	Numbers	Percentages
political gains	5	25 %
economic gains	12	60 %
security gains	1	5 %
uncategorised	2	10%
sum total	20	

Regarding the different types of interests mentioned by EU-outsiders concerning the EU’s goals in its digital policy towards Africa, the economic gains are the ones in the lead. They are the EU’s priority from the view of those interviewees. Such goals are based on economic gains, such as finding new African business partners by supporting cross-border data flows. Only a fifth of the interest-based goals are related to (geo)political gains, such as reducing the Russian and Chinese influence on the African continent by trying to introduce a GDPR like approach to data governance in Africa (interviewee 2/4).

Only once were security gains mentioned, referring to the EU aiming at stability in its African neighbourhood through digital policy (interviewee 2/11). Two goals that were clearly interest-based could not be allocated to one of the given categories but related to different types of gains at the same time; thus, those were only categorised as interests without further subcategorisation. As seen in the following table, those goals could also not be allocated to specific domains.

Table 33: Domains of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa - external perception

Domains	Numbers	Percentages
transregional governance	2	8 %
industry	4	15 %
trade	10	38 %
security	1	4 %
development cooperation	7	27 %
society	0	0 %
public sector	0	0 %
uncategorised	2	8 %
sum total	26	

The trade domain is in the lead, followed by development cooperation, thus being the two domains on which the EU's digital policy towards Africa is predominantly focused. The EU is well-known as a trading power, and in this domain, it is the EU and not the member states that have the competence for trade policy.

Table 34: Combinations of norms and interests related to domains in the external perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

	trade	industry	development cooperation	transregional governance	sums
inter-regional solidarity & economic gain	1	1	1		3
inter-regional solidarity & political gain				1	1
inter-regional solidarity & security gain					0
sum total	1	1	1	1	4

When it comes to the combination of norms and interest, i.e. that an interest and a norm are at the basis of the very same goal, we can see that it is again always the norm of inter-regional solidarity that combines well with two types of interests: economic as well as political gains. In

this context, it is essential to consider that the norm of inter-regional solidarity is the norm that was the most frequently mentioned concerning the EU's goals regarding its external digital policy towards Africa; thus, there are more possibilities of combination with interests for this type of norm than for other norms. Concerning interests, security gains were hardly mentioned at all, as we have seen before, and although it was particularly economic gains that were at the forefront of interests at the basis of the EU's goals, political gains, which were far less frequently mentioned, are still present when it comes to combinations with norms. Examples of such combinations mentioned were the creation of jobs in the digital realm in Europe (= interest) as well as in Africa (= norm) or the better protection of the data of African citizens (= norm) by using GDPR as a model and decreasing Russian and Chinese influence in Africa (= interest) with their different approaches to data protection. The first is a combination of inter-regional solidarity with economic gain, and the latter is a combination of inter-regional solidarity with political gain.

Table 35: Relations between domains and types of norms/interests in the external perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

	Domain								
	Develop- ment coopera- tion	Trans- regional gover- nance	Industry	Public sector	Security	Society	Trade	Uncate- gorised	Sums
Norm type									
Anti-discrimination	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Consumer rights	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Democracy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Inter-regional solidarity	1	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	5
Good governance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Liberty	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Peace	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respect for human rights	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Rule of law	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social solidarity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sustainable development	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sum Norms	1	1	2	0	1	0	1	0	6
Interest type									
Economic gain	4	0	1	0	0	0	7	0	12
Political gain	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	5
Security gain	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Uncategorised gain	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Sum Interests	6	1	2	0	0	0	9	2	20
Sums total	7	2	4	0	1	0	10	2	26

This table shows how often a particular norm or interest is mentioned in a specific domain. Thus, it is identified if a particular norm or interest is dominant in a specific domain or irrelevant within a domain. One combination of types of interests or norms and domains particularly stands out: economic gains within the trade domain. This is the most frequent combination, with eight instances. An interesting explanation of how the EU uses its external digital policy towards Africa to improve its trade with Africa was given by interviewee 2/9: the EU tries to get relevant data on Africa with the help of digital means and then uses this knowledge to improve its trade strategies in Africa. The combination of the domain of development cooperation with economic gains also deserves mentioning, hinting that working with African states in the development realm might serve the EU's economic interests and is not

automatically based on the norm of inter-regional solidarity. Interviewee 2/4 stated the EU's goal of providing work for its own citizens through its external digital policy towards Africa. This also proves the importance of having the category of development cooperation as a domain for the analysis since it does not always combine with the norm of inter-regional solidarity, which seems intuitive but is not the case.

The aforementioned combination of trade and economic gains seems more intuitive than the one between economic gain and development cooperation since the domain of development cooperation is intuitively linked with the norm of inter-regional solidarity rather than with an economic gain. This linking of economic gains with development cooperation also corresponds to what is written in general strategic documents of the EU without a focus on digital issues, such as the Global Strategy of 2016⁵⁶, where the concept of principled pragmatism was introduced; the term 'principled' refers to norms and values while the term 'pragmatism' refers to interests thus uniting both within the approach the EU should have as a global actor. The results of the analysis of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa reflect this approach.

In sum, EU-outsiders have an interest-based perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, focusing on its economic interests. The results of the analysis carried out so far are outlined in the table below. There are two dimensions: the addressee of the EU's external digital policy – in this project Africa and the US – and the perspective – projection (i.e. the image the EU gives itself in official documents) and perception of EU-outsiders (views expressed in interviews with EU-outsiders).

⁵⁶ This document was not included in the analysis since only documents with a clear reference to digital issues and EU-Africa relations were analysed. The Global Strategy was a general document concerning the EU's external and global policies with no focus on one particular domain or one particular geographic area. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see the coherence between more generic documents and the analysis of specific domains such as the external digital policy towards Africa.

Table 36: The way to assess the EU's global digital actorness

		Projection versus Perception	
		Image projected by the EU	Perception of EU-outsiders
EU external digital policies towards	Africa	Norm-orientation	Interest-orientation
	United States	To be analysed in the next empirical chapter	

The EU's type of global digital actor towards Africa will be determined as the last step of this empirical analysis. As indicated in the chapter outlining the research design, the results will be discussed.

5.3.3 Image versus perception: the EU as an incoherent realist actor in its external digital policy towards Africa

Table 37: The EU's external digital policy towards Africa: ideal types and result

		Image projected by the U	
		Norm-oriented	Interest-oriented
Perception of EU by outsiders	Norm-oriented	coherent normative actor presentation as normative actor, perception as normative actor	incoherent normative actor presentation as realist actor, perception as normative actor
	Interest-oriented	incoherent realist actor presentation as normative actor, perception as realist actor	coherent realist actor presentation as realist actor, perception as realist actor

According to the analysis of the collected empirical data in EU-documents and expert interviews with EU-outsiders concerning the EU's goals in its external digital policy towards Africa, the EU can be categorised as an *incoherent realist actor*. The image the EU gives itself concerning its external digital policy towards Africa is norm-based, with predominantly, actually almost exclusively, norms being mentioned in the publicly available documents that have been analysed. Interests clearly dominated the results of the analysis of the interviews with

EU-outsiders. This combination of a norm-orientation in the projected image and an interest-orientation in the perception of EU-outsiders corresponds to the ideal type of an *incoherent realist actor*. It is unexpected since the EU's external communication and intention to present itself as a normative actor would instead make one expect that the EU is also perceived as such a normative actor, which is not the case on the contrary.

The following table (see table 38 below) offers an overview of the results in relation to all three perspectives. This includes the perspective of EU-insiders, which is not included in the assessment of the EU's type of global digital actor, since this perspective can neither be considered self-representation nor perception from the outside. It shows a norm-focus of the EU's projected image and of the internal perception. The norm focus of the perspective 'internal perception' (i.e. the perception of EU-insiders) is less pronounced than the norm-focus of the perspective 'projected image', i.e. the image the EU gives itself in official documents. The external perception shows a focus on interests. Comparing the two perspectives of 'internal perception' and 'external perception', the results almost offer a mirror image: 78 % of norm-based versus 22 % of interest-based goals in the perspective 'internal perception' and 23 % of norm-based versus 77 % of interest-based goals in the perspective 'external perception'.

Table 38: EU's external digital policy towards Africa: norms versus interests – comparison of different perspectives

	Projected Image	Internal Perception	External Perception
Norm-based goals	93%	78%	23%
Interest-based goals	7%	22%	77%

The prevailing norm in all perspectives is inter-regional solidarity, and the prevailing type of interest is economic interest. Democracy promotion, which Raffaella A. Del Sarto detected as the EU's focus in its relations with its periphery, (2016) is not the EU's focus when it comes to its external digital policy towards Africa, based on the analysis of the documents as well as the interviews.

Complementary combinations of norms and interests occur, particularly regarding the norm of inter-regional solidarity and economic gain within the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. Prevailing domains differ according to the different perspectives (see table 39 below), which suggests that a different perspective entails a distinct focus on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. The EU's focus in its official documents is on global governance, i.e. on

global rules; EU officials focus on the digital industry; EU-outsiders concentrate on trade, which in particular for African officials is not surprising since digital trade is the domain that is of high relevance when working with the EU, for instance regarding trade agreements.

Table 39: Prevailing domains in different perspectives of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

Perspective	Projected Image	Internal Perception	External Perception
Domain	transregional governance	industry	trade

Concerning the complementary combination of norm- and interest-based goals, it was mainly the norm of inter-regional solidarity that combined well with different types of interests in all three perspectives. This shows that the explicit combination of norms- and interest-based goals in the EU documents is also reflected on the receiving end, in the perspective of EU-outsiders. No conflicting norm- and interest-based goals could, i.e. no goals that exclude each other were mentioned, which would have meant the policymaker would have to choose which one to prioritise.

5.3.4 Additional themes and issues with relevance to norms and interests in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

After establishing what type of actor the EU is concerning its external digital policy towards Africa, which was the aim of the first part of this research project's analysis, some further aspects linked to norms and interests as motivators in said policy shall be outlined. Said aspects surfaced in several interviews in remarks and explanations, proving their relevance. Those aspects correspond to what Dubois and Gadde (2002: 555) call "related issues", which are part of an abductive research design and could be further explored with suitable methods in the future (see 4.1.1. on the abductive approach in the chapter on Research Design). Those aspects were subsumed into themes on a more abstract level to relate them to the results of the analysis and each other, using the methods of holistic and structural coding (Saldaña 2009: 66-70, 118-20).

The steps of analysis are as follows: the identification of relevant remarks and explanations within the interviews, their allocation to said broader themes, and the analytical link to norms and interests as well as to other related theoretical concepts (see chapter on theoretical approaches). Those analytical steps will help put the core analysis results (see preceding chapters) in a broader context and identify research desiderata for future analyses.

The following issues will be discussed in this chapter:

- Role of geopolitics regarding Chinese and US presence in Africa
- The interplay of norms and interests concerning Chinese and US presence in Africa: complementary combinations of and contradiction between norms and interests
- Normative EU versus interest-oriented member states
- Different manifestations of one type of interest
- European (Western) norms versus African norms
- Western approach to (digital) development
- The Global Gateway as a first step towards a more strategic approach of the EU towards Africa
- Challenges of the AU and consequences for the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

5.3.4.1 Political gains: the role of geopolitics – China and the United States in Africa

Since not only the EU but also China and the US are present in the digital realm in Africa, different digital development models are present and not necessarily compatible. According to Daniel Spoiala and Kerstin Fritzsche (2021), the three models of digital development that can be found in Africa are the following: the market-centred and liberal model of the US with a focus on self-regulation; the Chinese state-centred model and the European third way, the human-centred approach, which is a combination of market economy model with a normative orientation. All three actors promote their respective models, and as development cooperation does not happen in a vacuum but in a broader geopolitical context: the respective actor's activities are often not neutral, but the donor's interests are also at play.

As already outlined, norms and interests are at play from the European side according to the results of the empirical analysis of this research project, which is in line with the findings of Spoiala and Fritzsche, evaluating the EU's approach as a mixture of interest orientation on the one and a normative human-centred approach on the other hand. While the general evaluation of norm- and interest-based goals and their complementary combination showed that it is in particular economic gains that motivate the EU concerning its external digital policy towards Africa, it appears that concerning China's and also the US presence on the African continent, both economic and political, in particular geopolitical, interests are relevant⁵⁷. The presence of China and the US in Africa was referred to on several occasions in the interviews carried out in

⁵⁷ This geopolitical aspect has already been mentioned in chapter 5.2.5 on the presence of other foreign powers on the African continent.

the framework of this research project. This is also in line with the argument that the new development policy instrument NDICI – Global Europe (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe is based on European interests due to a geopolitical context (Di Ciommo 2023)⁵⁸. This was also referred to in the chapter on document analysis since two of the Multiannual Indicative Programmes, which belong to the NDICI, have been analysed.

5.3.4.1.1 Differences between the EU, the US and China as relevant actors in Africa's digital sphere

5.3.4.1.1.1 Difference in digital activities in Africa

One interviewee (2/11) outlined in how far African citizens associate different powers that are active in the digital realm on the African continent with different digital activities: China is seen as the supplier of digital hardware, the US as the supplier of software and the EU as the supplier of regulation. Based on this information, China and the US are associated with being active in the private sector, while the EU is associated with the public sector and regulations. Such regulations or laws can be based on values but do not have to be; they can also be based on interests, so those associations with regulation do not necessarily hint at the EU being perceived as a normative power because it is motivated by values. Still, they hint at the fact that the EU is not present or at least not visible in the digital private sector in Africa.

5.3.4.1.1.2 The EU's human-centric approach

The EU's 'human-centric approach' was mentioned in five out of eleven interviews (2/2, 2/3, 2/6, 2/7, 2/8), so almost half of the interviews⁵⁹; it can thus be considered a relevant aspect concerning the EU's approach to digital policy and has an apparent normative appeal. Interviewee 2/7 outlined the differences between the EU's and the US' as well as the Chinese approach, considering this human-centeredness as one substantial difference between the EU

⁵⁸ See also chapter on the document analysis, where two of the Multiannual Indicative Programmes, which belong to the NDICI, have been analysed.

⁵⁹ Only the actual mention of the term human centric approach was counted, not a human-rights based approach or human rights in general.

and the two other powers in the digital realm. The interviewee pointed out, though, that the US and the EU did agree on the need for democratic principles, also in the digital sphere, in contrast to China. In analytic terms, democracy is a shared norm of the US and the EU, which could be seen as a potential common ground for joint projects in Africa. At the same time, finding common ground with China appears to be more challenging due to a lack of norm-convergence. The interviewee (2/7) also referred to the US laissez-faire approach standing in stark contrast to the EU's regulatory approach. Consequently, the US would leave a different normative mark on digital governance in Africa if they had more influence on the African continent than the EU in the future.

5.3.4.1.1.3 Internet governance: the EU and the US against China

Concerning the different approaches to digitalisation by the EU and China, one should also mention the difference in their approaches to internet governance. EU-insiders mentioned this several times in the interviews (2/3, 2/6). In this context, China has always been mentioned together with Russia, both trying to move away from the multi-stakeholder model regarding internet governance⁶⁰ into the direction of a state-centric model, which some African states support. The problem in this context lies within the multistakeholder model, according to interviewee 2/3, who said that African representatives did not have much of a say. Thus, according to this interviewee, a solution has to be found to allow them to contribute more within this model. This might ultimately lead to more support of the multistakeholder model by African states.

Said changes towards a more centralised governance model of the internet have been tried to be achieved through the ITU (International Telecommunication Union), where China tried to place its people in important working groups and also had the support of the former Secretary General of the ITU, Houlin Zhao, a Chinese citizen⁶¹. The AI (artificial intelligence) standardisation working group was, for instance, steered by Huawei, according to interviewee 2/6, who also pointed out the high relevance of the ITU regarding spectrum allocation as well as satellite positioning. In more abstract terms, it is geopolitically pertinent for countries to have

⁶⁰ Internet governance is the way of organizing and managing the internet including the rules all users have to adhere to. The current Internet governance model is a multi-stakeholder model, giving governments, private companies and also civil society a say.

⁶¹ The new Secretary General is Doreen Bogdan-Martin, a US citizen, as has already been outlined in the previous chapter.

their own nationals fighting for national interests and norms in leading positions in this multilateral institution.

The EU and the US largely agree on internet governance, which the US initiative of the “Declaration of the Future of the Internet” is proof of. The EU fully supports this initiative, while only four African countries signed this declaration: Niger, Cap Verde, Kenya and Senegal. According to interviewee 2/1, the EU endorsed this declaration and helped the US find as many signatories as possible. So, the norm of an open internet⁶² is a value the US and the EU stand for, which both actors would also like to prevail on the African continent. This is not only because the EU and the US are ‘normative powers’ in this instance, but there is a solid geopolitical element since this is a way of countering Chinese and Russian influence on the African continent, including in the digital sphere. What the EU has already done and will probably do in the future, since there are still only four African signatories in April 2023, is to discuss this issue with African officials further and to inform them about the importance of Internet standards and an open Internet also for African states and citizens, as stated by interviewee 2/1. So, this is where the EU and the US act in concert, fighting for an open internet, which can be considered a human right in our digital age and thus can be related to the norm of ‘respect of human rights’.

5.3.4.1.1.4 European, Chinese and US-American companies in Africa’s digital sector

Although US-American platforms are active on the African continent, Chinese companies dominate the private sector if one looks at the African continent as a whole. Interviewee 2/3 argued that this was due to neglect from Europeans and the US, who had left the space to China, which the EU (supposedly also the US) now wanted to change (interview 2/3) (see also for instance Hooijmaaijers 2018: 443-44).

In particular, Chinese but also US-American companies are profiting from money from the EU’s programme ‘Digital for Development’ (D4D), which means that it is European taxpayers’ money that foreign companies benefit from, according to interviewee 2/6⁶³. Foreign companies

⁶² In this context, the term open internet refers to the fact that the internet should not be fragmented into different ‘national’ internets, such as a Chinese or Russian internet behind great ‘firewall’. Citizens of different nations should have access to what is published by citizens of other nations than their own.

⁶³ From 2020-2023 a budget of 8 mio Euros was spent on the EU on the D4D programme supporting project in ten African countries. The official communication of the EU only mention European firms and stakeholders which

do not only profit from EU aid in the digital realm, but this is a more general phenomenon (Gomart et al. 2023: 62) that seems to continue in the younger digital sector. This is not true the other way round, i.e. there are no Chinese programmes EU firms would profit from, based on information given by the interviewee just quoted before (2/6). Interviewee 2/7 delivered the reason, saying this was partly due to strict procurement rules, which should be scrutinised and maybe even changed. This aligns with interviewee 2/6 suggesting that European companies and business associations should also be included in those digital development initiatives of the EU, not only foreign companies.

Interviewee 2/3 introduced the issue of so-called trusted vendors: according to the EU, only such trusted companies should be included when building digital infrastructure in Africa. This interviewee argued that a European interest – supporting its own digital industry, which is supposed to be ‘trusted’ in contrast to foreign vendors – lies behind this ‘trusted vendor approach’. The interviewee also stated that this was not a covert interest but that African citizens and representatives were aware that Europeans would not want such funding to benefit only Chinese or other foreign companies. This relates to another interviewee’s (2/6) statement that having and following one’s interests, mainly if those were still based on or combined with values, were not considered negative by African citizens (interview 2/6). In the end, this corresponds to what was asked for on several occasions by high EU-officials and politicians, namely an EU that is learning and adopting the ‘language of power’ and becoming more geostrategic (see for instance Borrell 2022; Breton 2021), i.e. focusing more on the EU’s interest and communicating accordingly. At the same time, there is still a solid normative element since those companies, be they European or foreign, must comply with specific EU standards to be categorised as ‘trusted’, which is compulsory.

5.3.4.1.1.5 Research desideratum concerning Chinese and US presence in Africa

There was no obvious difference between what EU-insiders and EU-outsiders put forward regarding Chinese and US-American presence on the African continent as a reason for the EU to develop its own external digital policy towards Africa. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to see if there are different perceptions in interviews that are focused on this aspect. However,

contradicts what interviewee 2/3, an EU-official working for the Directorate -General for International Partnerships.

this was beyond the scope of this research project.

5.3.4.1.2 China's presence in Africa influencing the EU's digital policy towards Africa

To get an overview before delving into details, it shall be looked at how many interviewees mentioned China initiatively without my asking and how many talked about it after my explicit mention of China as a relevant actor in Africa. Three of the EU-insiders and two of the EU-outsiders, i.e. five out of eleven experts, actually talked about China concerning the EU's goals in Africa without my asking explicitly about China. After my asking, two insiders and three outsiders, again five interviewees, had information to give about China concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. Only one interviewee, an EU-insider, did not seem to find China relevant enough to provide information even after my asking. One interviewee who gave information about China said that China did not constitute a vital actor, at least not at the AU (African Union) level. In summary, nine interviewees out of eleven considered China a relevant actor in Africa. They thus found that this fact also provided reasons for the EU to become more active on the African continent in the digital realm.

5.3.4.1.2.1 China as supplier of digital infrastructure in Africa

Concerning African digital infrastructure, Huawei built the most significant part of it, according to interviewee 2/6. This is primarily related to so-called safe-city or smart-city projects, where a large number of CCTV cameras connected to AI (artificial intelligence) being able to carry out facial recognition were installed to make cities safer and more efficient using e-governance. In this context, Hikvision was also mentioned in addition to Huawei (interview 2/3), with both companies disguising surveillance with the help of said smart-city projects. This is part of the Beijing effect – as opposed to the Brussels effect – meaning that China, through its Digital Silk Road, does not only export software and hardware but also its 'digital authoritarianism' (Erie and Streinz 2021). Huawei and ZTE's participation in smart city projects, especially in emerging markets, are specific examples of that (Erie and Streinz 2021: 2). One interviewee (2/6) even questioned whether China would introduce its social credit system on the African continent. The interviewee guessed that the probability was high that it would actually do so. Even if that is not the case (yet), China is already diffusing its values and norms with the help

of exports of software- and hardware (see the Beijing effect mentioned before). This is what Ian Manners (2002: 245) calls ‘transference’, referring to any exchange (trade, aid, technical assistance, etc.) aiming at the diffusion of norms.

One of the interviewees (2/6), who was also one of the creators of the EU’s Global Gateway strategy, stated Zimbabwe and Nigeria as countries in which China had been particularly active. Chinese companies delivered and installed eID systems in those countries, and the collected data was moved to China for analysis. Thus, citizens registered within those eID systems could be identified with the help of facial recognition. Using this technology, “social tension can be created by the press of a button,” according to this interviewee.

This information is particularly alarming because many African regimes are authoritarian and use digital tools, among other things, to stay in power (see for instance Ogunjuyigbe 2022a). Apart from that, there are also security concerns, and the explanations given by the interviewees referred to in this subchapter are substantiated by the quoted sources, so China can be considered a threat to Africa’s digital sovereignty.

5.3.4.1.2.2 African repudiation of ‘China bashing’ and lack of proof of Chinese activities

According to one EU-outsider (2/4), a geopolitical motivation of the EU in its external digital policy towards Africa is not necessarily openly communicated but rather disguised behind the official argument of respect for human rights and Africa’s development. The interviewee explained that there was a big difference between what was given as reasons for the EU’s official digital strategies in Africa and what was mentioned in less official situations and contexts. The ‘official’ reason, which is mainly developmental and instilling a human rights-based approach in the digital arena, stands in stark contrast to the ‘unofficial’ but actual motivation, which she suspects is countering foreign influence on the continent, in particular, Chinese, Russian and US-American influence. This suggests that the EU sees the African continent as its sphere of influence, which must be shielded from other foreign nations’ influence. This can be compared to the Monroe Doctrine⁶⁴ of the US, nonetheless without the military component and a focus on economic and ‘soft’ or normative power in the digital sector.

⁶⁴ The Monroe doctrine goes back to US president James Monroe, who outlined in a speech in 1823 that the US would not intervene in Europe and Europe would not intervene on the American continent, which included North and South America.

Based on the information given in this interview, the emphasis on spreading specific values and norms in the digital realm, particularly human-centrism, is connected to geopolitical goals. Thus, the EU seems to have used the possibility of highlighting a value as a goal in its documents, i.e. in its self-representation as a global digital actor. At the same time, geopolitical considerations were the actual drivers behind the EU's policy. This would finally mean that the EU's reputation as a normative actor was fostered, while in reality, another goal based on geopolitical interest was pursued.

This geopolitical and economic motivation based on Chinese (and other foreign powers') presence is not very much talked about, though (as stated by interviewee 2/7, an insider, and interviewee 2/2 and 2/4, both EU-outsiders). The two EU- outsiders appraised said abstinence from referring to China's presence as a reason for European activities in Africa as a reasonable choice. They further explained that African citizens did not appreciate negative discourse about Chinese presence on the African continent, and thus, such 'China-bashing' did not help achieve European goals in Africa at all. Further, they argued it was in the interest of Europe that African countries choose sides and, for instance, decide which digital norms they prefer. Still, African states wanted to have as much investment as possible. Thus, it was not in their interest to choose sides.

Apart from this abstinence of the EU from putting forward Chinese presence as a reason to act, one interviewee (2/4) also argued that it was difficult for the EU to use this argument of having to counter Chinese influence officially since China was not that visible. Only a few examples of Chinese actions that are detrimental to African citizens and that might have negative implications are known, such as Chinese companies trying to improve their artificial intelligence in the field of facial recognition technology in Zimbabwe and other African states (for which there are usually no public documents available). According to this interviewee, such information, let alone proof, is hard to get hold of. I can confirm this based on my research since I did not find much (grey) literature on such Chinese activities. Further, Chinese agenda-setting is rarely explicit, and thus, it is difficult to counter due to its lack of visibility. Consequently, the EU cannot readily disclose its interests, in that case, geopolitical motivations, but instead has to deliver normative reasons for its external digital policy towards Africa due to a lack of proof or information.

5.3.4.1.2.3 Chinese versus European approach to dealing with Africa

While the African population has a positive view of the US since its social media companies are mostly perceived as an exciting offer, there is also something African citizens find positive about China: its completely different approach to dealing with Africa than Europe. There is no conditionality – China supplies the money in the form of (often untransparent) loans without asking any questions or making any demands concerning human rights or democratic values (see for instance Hodzi 2020; Vines and Wallace 2023). This approach by the Chinese, who leave out any conditionality and are partly more effective and more visible to the citizens in African countries (interviewee 2/9), is confirmed in the area of trade and aid by the literature. (see for instance Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 227)

Interviewee 2/9 argued that the Western aid centric model - in general, not only concerning digital issues – was ineffective and, in the end, has not led to any solutions for the African people. Thus, it would be interesting to scrutinise in future research if there is a change in the EU's development approach in the digital sphere. A turn in the Chinese approach can be seen, which becomes more of a 'classic' development cooperation rather than a mere offer of loans, at least in the digital sphere. The Chinese seem to copy this approach from Europe, according to interviewee 2/3. Thus, it remains to be seen if the norm of inter-regional solidarity becomes more prominent in Chinese activities on the African continent, consequently leading to a certain convergence with the European approach – the latter being criticised by some of being ineffective – seemingly a contradiction and a very relevant research gap to be filled.

5.3.4.1.2.4 Chinese versus European companies

Interviewees also gave information regarding competition between Chinese and European companies in Africa. While Chinese companies are very active on the African continent and are thus to be found on bidder lists for tenders, this is less true for European companies. The blame is placed on strict procurement rules and the fact that price is a vital argument in Africa, which is considered more beneficial to Chinese companies (interview 2/10). One interviewee (2/2) even stated that Chinese companies often bribed African officials to receive contracts, which would explain why Chinese companies receive so many contracts. This suggests another normative difference between the European and Chinese approaches to their respective African activities. Thus, norms are not only relevant as a motivating force but also relevant in how

actions are carried out, ultimately determining the outcome. An important question is which norms African citizens are, in the end, more prone to Chinese or European (or Western) norms and values.

5.3.4.1.3 US' presence in Africa influencing the EU's digital policy towards Africa

While the EU has a partner in the United States regarding countering China's rise on the African continent, the US is also a rival or competitor whose influence on the African continent the EU wishes to reduce. When China was referred to as a relevant actor in Africa and even as a motivator for the EU to get active during the interviews, the US was sometimes mentioned in the same sentence or at least in the same context. However, the US was mentioned more rarely than China. One interviewee (2/10) even explicitly ascertained that Chinese presence and actions on the African continent were a stronger motivator for the EU to get active than the US presence. Nonetheless, countering the US is a relevant factor for the EU's external digital policy towards Africa as well, shown by the fact that almost all interviewees (ten out of eleven) mentioned the United States, but mostly only in the context of Chinese presence on the African continent, or after my asking. One interviewee (EU-insider, interview 2/8) did not mention the US at all.

5.3.4.1.3.1 US platforms and surveillance capitalism countering EU norms

A critical aspect in countering US influence is that the US digital business model is a platform-driven data-extractive model closely linked to and well-working within surveillance capitalism, as analysed by Shoshana Zuboff (2019). This is actually against European norms, and thus, the EU tries to fight that, also in Africa, where US American digital giants such as Meta or Google extract and harvest data without a focus on data protection. Thus, they do not create local value but build value in Silicon Valley (interviews 2/3, 2/2). Europe tries to counter this with the help of data regulation and governance as well as through support for African entrepreneurs so that they can develop their own data-driven business models. Thus, the presence of US firms and their business model is the basis of the EU's motivation to become active in Africa's economic interest in the digital sphere. This corresponds to the norm of inter-regional solidarity, and the focus on data protection corresponds to the norm of human rights.

Nonetheless, this is not a purely altruistic activity, according to interviewee 2/6, since how to unlock data for (African) citizens rather than for US-American companies is a geopolitical question⁶⁵. Interviewee 2/3 further stated that US-American firms had the same data-extractive business model everywhere, also in Europe and that the EU wanted to counter this influence on its own territory as well (interviewee 2/3), which could be better countered with a partner, Africa, on a more international or global level. In short, digital issues are global issues; thus, a global approach is needed, as well as allies fostering this human-centric data economy.

5.3.4.1.3.2 African repudiation of US Bashing

Not only do African citizens and officials dislike ‘China-bashing’, as noted earlier, but they are not very fond of ‘US-American bashing’ either. According to interviewee 2/4, African citizens see US big tech such as Meta positively since it offers them a way to connect themselves. The interviewee further argued that countering this would actually be perceived as taking away a positive aspect of digitalisation for African citizens. Consequently, just like countering Chinese activities on the African continent by the EU was perceived very negatively by African citizens, so was officially countering US-American activity. Maybe this more geo-strategic EU and using more assertive language as demanded (Borrell 2020; Breton 2021) is not necessarily what is expected and positively received by EU-outsiders.

5.3.4.2 The interplay of norms and interests as motivators behind the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa concerning Chinese and US presence in Africa

After scrutinising the different actions of China and the US on the African continent and their implications for the EU’s external digital policy, an overview of norms, interests, and their complementary combinations shall be given. After that, theoretical implications will be outlined to further develop theoretical frameworks regarding normative versus interest-oriented actorness and decisions. The motivation behind the EU’s digital policies stemming from Chinese and partly also US-American presence and actions on the African continent are mainly related to geo-political and, to a lesser extent, to economic gains of the EU, as will be outlined in the following subchapters. The motivation of the EU is also related to certain norms, which

⁶⁵ This refers to the issue of who owns and/or has access to the data – the company providing the digital tools with which the data was created, the user and actual creator of the data or ‘local’ firms providing space to storage the data et cetera.

are linked to geopolitical gains, though. Thus, there can be complementarity between norms and interests, as explained below.

5.3.4.2.1 Geopolitical interest & norms of human rights and democracy

This thesis' analysis of the documents and the interviews with the experts (EU-insiders and outsiders alike) showed that economic gains are exceptionally compatible with norms, particularly with the norm of inter-regional solidarity. When scrutinising the activities of China and the US as reasons for the EU's digital policies on the African continent, though, we find in particular a geopolitical interest compatible with the norm of respect for human rights (data protection and privacy).

Concerning China, the norm of democracy also plays an important role, unifying the US and the EU against China, as does the open internet, which is related to the larger norm category of respect for human rights. The interplay between the EU's geopolitical interests and the norms of human rights and democracy, as well as the lack of appreciation of African citizens for the EU stating China and the US as reasons for its digital policies in Africa ('China/US bashing'), corresponds to the result of the analysis assessing the EU as an *incoherent realist actor* (= seemingly normative, but in fact interest-based actor). Said interplay between the EU's interests and norms made it unnecessary for the EU to communicate its geopolitical and economic interests. The fact that African societies do not appreciate discourse about those interests supports the normative tendencies of the EU's external communication.

5.3.4.2.2 Countering Chinese and US influence on digital issues in Africa: dissemination of norms and serving one's interest simultaneously

The following paragraphs will outline the link between norms and interests, i.e., how (disseminating) norms can serve an interest. As stated by a policy officer of the Directorate General for International Partnerships (INTPA) (interviewee 2/3), networks, infrastructure and regulatory convergence concerning digital issues are related to (geo)political interest on the side of the EU. This corresponds to Federica Bicchì's (2006: 299) conclusion that „the EU does not promote (neutral) norms, but promotes ‘Europe’ “. Regulation, which is related to norms and normative motivations, is also associated with geopolitical motivation due to competition for

normative influence in the digital realm on the African continent, particularly between the EU and China, but also with the US. This relates to the very different approaches the EU and China have taken and the partly different approaches the EU and the US have taken regarding digital issues. Some have been addressed in the preceding paragraphs, such as the difference between the EU's focus on human-centredness and data protection versus the Chinese focus on surveillance to control citizens. The EU and the US agree on some norms, such as an open internet, but not on others, like data protection and privacy – the latter being fostered by the EU, but the US prefers a *laissez-faire* approach.

All those approaches can be disseminated via companies' exports of digital goods and services and through 'exporting' regulation equally well. The first is done extensively by China in Africa and by the US to a certain extent; the second is more aligned with the EU's approach because the EU does not have as many big digital giants as China or the US⁶⁶. Exporting rules and practices to serve its own interest is what corresponds to what Del Sarto (2016) calls normative empire Europe. Since both norms and interests are being served, I would argue that, in this case, the EU uses the complementarity of values and interests to its own advantage as well as to the advantage of the target state. If there is no acceptance of those norms by the target state, i.e. if the target state rejects those norms but those are still imposed as part of a utility-maximising strategy of the EU, normative empire Europe is the more suitable term to be used.

While having European companies on the ground in Africa might be a goal for the EU regarding business possibilities, meaning this would serve an economic interest, this can also help the diffusion of European norms and thus would be another example of this interlinkage of interests and the dissemination of norms. European companies counter the focus of Chinese companies on surveillance and gathering of citizens' data with a human-rights-centred emphasis on data protection, democracy and inclusion (as mentioned, for instance, by interviewees 2/7, 2/6). Thus, more business for European companies on the African continent also equals the dissemination of European digital values through what Ian Mannes (2002: 245) calls 'transference', i.e. diffusion of norms through any exchange: trade in goods, aid or technical assistance. Economic interest and normative motivation effectively interplay when countering

⁶⁶ Although one EU-insider (interviewee 2/1) disagreed by saying that the EU had digital giants as well, such as Nokia, in particular Alcatel Submarine Networks (ASN), which was also owned by Nokia, and which was a leader in the submarine cable sector. Such digital giants, which are not part of the platform economy and are not a social medium are less visible but still important economic actors. So, the EU's supposed lack of digital giants also has to be seen through this lens of different digital sectors with different visibility. Another EU-insider (interviewee 1/5) mentioned this also in one of the exploratory interviews. Still, the same interviewee did admit that the EU contemplates the fact that many digital companies were based in the US or China in its strategic considerations.

other foreign powers' influence in Africa. The digital market as a significant incentive for the EU concerning Chinese presence was mentioned frequently in the interviews (2/3, 2/9, 2/10, 2/11).

The EU's "ethical digital policy", as interviewee 2/10 put it, is just a way of staying relevant on the continent, which adds up with the EU being a normative power spreading its norms with the focus on 'power' rather than on 'normative' since the goal is staying relevant rather than the norms as such⁶⁷. One could also say the focus is instead on geopolitical gain, which is not communicated as such. This is a way of serving both an economic (countering big tech) and a geopolitical (staying relevant) interest, as well as values (what interviewee 2/10 called 'ethical digital policy') at the same time. Thus, this also relates to the interplay between disseminating norms and pursuing an interest.

5.3.4.2.3 Contradiction between norms and interests versus complementary combinations of norms and interests – theoretical reflections

In this dissertation's sources, the EU's strict approach to data protection and digital regulation has even been criticised as limiting European companies in their growth and development. While securing its own geopolitical and economic interest in Africa with those norms related to the above-mentioned "ethical digital policy" (interviewee 2/10), this might work against the EU's economic interest of developing its own digital giants simultaneously. When seeing this through the lens of norm- versus interest-orientation, one has to assert that there are conflicting goals – economic gains (faster growth of digital companies) versus normative goals (respect for human rights). The EU's adhering to the norm of data protection rather than focusing more on developing its own digital companies contradicts the realist assumption that ethical concerns are second-order concerns and that norms are thus only relevant if they do not contradict interests.

On the other hand, geopolitical ambitions (influence in Africa) are being fully served in this context without contradicting the normative goal of human rights or developing the African economy (= norm of inter-regional solidarity). In this context, an evaluation concerning the EU's focus on the norm of inter-regional solidarity in Africa given by interviewee 2/10 seems relevant: the EU's support of the development of African digital businesses cannot be

⁶⁷ In this context one could distinguish between main and side effects or intended and unintended effects.

considered as a conflict of interest concerning the EU's own goal of developing its digital businesses further, since the needs of Europe and Africa in this context are still very different. Thus, while the EU might hamper the growth of its own digital companies (i.e. working against its own economic gain) with its strict regulatory approach (norm), supporting the African digital industry (norm of inter-regional solidarity) does not contradict the EU's goal of developing its own companies (economic gain).

The following table categorises decisions as a consequence of complementarity or contradiction between norms and interests based on the explanations and examples stated above.

Table 40: Types of decisions based on types of norm & interest interplay

Interplay norm & interest	Type of decision	Example from empirics
Contradiction between norm and interest	Normative decision Norm has priority	Strict data protection (norm) being a hindrance to the growth of European digital companies (economic interest)
	Realist decision Interest has priority	If the EU decides to adhere to its approach of preference of data protection over unfettered growth of its companies, it takes a normative decision.
Complementarity of norms and interests	Open realist normative decision open communication about this complementarity or at least about normative and interest-based motivation	Countering Chinese and US influence in Africa (geopolitical, partly economic interest) with the help of norms GDPR (norm) which could also lead to repatriation of funds (economic interest) ⁶⁸
	Hidden realist normative decision Pretence of normative focus combined with hidden interest-orientation, i.e. communication only about norms as motivation, no communication about the interests	

Scrutinising the EU's norm and interest orientation not from the angle of perception versus projected image – which is the central perspective of this research project – but from the angle of the interplay between norms and interest in decision making – there are two main interplays:

⁶⁸ Example given by interviewee 2/9

contradiction and complementarity. Those interplays lead to different types of decisions. In the case of a contradiction between norm and interest, the decision can be either normative or realist, meaning that the EU (or any other actor) explicitly decides where its priority lies – with the norm or with the interest. In the case of a norm and interest complementarity, the EU also has two possibilities. The EU's first option is to communicate openly about this complementarity and thus to present both norms and interests as motivating factors in its external communication (open realist normative decision). The second option is to pretend norm-orientation by not communicating the interests behind the decision but only putting forward normative justifications for its policies (hidden realist normative decision). The second, the hidden realist normative decision, is a type of decision that relates to the concept of *normative empire Europe* (Del Sarto 2016). In the case of a contradiction between norm and interest leading to mutual exclusion, a decision of the EU concerning its preference towards either norm or interest is compulsory. In the case of complementarity, the decision is 'only' about what is communicated externally as a motivating factor.

5.3.4.3 A normative EU versus interest-oriented member states: Germany and France

Since member states also have the competence concerning digital foreign policy⁶⁹ as well as their own development agencies working on the African continent and since it is companies of member states that carry out the actual business activities, individual member states were also referred to during the interviews. Any individual activities of the member states in the development sector are coordinated and thus coherent with the EU's goals, based on the so-called 'Team Europe' approach. This approach refers to the coordination and coherence of member states' individual actions to achieve efficiency and effectiveness rather than duplicities and, in the worst case, even contradictions. While the member states have to adhere to the EU's values referred to in EU treaties, which also includes their national development agencies and their national businesses, interests of the EU are not that explicitly referred to in official documents. Thus, it is pertinent to scrutinise the link between interests and member states that were named in the interviews.

⁶⁹ Concerning competence, it shall be clarified that external digital policy is a mixed competence, since it is not a 'traditional' foreign or security policy, but is instead a case of external action (digital trade, digital development) and of an internal policy with an external dimension according to the categorisation outlined by Keukeleire and Delreux (2022: 41).

The two member states mentioned the most were Germany and France, with other member states being mentioned only once or not at all. Germany was mentioned twenty-one times overall, fourteen times by EU-outsiders, seven times by EU-insiders; France was referred to fourteen times, nine times by EU - outsiders, and five times by EU-insiders. Hence, Germany occupies the first rank concerning references in the interviews.

Interestingly, those two member states were mostly cited when an interest-related issue was discussed in the interview. Support coming from the European Union is generally seen as more neutral in Africa than the support given by specific member states. Thus, EU institutions are seen to represent normative motives, while member states' motivation is often perceived as being interest-based. This finding conforms to what is stated in the relevant literature (Gnanguenon 2023) (Schunz and Damro 2020: 135) (Hyde-Price 2006: 223) (Moravcsik 1993) and thus confirms this tendency also for the digital domain. Interviewee 2/4, an EU-outsider, even argued that the EU Commission was trying to be seen as a neutral partner and instead wanted the member states, in that case Germany, to be seen as the "bad guy", i.e. as the actor being more critical towards Africa and more interest-oriented. Nonetheless, this research can only give a first insight, and further observation and study would be needed to gain a deeper comprehension of the interplays and relations between the EU and its member states concerning norms and interests in the digital external policy towards Africa.

In the field of development policy, one also has to consider the coexistence of European and member states' national development activities, which the Commission coordinates (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 235) with regard to the Team Europe approach. France is a relevant actor in this regard. President Emmanuel Macron often refers to the African continent as a young, vital and highly dynamic market in his speeches on French-African ties (Taylor 2023). This mentioning of the market directs at economic gains that France might want to achieve on the African continent, potentially also in the digital realm, where in particular young African citizens constitute potential customers. This corresponds to an interviewee's (2/10) statement that France had its own digital foreign policy aiming at developing its own digital unicorns⁷⁰. Due to its historical ties to the continent, having such a strategy in the digital realm seems pertinent. Nonetheless, not only France but also Germany and France were said to have

⁷⁰ Unicorn is a term often used in the context of start-ups. It refers to a rather newly founded company (= a start-up) that has reached a market value of a billion US Dollars.

a clear economic interest in supporting the development of their own companies (interviewees 2/2, 2/9, 2/10).

It is not only economic interests that are at the basis of France's digital strategies on the continent, though. French voters still believe that Africa is an essential partner for France in terms of economic and security interests and preventing migration from Africa to Europe (Taylor 2023). According to President Emmanuel Macron, there has been a change in the relations between France and Africa, and France's interest in Africa has now gone beyond a security interest (Fofack 2023).

Security concerns and development goals need to be decoupled to move away from a neocolonial approach, according to Hippolyte Fofack (2023), Chief Economist and Director of Research at the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank). In terms of the concepts of norms and interests, this means that the norm of inter-regional solidarity and the interest of security must be separated. What the African economies aim for is integration into a global economy within which technology and digitalisation are of great relevance (Fofack 2023); if France does not deliver on that, there are plenty of other potential partners Africa could choose from (Fofack 2023), which relates to the concept of Africa's derivative power (see chapter 3.1.2.3 for an outline of this concept). These arguments in the literature prove that it is relevant for France to have its own digital strategy for Africa. It remains to be seen if this is well coordinated within the 'Team Europe approach'. For the EU, it is also relevant that this does not shed a negative light on the EU due to negative associations with France based on its colonial past and dependencies still present even after the colonial period. Thus, France is not seen as a normative actor, which might also overshadow the EU's presumed normativity when it is related to French activities on the African continent, which also has to be taken into account in the digital realm.

This is a relevant difference between Germany and France as actors on the African continent. The difference between those two countries' relations with Africa in the past was mentioned in the interviews, particularly regarding colonialism. This leads to France still being seen as a past colonial power and thus being at a disadvantage. At the same time, Germany, having left the African continent already after the First World War, has a different, more positive image in Africa. This also means that it is not necessarily in the interest of the EU to have a lot of French presence on the African continent, as indicated by interviewee 2/7, an argument that can also be found in the media (see for instance Taylor 2023).

Nonetheless, Germany and France were mentioned not only because of their economic interests but also neutrally, just because of their higher activity on the African continent than other member states and their involvement in different projects such as data centres, data management, or infrastructure projects. Other member states (Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Belgium, Portugal) were only mentioned in a neutral way (interviews 2/3, 2/10, 2/11).

Concerning Germany, it was also outlined that the GIZ (the German development agency) would instead send its own staff as advisors rather than hiring local African consultancy firms or NGOs. This means that the GIZ usually takes ten per cent of the EU funds made available for the respective project for the overheads (interview 2/4). This is usual but should still be considered when analysing what EU member states do on the ground concerning norms and interests. This does not only concern Germany, though, but also French agencies, who benefit in the same manner (Gnanguenon 2023). This issue of rather resorting to well-established Western or European agencies and NGOs or consultancies is well known, and the reason lies in the EU's strict rules for project management and financial reporting, which grassroots or civil society organisations in African countries usually cannot comply with (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 115,36). Thus, it is not only a national interest that lies behind giving preference to European staff and service providers, but systemic challenges could also be changed if alignment with African interests and, thus, with the norm of inter-regional solidarity were prioritised.

The prominence of German and French presence or visibility can also be connected to the assessment in the literature that the interests of the big member states play an influential role in the EU's foreign policy (Lehne 2015: 6,9). For the big member states such as France, the EU is a possibility to further advance their own interests by using the EU's instruments and by using the EU as an influence multiplier (Lehne 2015: 6). As mentioned above, Germany and France were referred to as having a clear economic interest in supporting their own companies' development (interviewees 2/2, 2/9, 2/10). The national interest of member states is not only visible in the digital realm but also in other areas of foreign policy and external action. Member states impact the launch of CSDP missions, where France and other member states upload their national preferences and goals (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 207). Particularly concerning global challenges that cannot be solved by one member state alone, which is valid for digital issues, member states might upload their interests and preferences to the European level, as in the case of France (Alec de Flers and Müller 2012: 22) and said preferences may then be projected into third countries. The stated literature referring to the interests of member states

being uploaded to an EU level confirms the impression of interviewees referred to in this chapter that interests are often linked to member states. At the same time, the values enshrined in the treaties are instead associated with the EU and its institutions.

For future research, it will be interesting to investigate where EU interests in the global digital realm originate, for which Chad Damro's *market power Europe* concept might prove useful. One essential component of this concept are interest groups and interest contestations, making the concept suitable for said analysis. Such interest groups can be transnational and would not necessarily be linked to one member state only, though. Also the lens of *De-Europeanisation* (Müller et al. 2021) might be useful for future research into the lack of willingness for collective action in the digital realm due to different interests and the preference of some member states to follow their individual digital foreign policy

5.3.4.4 Different manifestations of one type of interest

One of Africa's challenges in the digital sphere is not being ready for some digital products or specific digital regulations, as raised by interviewee 2/4. This corresponds to information that can be found in African media as well: the African market is not ready for specific products that sell well in European or US-American markets, such as the offer of a prime membership in exchange for an exemption from the delivery costs of purchased products online, which is what the company Jumia, African's analogy to amazon, the largest online retailer in Africa, ascertained; further, Jumia changed its priority from high-end and high-cost electronic products to more everyday products, in particular food, which emerged as a successful strategy (Onukwue 2022c). Such a difference between the market and potential customers is, on a more abstract level, linked to the concept of interests. Just as African norms are different, the interest, even a specific interest, an economic interest in this case, can manifest itself in utterly different ways, which has, in turn, consequences for the necessary regulations.

5.3.4.5 European (Western) norms versus African norms

In analysing the documents related to the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, one can see the planned endeavour of achieving an equal partnership instead of a donor-recipient relationship. Still, according to the interviews with African partners, one cannot see the results

in practice (yet). As one interviewee put it, the EU talked a lot. Still, it has now started to act (exploratory interview with an EU-official: interviewee 2 on 14.2.2022) This corresponds to Staeger's (2016b: 995) claim that "African agency is on course to produce a continental polity with a different normative aspiration and political ends. The EU would do well to appreciate this shift not just in rhetoric but also in its programmes and policies [...]". Also, interviewee 2/4, an EU-outsider, explained that there was a difference between the EU's norms and African norms, potentially leading to the EU imposing its norms on African governments. The expert argued that the latter had other norms in general and thus should also develop their own norms in the digital realm. This interviewee mainly referred to the difference regarding privacy and data protection, with African people having a communitarian⁷¹ approach and, given the chance, probably developing different solutions concerning privacy and data protection based on a different normative approach. Since this seemed a relevant point regarding norms, I conducted plausibility checks by asking the following interviewees about this issue.

Interviewee 2/11, an EU-outsider from Africa, confirmed that a communal approach was prevalent in Africa but that data protection and privacy were still considered very important in her circles. Thus, looking further into this particular issue of different normative approaches of Europeans and Africans leading to different digital policies would be interesting. It would also be interesting to see how a more communitarian approach to data would be implemented within data policy and management since such solutions still have to be found or created. The issue of conditionalities was also raised concerning the difference in norms (interviewee 2/10), which is undoubtedly relevant since a Euro-centric norm as a condition could be perceived negatively. Further, this was said to cause hurdles and add to bureaucracy. Ultimately, it was not even certain if those values were suitably integrated into policies and produced the desired effect (interviewee 2/10). The same interviewee also found it advisable to instead achieve unification and harmonisation within Africa concerning digital norms through the African Union rather than by the EU exporting its digital norms.

Interviewee 2/9 confirmed the difference between European and African norms and then stressed the difference in norms concerning LGBTQI rights in this context. On a more abstract level and concerning the theoretical framework used in this research project, those rights relate to the norm of respect for human rights – a core norm (as opposed to minor norms) of the EU,

⁷¹ A communitarian approach refers to the prioritisation of the community and communal values and interests over individual ones. (See for instance Chimakonam and Ogbonnaya 2022) Or: (Imafidon 2023)

according to Ian Manners, as well as to the minor norm of anti-discrimination (see Manners 2002). The expert argued that LGBTQI rights did not have high relevance in Africa but were instead imported from Europe. In the digital sector, those norms would have relevance regarding content-moderation of platforms, for instance, as well as the protection of LGBTQI people against discrimination in the digital field, also through algorithms. This example of the norm of respecting the rights of LGBTQI people being a Euro-centric norm by an interviewee also shows that there is still no general approach to an agreement on the universality of certain norms.

This plausibility check was substantiated by further research concerning LGBTQI rights and their acceptance and relevance in Africa, as mentioned by interviewee 2/9. In 2008, a UN declaration (there was not enough support for a resolution) condemning violence, harassment and discrimination against people based on sexual orientation and gender identity was read out before the General Assembly and has been supported by 96 member states, including only 10 African states; the other 45 African states either abstained or voted against (Human Rights Watch 2008). So, the majority of African states did not support this declaration. In 2014, a declaration related to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was adopted by the UNHRC (United Nations Human Rights Council): the declaration was initiated by South Africa, but all other African members of the UNHRC either voted no, abstained or were absent (UN Human Rights Council 2014). Thus, according to these numbers, the interviewee's evaluation seems suitable for most African states. Still, the question remains if specific universal values must be respected worldwide and how or by whom those norms can be declared universal. This issue is very relevant regarding the norms on which the EU bases its external digital policy towards Africa.

Apart from Eurocentric norms, one should also consider Chinese (or other powers') normative influence in the digital realm in Africa due to their presence on the African continent. In the end, African citizens might consider neither Chinese nor Western/European values suitable for their vision of digitalisation. Given the opportunity to develop their own 'African' approach, this approach could be a different and new one, geared towards specific African needs and usages. Ignoring this possibility means that 'othering'⁷² in the sense of seeing African people as *different* (type one of othering) and even *inferior* (type two of othering) takes place since

⁷² Types of Othering: Representing the other as 1. different, 2. inferior, 3. as violating universal principles, 4. as existential threat (see chapter on theoretical concepts for details and explanations)

African countries have not yet developed their own norms regarding digitalisation. The Chinese, on the other hand, are seen as *violating universal principles* (othering type 3) by the EU when using artificial intelligence for surveillance purposes, for instance. Africa could also fall under this category later if Chinese digital norms were adopted, as has already happened due to the ‘Beijing effect’ (Erie and Streinz 2021), as outlined before⁷³, in some African cities and countries.

Since the EU aims at disseminating its digital norms to Africa, the EU sees the differences between the EU and Africa as *acquired*, not *inherent* (see table 41 below and table 5 in the chapter on theoretical approaches); otherwise, the dissemination of norms would not even be possible and thus no relevant measure. The reaction of Africa remains to be seen, normative dissociation and normative convergence being the two possibilities. The first, normative dissociation, can take different forms: Africa could create its own norms from scratch, could adopt Chinese, European or any other foreign norms, for instance US-American ones, or it could adapt any foreign norms, to its own requirements and approach. Rumelili’s (2021: 21) theoretical framework (see chapter on theoretical approaches for details) can thus be further developed as follows:

⁷³ See subchapter 5.3.4.1.2.1 on China as supplier of digital infrastructure

Table 41: Construction and reaction of target state

	EU construction of target state	
Reaction of target state	<i>Inherent difference</i>	<i>Acquired difference</i>
<i>Recognition</i>	Transactional cooperation	Normative convergence - Full normative convergence - Partial normative convergence (= adaptation of EU norms according to third state's own values)
<i>Rejection</i>	Conflict	Normative dissociation through: - Creation of new norms - Adoption of norms of other third parties (e.g. China)

Table based on Bahar Rumelili (2021: 203) and further developed

What was not added to the table but is still worth considering is the fact that even if the target state rejects the EU's norms, the EU might still be able to impose those norms on the target state. This combination of rejection and normative convergence might be worth examining in an empirical study.

An issue closely connected to norms and their dissemination to other actors who have different norms is conditionality – which falls under norm dissemination through transference, according to Ian Manners (2002: 245). Although the EU aims at disseminating its norms in the realm of digitalisation according to this thesis' analysis of the relevant documents, no explicit and specific conditionalities concerning the digital sector were confirmed by interviewees (2/8, 2/9, 2/11). Those three experts stated that in their lines of work (private sector development, e-payments and e-commerce, data and security Infrastructure and governance, respectively), they had never encountered explicit conditionality. One interviewee (2/7) from the DG Connect (Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology), though, gave the information that specific goals did have to be met by African partners to receive financial support from the EU for projects in the digital sector, but without giving any details. A

plausibility check was carried out by scrutinising Economic Partnership Agreements between the EU and African regions, which were found not to include any digital issues and thus no conditionalities concerning the digital realm.

This initial evidence suggests no conditionality is used in the digital relations between the EU and Africa. However, further research on the EU's actual dissemination of digital norms through conditionality, which is not the focus of this research project, is needed to ascertain future developments. An introduction of such explicit conditionality through clauses in agreements would confirm the EU evaluating the differences between itself and Africa as what Rumelili (2021) calls 'acquired', not 'inherent', and it would foster '(partial) norm convergence' (see table 41 above).

5.3.4.6 Challenges of the African Union and Smart Africa and the consequences for the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

Further relevant points were raised regarding two African institutions: the African Union (AU) and Smart Africa: the first's lack of speed and responsiveness, as well as unclear mandates and division of responsibilities.

One interviewee (2/9) even referred to the African Union as a "place to retire for officials in higher positions", explaining why these officials were not very (pro-)active. I again carried out plausibility checks in the subsequent interviews, which did not bring any confirmation of this particular claim. Nonetheless, one interviewee (2/10) assessed this assertion as an interesting issue that should be looked into. Interviewee (2/9) also argued that the AU was, in general, very slow (confirmed by interviewees 2/6, 2/7, 2/8, 2/10), which was why Smart Africa was founded in the first place, to speed up the processes in the digital realm and actually to implement strategies. Interviewee 2/6 underpinned this by saying that Smart Africa was more agile than the AU. This corresponds to what was already outlined in the chapter on the status quo of EU-Africa relations concerning digital issues: the African Union is more intergovernmentally organised than the EU, and its members are more heterogeneous and often not aligned. This leads to a lack of progress and hinders the advancement of policy implementation.

Another challenge is the unclear division of responsibility between the AU and Smart Africa, referred to by several interviewees (2/9, 2/8). One interviewee (2/8) explained that the policy level was reserved for the African Union within the digital sphere, while Smart Africa was the

“implementing arm”. He further conceded that there was some contention between the two organisations concerning this division of responsibilities. This distribution of competencies was confirmed by two officials from Smart Africa (2/9, 2/11); the first added this was only an unwritten rule. The second substantiated this division of competencies but did not raise any contentious issues. For an official from DG CONNECT (Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology) (interviewee 2/7), it was clear that it was Smart Africa they worked with “because we feel that [this] is where the capacity is.”

Nonetheless, Smart Africa also has its own challenges. Interviewee 2/9, an official of Smart Africa, argued that they did not have a clear mandate since only 35 of the 54 countries on the African continent were members, and not all of those had ratified the agreement setting up Smart Africa⁷⁴. Interviewee 2/4 criticised Smart Africa for not assessing their projects' outcomes and only assuming positive effects. This might be due to a need for more resources, which they suffer from just like the AU does, according to one of the Smart Africa officials (2/9).

The underfunded and understaffed AU essentially receives its resources from the EU and thus depends on the EU, as interviewee 2/10 stated. The organisation was also said to be inefficient, leading to long waiting times for partners, also for the EU, until there was a response; the more intergovernmental nature of the EU and “shrewd” (interviewee 2/7) member states add to those problems (as also stated in interviews 2/6, 2/8, 2/10). In this context, interviewee 2/8, an EU-official also referred to a point of criticism, which he was confronted with quite frequently, namely that the EU imposes its initiatives on Africa and thus pushes its own agenda. The interviewee refused this criticism since, according to him, it was only before mentioned problems of lack of resources and inefficiency on the side of the AU that might lead to a lack of representation of African norms and interests, not a supposedly hidden agenda of the EU.

Nonetheless, even if it is the lack of resources of the AU and not an explicit push by the EU, the consequence of an overrepresentation of EU interests and norms alike puts the EU's approach to an ‘equal partnership’ with Africa in question. A balanced representation of African and European interests and norms is still a goal to be achieved, also in the digital realm. This is also interesting regarding the reaction of African states concerning digital norms

⁷⁴ As of September 2024, there were already 39 members.

(recognition versus rejection) and in how far and how normative convergence might be achieved (see table 5 based on Rumelili).

5.3.4.7 Western approach to (digital) development

The Western aid-centric model's usefulness and effectivity were questioned by interviewee 2/9. After referring to this criticism in a plausibility check in a subsequent interview (2/10), I noticed that there had already been changes within the Team Europe approach. This refers to the norm of inter-regional solidarity and how it should be implemented. In a follow-up in-depth study, it would be interesting to learn if this is actually the case in digital development policies in Africa. Another interviewee (2/4) also criticised the 'Western approach', pointing to a patronising approach vis-à-vis so-called 'developing countries'⁷⁵.

In connection with this Western aid-centric model, one interviewee (2/9) observed that Europeans sometimes had not finished projects they had started in Africa in contrast to the Chinese, who usually finished their projects. The plausibility checks in the following interviews showed that others only had positive experiences concerning European projects in Africa, though (2/10, 2/11). A further tendency ascribed to projects with Europeans was that Europeans tried to commission their own companies rather than African ones (interview 2/9), which contradicted what other interviewees before said concerning strict procurement rules (interviews 2/6, 2/7), rendering it impossible to favour European companies. In interviews after the one in which this issue was introduced, I carried out plausibility checks, which again led to similar answers pointing to procurement law and to the fact that those interviewees have not had such experiences (2/10, 2/11). These contradicting pieces of information concerning the EU's economic interests and in how far this interest is or is not pursued in such a way raise questions. These are worth further inquiries and examination in future research projects.

While this research project already catered for non-European perspectives by explicitly interviewing non-Europeans and thus integrated a "decentring" (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 357,58) and non-Eurocentric perspective (see also chapter 3.2.2 on poststructural and postcolonial critique of the concept of Normative Power Europe and the chapter on research design), further research could continue this work focusing on this non-Eurocentric perspective.

⁷⁵ As was referred to in chapter 5.2., explaining the context.

5.3.4.8 The Global Gateway as a first step towards a more strategic approach of the EU towards Africa

An EU instrument or rather strategy that was very often mentioned in the interviews was the Global Gateway; on the whole it was mentioned twenty-three times by the interviewees, partly referring to China and its Belt and Road initiative. This strategy has the implementation of infrastructural projects in general as a goal; thus, digital infrastructure projects are included, such as submarine cables and the fifth generation of mobile communications (5G). Stefano Sannino, secretary general of the EEAS (European External Action Service), as well as Koen Doens, director-general of the directorate general International Partnerships (DG Intpa), praise the Global Gateway as an interesting alternative to the Belt and Road initiative since the focus is seen on quality rather than quantity (Lau and Moens 2022). The project does constitute a clear shift in the EU's approach to Africa from an aid-centred approach to a more strategic one, which includes the EU's interests and the ones of its partners, in that case, Africa. This also shows a shift in the EU's communication in presenting itself as a partly interest-led power that does not exclusively have its own interests in mind but does not exclusively have Africa's development (=normative motive, inter-regional solidarity) as a goal either. Thus, here we see a consequence of the demands for a more geopolitical Europe that is in the process of learning the language of power. Such more interest-oriented language can be considered a first step towards what Josep Borrell calls the "language of power" (Borrell 2020), which the EU should learn, as well as a step towards a more geopolitical Europe (Borrell 2022; von der Leyen 2020b).

Interviewees were only partly still⁷⁶ hesitant in mentioning China openly as a competitor when it comes to the Global Gateway and the EU's external digital policies: partly they mentioned it proactively, partly they only admitted the EU's geopolitical and economic rivalry with China as an incentive for the Global Gateway programme after my asking. As mentioned before, it was even seen as not being advisable for the EU to mention China in the EU's external communication, particularly not negatively. So, it seems we are in the middle of a changing paradigm when it comes to the EU's strategies as well as communication from a more normative one, which can still be seen in the results of this research project, to an approach allowing for more strategic interests also in the EU's external communication in the future. It

⁷⁶ In the exploratory interviews which took place 9 months before the expert interviews, there was much more hesitancy in mentioning China as rival in Africa concerning digital issues and thus being a motivational factor for the EU's strategies for its activities on the African continent.

will be interesting to see if this change continues or if these instances of more interest-oriented communication and strategies are just a temporary phase, which could be shown by future research.

5.3.5 Review of discussion of results concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa in relation to the theoretical framework

As we see from the results, norms and interests are represented to a different extent in the three perspectives: the EU's projected image, the perspective of EU-insiders (i.e. EU-officials) and the perspective of EU-outsiders (African officials, employees of think tanks).

Table 42: Norms versus interests in the three perspectives concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

	Norm-based goals	Interest-based goals
EU's projected image	93%	7%
Internal perspective (EU-officials)	78%	22%
External perspective (EU-outsiders)	23%	77%

The start of adding more interest-based elements in the EU's global strategies, as could be determined in the EU's Global Strategy of 2016 (Masters and Landsberg 2021), as well as the demand for a more powerful language (Borrell 2020) and a more geopolitical orientation of the EU (von der Leyen 2020b), which should be seen through a strong representation of interests in the EU's projected image, has not been followed based on the empirical material of this research. Nonetheless, an interest-orientation is perceived by EU-outsiders. EU-officials lie in the middle with a less strong tendency towards norms than the EU's projected image. In this regard, the explicit combinations of interests and norms when pursuing a goal were interesting to analyse. It was enlightening that in the perspective of the projected image, **all** of the few interests mentioned in the EU's documents were combined with a norm, proving the importance of a normative discourse. Further, it was interesting to see that it is, in particular, the norm of inter-regional solidarity, which was often combined with interests.

With relation to realist approaches, it is thought-provoking to find that in the empirical data at hand, interests were sometimes somewhat related to particular member states than to the EU as a supranational institution, which speaks to the realist focus on states as the primary (interest-

oriented) actors on the world stage. In the literature on EU foreign policy, one also finds accounts of member states' economic or security interests being the actual reasons for seemingly value-based policies, such as political conditionality (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 227), which is communicated as being value-based.

One reason why EU-outsiders perceive the EU as more interest-oriented than EU-insiders might be because the former do not only see the EU's strategies but first and foremost the consequences in practice. This is what research concerning the EU's external policies has already shown, namely that interest-oriented trade objectives have been seen to prevail over value-based goals in many cases (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 221,22). This might also have happened in meetings, conversations or interviews EU-outsiders had with EU-officials regarding the EU's external digital policy towards Africa: prevailing interest-oriented objectives, even if in official documents norm-based objectives prevailed.

The concept of Africa's derivative power is also very relevant in the digital field, with many different actors interested in working with and in Africa, particularly China and the US, which gives Africa certain leverage when negotiating with the EU. It explains the EU's motivation to become more active in Africa in the digital realm, as seen in the interviews. Africa's derivative power (see chapter on theoretical approaches for details on this concept) might also have a positive effect on and further support the development of a really equal partnership since Africa becomes more of the EU's equal: the latter is an important market and has more economic and geopolitical might, but Africa is a still developing digital market with many young citizens and a partly already thriving fintech sector.

Concerning the difference between African and European norms, it was confirmed, at least to a certain extent, what postcolonial critiques ascertained about Eurocentric norms. In an equal partnership, African citizens or politicians should choose which digital norms are relevant and suitable for them and how those are implemented. It might be done in a similar way as in Europe; it might be done differently. Based on what was said in interviews, both is possible. What is essential is that there is a choice rather than an imposition of European norms without discussions and negotiations. Reflecting on the results regarding the concept of othering, representing the other as inferior is the form of othering that prevails in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa at the moment due to the prevalence of the norm of 'inter-regional solidarity: it is recognised that Africa needs support because it lags behind in its digital development in all regards – digital economy as well as regulation of the digital sector.

6 The EU's External Digital Policy towards the US

6.1 The context: EU-US relations from the past to the present

This chapter offers an overview of the relations between the EU and the US, starting from the inception of the EU's predecessors until the current status quo. Based on the available literature, the developments and the status quo will be outlined and discussed; thus, the chapter gives the first part of the context for the empirical findings presented in chapter 6.3. The second part of the context, more related to digital issues in the EU-US relations is delivered in chapter 6.2.

After scrutinising the development of the EU's institutions responsible for foreign relations in general as well as for the EU's relations with the US in particular, divergences within the EU regarding how the US should be approached will be addressed. Further, the similarities and differences between the EU's and the US' approaches in the international arena will be outlined, including their approaches to China.

6.1.1 Historical institutional development of EU – US relations

This part presents the different EU and US bodies, treaties, and agreements relevant to the EU-US relationship, not just within the digital sphere. Outlining those institutions' chronological development will help understand the present state of EU-US relations, which affect the EU's approach to its external digital policy towards the US.

The Vandenberg Resolution of 1948 allowed the US to join alliances outside the American continent, thus also with European countries; the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in 1949, and several Western European countries joined the North Atlantic Alliance (Bindi 2022: 230-32). The European Coal and Steel Community was launched only a few years later, and the founding Treaty of Paris entered into force. In 1958, the Treaties of Rome came into effect, and thus, the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community were established. Due to the inefficiency of the EEC concerning foreign policy (Bindi 2022: 233), the European Political Cooperation (EPC) was instituted in 1970, which also catered to the US' need for a more homogeneous and unitary interlocutor (Smith 2015: 577). In 1992, the

Maastricht Treaty was signed, creating the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the new ‘forum’ for dealing with external issues, also vis-à-vis the US (Bindi 2022: 233-34). However, the CFSP was soon to be watered down due to worries of pro-NATO member states seeing the CFSP as threatening the cooperation with NATO (Bindi 2022: 234). In 1999, the new European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), renamed Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in the Lisbon Treaty, was established (Bindi 2022: 235-36). The Lisbon Treaty, signed in 2007, strengthened the EU foreign policy by creating the High Representative of European Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Bindi 2022: 237).

During the Cold War, the EU’s role was a supportive one of the Western alliance as a counterweight to the Soviet Union on the one hand, but also one of countering US dominance by developing an independent European identity (Smith 2015: 574). After the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the US becoming the only global superpower, there was room for new roles of the EU outside of this West-East or capitalist-communist axis (Smith 2015: 574-75). The institutionalisation of EU-US relations accelerated with the Transatlantic Declaration in 1990, the New Transatlantic Agenda five years later, the Transatlantic Economic Partnership in 1998 and the Transatlantic Economic Council in 2007 (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 305). The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) of 2013 was not concluded, but negotiations ended in 2016.

Within the US Department of State, it is the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, within which it has been the Office of European Union and Regional Affairs (ERA) that has been responsible for US relations with the EU from 2010 onwards (Bindi 2022: 239). As can be seen from the mentioned institutions, it is, in particular, the economic sphere within which the EU and the US developed partnerships based on converging values and interests, while in the field of security policy, there was divergence about resources (Smith 2015: 575) but also concerning values. Also, within the digital sphere, there are different domains within which convergence and thus cooperation is possible, such as digital trade or industry, but also security issues and development, which are scrutinised within this research project regarding the EU’s goals.

Strategies of the EU relevant to the US were the European Security Strategy (ESS) and the Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy. The first, entitled *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, was agreed on by the European Council in 2003 and seen as a counterpart to the US security strategy, which then led to the establishment of the European Defence Agency (EDA) in the following year (Bindi 2022: 237). The Global Strategy for the

European Union's Foreign and Security Policy was established in 2016 by Federica Mogherini. The EU's strategic autonomy was strengthened by creating the Permanent Structured Cooperation on Security and Defence (PESCO) in 2017. However, the EU failed to develop into a global actor⁷⁷ (Bindi 2022: 243).

Regarding institutions, it is also essential to see which ones are considered relevant by the EU or the US since this significantly affects the relations between the two powers. US President Obama's preference for the G20 over the G8, for instance, made most of the EU member countries fear being side-lined due to the more extensive group of countries, which proved to be confirmed at the Climate Change Summit in 2009, where the US made a deal with India, China, Brazil and South Africa while Europe was only a bystander in this process (Bindi 2022: 237-38). This shows that regarding digital issues, it remains to be seen which institutions the US will consider relevant in the future – the Trade and Technology Council (TTC) with the European Union or digital alliances with other global actors. Notwithstanding the distinction between more or less relevant institutions in the EU-US digital relations, it is for certain that our institutions are highly interconnected, interviewee 3/8 points out: „Our two domestic systems are interacting in such deep ways across all of our federal agencies, all of the EU directorates, that it's sort of what I call Transatlantische Innenpolitik.”

6.1.2 EU & NATO: Atlanticists versus Europeanists

There is divergence within the EU regarding the United States since there is an apparent tension between European integration and transatlantic relations. Since the EU's external digital policy is a shared competence with also the EU Member states having a say and being also active concerning digital foreign relations themselves, particularly France, those divergences can influence the EU's external digital policy towards the US. Keukeleire and Delreux (2022: 306) refer to two groups of member states concerning their orientation towards the US: the ‚Europeanist‘ member states, with France being the most prominent or even leading member, and the ‚Atlanticist‘ member states, of which the UK was the most critical member when it was still part of the EU. The Central and Eastern European member states belong to the latter group

⁷⁷ A global actor is considered as an actor being engaged globally and having effective external policies in different domains such as security, peace negotiations, protection of human rights et cetera.

since they consider the US a protective force against Russia. Older member states are less influenced by such thinking along the lines of military threats from a third country.

This tension between European integration and transatlantic cooperation is closely related to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which strengthened and secured the US' influence on European states (Smith and Steffenson 2017: 393) and its integration. Since the enlargement process towards Eastern European countries was delayed, the US used this window of opportunity to speed up the NATO integration process towards the East⁷⁸ and countered European efforts to build a European security and defence identity, which was, in the end, built within NATO and avoidance of the 'three Ds' had to be respected: no decoupling, no duplication and no discrimination. Such tensions and disagreements between the EU, the US and NATO, as well as within the EU concerning transatlantic issues, might increase due to external events, such as the terror attacks on 11th September 2001, which triggered different views on the Anglo-American attack on Iraq in 2003 (Bindi 2022: 236). Apart from this divergence within the EU, there is also divergence – as well as convergence – between the EU and the US, covered in the next part of this chapter.

6.1.3 Divergence and convergence as characteristic of EU – US relations

The convergence and divergence of the EU and the US are particularly relevant for this research since they are closely related to the concepts of norms and interest, which can either converge or diverge and thus facilitate or complicate relations and have an effect on the strategies and policies of the EU towards the US. The EU and the US are highly interdependent and share many values but still have different approaches towards various issues within the complex international arena (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 304-05).

Common values constitute democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and the two powers regulate the global economy together (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 306), and at least partly based on those shared values, which is also the case in the digital arena as the results of the analysis of this research project show. The EU has been the more potent regulator in this sphere

⁷⁸ 1999, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary joined NATO. 2004, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania followed.

until now, as can be seen by the GDPR and the so-called Brussels Effect⁷⁹. While some values are shared and may lead to potential partnership, most disputes between the EU and the US are based on non-alignment concerning values (Smith and Steffenson 2017: 405). In the digital arena, this can be seen in the area of data protection and data transfers between the US and the EU, with the privacy shield being invalidated in 2016 and debates still going on concerning the new data privacy framework⁸⁰ (see further information in the chapter 6.2.7). Nonetheless, there are also diverging approaches in some fields, leading to a mixture of convergence and competition (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 307), which is also true for the digital arena.

Within the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the precursor of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Europe, or rather the European Economic Community (EEC), and the US frequently experienced disagreements. By 1970, the EEC was considered an economic competitor by the US, as Federiga Bindi (2022: 232) explains: already in that decade, the US demanded higher financial contributions to NATO from the EEC, and there was pressure from the international community on Europe to engage more in international affairs leading to the ‘Declaration on European Identity’, through which the EEC and the US cooperated. Several external events, such as the Arab-Israeli wars, the oil crisis, and the Vietnam War, but also the deteriorated transatlantic relations, tied European countries closer together. At the same time, the US and the Europeans tended to disagree on foreign policy issues.

Divergence and convergence between the EU and the US are often related to the prospective political leaders. European integration was, in general, strongly supported by the US already with its structural foreign policy after the Second World War, mainly through the Marshall Plan; also later on, European integration was supported by the US, which changed with the Trump administration (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 305-06). The transatlantic relationship drastically deteriorated due to withdrawals of the US from different organisations and treaties such as the World Health Organisation, the Iran deal, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) as well as the Paris climate accords, making the US an untrustworthy agent on the international scene (Bindi 2022: 242-43). US President Joe Biden’s foreign policy starkly

⁷⁹ Anu Bradford’s (2020) concept of the Brussels effect explains the compliance of companies with a global presence with the EU’s regulations, such as the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).

⁸⁰ Both the privacy shield and the data privacy framework were or are adequacy decisions, saying that data protection rules in the US were/are similar to the EU’s rules. Thus, data can be allowed to flow freely. The privacy shield was invalidated on 16th July 2020 based on a ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union, the so-called Schrems II judgement referring to the Austrian lawyer Maximilian Schrems, whose NGO NOYB (None of Your Business) brought in the claim that US standards of data protection were not similar to EU standards and thus not sufficient.

contrasts his predecessor's, with a turn back to multilateralism and alliances, his first international visit leading him to Europe (Bindi 2022: 244).

Although a link to different leaders and their different approaches can be ascertained, an evident disparity between the EU and the US regarding the support for international agreements seems independent from leadership; the US has not ratified or not even signed up for over half of international treaties, such as the International Criminal Court, the abolition of the death penalty or biological diversity (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 307). Stephan Keukeleire and Tom Delreux (2022: 307) ascribe this to the US' hesitancy regarding restraining its independence and autonomy due to multilateral frameworks and international rules, while it hesitates far less than the EU concerning coercion and military power. Nonetheless, the two authors still agree with Federiga Bindi's (2022: 242-44) argumentation of a link between the prospective leader and the approach to foreign policy: the extent of this tendency towards unilateralism and coercion depends on the issue as well as on the administration in power. A case in point is Obama's more open approach towards multilateral institutions as opposed to Trump's aversion to those (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 307-08). Concerning the before-mentioned coercive and military power, not the whole of the EU always supports civilian over more coercive military means. There is also tension within the EU, with states like France and the UK, then still a member of the EU, which, for instance, intervened during the Arab Spring, just as the US did (Smith and Steffenson 2017: 404).

The divergence between the EU and the US sometimes developed due to the dominance of the security domain or even the 'securitisation'⁸¹ over other relevant domains of global cooperation, such as the environment, trade or development (Smith 2015: 577). An interesting question is whether this is or will also be valid within the digital sphere, which is beyond the scope of this research project but can certainly be touched upon within the empirical analysis, paving the way for further research in that direction.

One division that has become prominent recently, also with regard to digital issues, is how to approach China. The US focuses on economic and technological risks, while the EU considers its economic ties with China, constituting a vital export market (Bindi 2022: 245), particularly for Germany. Another bone of contention is Russia, which shows that, at times, external events lead to more convergence between the EU's and the US' interests: Russia's invasion of Ukraine

⁸¹ Securitisation is a concept linked to the Copenhagen School referring to the process of turning political issues, for instance climate crisis or migration, into security issues through speech acts.

triggered European actions that had been demanded by the US for a long time, such as a rise in defence expenditure in Europe (Bindi 2022: 246), and a reduction of gas imports from Russia. The US' relation to China also influences US-EU relations in the digital and other realms, as discussed in the following subchapter.

6.1.4 The impact of US-China relations on the cooperation between the EU and the US

The current relations between the EU and the US are highly influenced by the US' relationship and ties with China, which are pretty complex, also in the digital realm, and have been characterised as 'cooperative rivalry' (Nye 2022; Weiss 2022) and as an economic as well as a political rivalry (Lumet 2022). In contrast to these assessments, realists advance the concept of containment as essential for US-China relations (Mearsheimer 2021). Both lenses combined, the realist as well as the neoliberal one, deliver a more holistic picture of the US approach than just using one lens, thus both shall be compared to and contrasted with the EU's approach to China, being tripartite: China is considered a cooperation partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival – which only partly corresponds to the US' approach to China as outlined above. An approximation of the EU's and the US approaches, which will be scrutinised in the following paragraphs, is certainly relevant in the EU's external digital policy towards the US due to China's relevance in the global digital arena and thus also for US foreign policy.

The rivalry between the US and China is characterised as cooperative because crises such as pandemics or the climate crisis have to be dealt with on a global level, so the US and China, as well as other countries, have to cooperate to tackle such challenges (Nye 2022: 1639-41). This is also true for the digital revolution. An essential characteristic of the relationship between the US and China is its multidimensional nature and interdependence between those two countries. That is why the analogy of today's relations between the US and China with the relations between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War is not coherent: there were no interdependences between the Soviet Union and the US, and the relationship was two-dimensional (military and economy) (Nye 2022: 1639-41). Nonetheless, this analogy is often made, although very complex interdependences exist, particularly in the digital realm, for instance, regarding the convoluted supply chains of semiconductors or data flows.

On the other hand, Mearsheimer⁸² (2021) does not argue along the lines of cooperative rivalry but instead considers containment an essential concept and measures that presidents before Donald Trump and Joe Biden should have taken. He evaluates the support China was given in its economic development by the US and the West in general as a mistake since this made it possible for China to develop into a regional or almost a ‘great power’; such powers are known to strive for hegemony according to the realist school, which Mearsheimer adheres to. The assumption that economic development and integration of China will lead to its democratisation and respect for human rights transpired as a fallacy advocated by the liberal school. China used subsidies, espionage and trade barriers to develop and protect its domestic industries (Beckley 2022), including its digital industries. Still, even if China has not become a liberal country respecting the same values as countries of the West, it was integrated into the global system. Weiss (2022) considers this a success since this is to be preferred to China outside of a worldwide value-based system, leaving China entirely out of reach.

Since the rise of China and its containment is a significant issue for the US, it also influences the relations between the EU and the US, which is also true for the EU’s relations with China. The EU considers China a cooperation partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival, as agreed within the European Council already in 2019 (European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2019) and as still valid and agreed on in 2023 (European Council 2023c). Nonetheless, Sabine Weyand (2022), Director General of the European Commission’s DG Trade, recognises a shift towards systemic rivalry but also argues that if the EU only cooperated and engaged with countries adhering to the same values as we do, we would soon be alone. The confrontation between China and the US would significantly impact the global level while our values and the EU in general would be weakened and side-lined. This is also why she considers the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI)⁸³ with China a vital instrument, which aims to balance asymmetries within the relationship between the EU and China.

In short, the current relations between the US and China contain the following ingredients: complacency concerning peace since it is believed that due to interdependence, there would be no war; rise of nationalism on both sides; ‘clumsy’ and unclear policies like Chinese wolf

⁸² Despite Mearsheimer’s arguments concerning the Ukraine in recent times being contested, his arguments in this context help comparing and contrasting the US approach to China with the EU’s approach.

⁸³ The Comprehensive Agreement on Investment between the EU and China (CAI) was signed in December 2020 after seven years of negotiations but has yet to be ratified by the European Parliament. Further steps have been suspended until now.

warrior diplomacy⁸⁴ or compromises concerning Taiwan again by both parties (Nye 2022: 1641-43). The future will show which new world order will be built: whether it will be based on exclusiveness or inclusiveness, whether it will be based on leadership in strategic technologies, as was the case with all past world orders, or not. One difference with past world orders might be the focus on values, such as democracy, rather than on capitalism, which was the core of the liberal world order (Beckley 2022) and is associated with economic gains rather than values.

6.1.5 Concluding remarks on EU-US relations

While Western Europe and the United States can look back at a long history of cooperation, there were not only cooperative times, such as after the Second World War or after the 9/11 attacks, but also less cooperative times, such as the years after the Iraq War and Donald Trump's presidency (Bindi 2022: 229). Nonetheless, the economic ties between the two regions deepened and widened even during times of trouble, and the two powers can be considered equal partners regarding the economic arena (Smith and Steffenson 2017: 390). The EU-US relations can present several successes, such as the nuclear deal with Iran, the NATO operation in Libya, and counterterrorism (Bindi 2022: 239). It remains to be seen how the cooperation or lack of it between the EU and the US evolves further in the digital realm and which successes can be celebrated in this field in the future.

It is relevant for the EU to consider – also concerning its external digital policy – that the US still enjoys the most extensive structural power in today's international system, which has primarily been defined by the US, also through the leading international organisations mainly founded after the Second World War (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 304). Another aspect is the US' preference to work with the most powerful member states of the EU bilaterally, if possible (meaning if there is no evident EU competence), which also allows for a divide-and-rule-strategy, facilitated by EU members' differing interests, policies, and capabilities (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 305). This strategy is not only applied by the US but also by

⁸⁴ China has replaced its friendly diplomacy with wolf warrior diplomacy, meaning that Chinese diplomats immediately react with harsh comments whenever China is criticised by foreign actors (see Beckley, Michael: 2022)

China in different spheres, also the digital one. Said digital sphere will be the focus of the following subchapter.

6.2 EU-US relations within the digital realm

After the overview of EU-US relations in general in the preceding chapter, this chapter focuses on digital aspects within the relations between the two actors and thus delivers the second part of the context in which the empirical analysis (chapter 6.3) is embedded.

The chapter starts by scrutinising the relations between the EU and the US in the digital field regarding the necessity of cooperation with like-minded partners, the US' suitability as such a like-minded partner, and China's role within and impact on EU-US relations within the digital. A focus on the roles and challenges of different functional subfields of the digital relevant for EU-US relations follows. Those will already be related to the theoretical framework of different norms and interests as well as dimensions of external digital relations. Outlining the background and conditions within which the empirical analysis is conducted will help contextualising the results concerning the EU's actorness in the global digital field.

6.2.1 The US as a like-minded partner in the digital sphere

Since the US is an important global player in the digital sphere, particularly regarding its successful digital industry resulting in global digital giants of US origin such as Meta or Google, considerations of how to cooperate with the US are relevant for the EU's external digital policy towards this powerful actor. For this, the actual like-mindedness of the US regarding common norms is relevant as is in how far it is necessary or advisable to align with the US in a way that could be associated with 'bandwagoning', as opposed to China, another important global player in the digital sphere.

Decisions taken by US politicians with regard to the Internet in the past still have an impact on today's Internet. It was the Clinton-Gore administration that commercialised and privatised the Internet in the mid-1990s based on the decision that the Internet should be linked to US economic power rather than military power (Carr 2016: 13). The multi-stakeholder governance system of the Internet was designed to enhance US economic power and even to give the US a

certain hegemonic power over the Internet (Carr 2016: 185-86). It still prevails today and thus still serves US economic interests.

Taking the lead in ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) was considered crucial by different political leaders in the US, also President Obama, who saw US leadership in this field as a way to stay a leader in the future (Carr 2016: 188). In the meantime, the EU has at least been successfully closing the digital gap between itself and the US concerning the share of companies having adopted advanced digital technologies so that in 2022, the levels of the two regions were similar (Scott 2023k). The adoption of advanced digital technologies is just one aspect, though, since economically speaking, it is particularly important how many actual digital giants there are and how powerful those are.

Nonetheless, the promotion of norms and values seem to have become more relevant in US conceptions of power in the information age, while during the industrial ages, states rather tried to acquire more material power than rivals in order to take or keep leadership (Carr 2016: 188-89). If material power, or in other words economic or security interests are pushed into the background while norms and values gain ground, the question remains if those norms of the US in the digital realm correspond to the EU's. If this is the case, those values could be promoted in alignment vis-à-vis other global digital powers, which then could be reined in, be it other state actors, for instance China, or private ones, such as Meta or Apple.

The Declaration for the Future of the Internet (White House 2023), a declaration initiated by the US and signed by 61 countries in March 2023, leads one to assess the EU and the US as like-minded partners, at least concerning certain values, if not all. The declaration demands a global, open, affordable and accessible Internet based on fundamental human rights and trust governed by multiple stakeholders. An open and affordable Internet is not only a human right but can also be assigned to the norm of social solidarity due to affordability. Respect for human rights is a core norm, and social solidarity is a minor norm, according to Ian Manners (2002). In this instance, the EU and the US have the same values and thus are potential like-minded partners in this field. The cooperation of the EU and the US was already mentioned in interviews concerning the EU's digital policy towards Africa, for instance in the interview 2/1. The EU and the US do cooperate concerning digital issues in multilateral fora such as the OECD, the G7, the G20, the UN or the Council of Europe (in the latter the US is only an observer member). The cooperation concerns in particular digital infrastructure and AI, such as

the so-called Hiroshima AI process within the G7 or the Global Digital Compact within the UN, or the CRM club (critical raw materials club) (interview 3/3).

The relevance of cooperation between the EU and like-minded partners, particularly the US, in the digital field is often declared. The Director of Policy Strategy and Outreach at the Directorate General Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CNECT), Thibault Kleiner, put forward that it was not enough for the EU to be a market but that it had to become an economic power (Molly Killeen 2022). According to him, many experts agree that the EU has to work with like-minded partners, such as the US, but also Japan, Korea, Australia, Taiwan, and New Zealand, in order to reduce its dependence on authoritarian regimes concerning crucial products and to develop its competitiveness. The same is true for the United States, which need support from like-minded democracies for its policies addressing current technological challenges (Kornbluh and Tréhu 2023), which the US often links to China.

It is not only the respective administrations that suggest the EU and the US should cooperate, but also digital industry representatives argue along these lines, although oriented towards economic gains. Ten digital industry organisations from eight Central Eastern European countries expressed their wish to strengthen transatlantic cooperation in strategic areas and also to open the market to trade with different potential partners, such as the US, Israel or South Korea (Adigital et al. 2023). Their goal is to increase European investment and support European start-ups. Another example is the joint statement of DIGITALEUROPE's⁸⁵ Director-General Cecilia Bonefeld-Dahl and United States Representative Jerry McNerney, Chair of the Congressional AI Caucus, stressing the need for cooperation between the EU and the US on artificial intelligence (Bonefeld-Dahl and McNerney 2022). The differences and similarities of those two potential partners are relevant in terms of the future success of such cooperation. Thus, they, are the point of concern in this chapter's next part.

6.2.2 Differences and similarities between the EU and the US in the digital realm – an overview

⁸⁵ DIGITAL EUROPE is a European trade association representing the digital industry. It was founded in 1999 under the name of European Information and Communications Technology Industry Association (EICTA), and was rebranded in 2009 as DIGITAL EUROPE.

The UN's Digital Development Compass shall be consulted to scrutinise the differences and similarities between the EU and the US in a structured manner. Those differences are likely to have an impact on the EU's external digital policy towards the US and will further help putting this research into context.

The UN's Digital Compass shows the digital maturity of a country and is based on six pillars: people, connectivity, government, regulation, economy and digital public infrastructure. Each country is assessed concerning those pillars and categorised into five stages of digital readiness in the following ascending order: basic (=1), opportunistic (=2), systematic (=3), differentiating (=4) and transformational (=5)⁸⁶. Further, there is an overall evaluation taking into account all pillars. While there is an evaluation of the United States as a whole, there is none of the European Union as a whole but only of its member states, as with many indices. Thus, the averages of the respective pillars of all EU-member states were calculated by the author in order to be able to compare the whole of the EU with the US. The individual

⁸⁶ The explanations concerning the Digital Development Compass are reduced to what is necessary for an understanding of the differences between the EU and the US. Further information can be retrieved at: <https://www.digitaldevelopmentcompass.org/>, accessed 3.12.2023.

Table 43: Digital Development Compass – scores of the EU's member states & the EU average compared to the US score

Member State	People	Connectivity	Government	Regulation	Economy	Digital Public Infrastructure	Overall
Austria	4.49	3.49	4.50	3.74	2.65	4.24	3
Belgium	4.39	3.63	4.08	4.1	2.62	4.56	3
Bulgaria	3.58	3.28	4.17	3.92	0.91	4.09	3
Croatia	4.06	3.41	3.61	3.74	0.87	4.80	3
Cyprus	4.03	3.78	3.83	3.22	1.64	3.33	3
Czechia	4.26	3.52	4.2	3.65	1.26	4.14	3
Denmark	4.34	3.89	4.46	4.34	2.82	4.73	4
Estonia	4.45	3.43	4.46	4.42	2.21	4.8	4
Finland	4.66	3.92	4.22	4.63	3.15	4.42	4
France	4.43	3.91	4.68	4.39	2.9	4.8	4
Germany	4.57	3.94	4.55	4.43	1.59	4.12	4
Greece	4.32	3.54	4.05	3.56	2.13	4.8	3
Hungary	4.02	3.39	3.84	3.61	1.01	4.56	3
Ireland	3.79	3.63	4.00	3.77	2.66	3.1	3
Italy	4.01	3.48	4.45	3.77	2.3	4.49	3
Latvia	4.27	3.71	4.54	2.90	1.09	4.02	3
Lithuania	4.19	3.74	4.42	3.65	2.51	4.38	3
Luxembourg	4.32	3.63	4.29	3.77	2.12	4.32	3
Malta	4.40	4.00	4.07	3.61	1.11	4.13	3
Netherlands (the)	4.34	3.84	4.70	3.87	2.87	3.43	3
Poland	3.50	3.74	4.32	3.29	0.81	4.38	3
Portugal	4.33	3.45	4.64	4.27	1.09	4.68	3
Romania	3.25	3.44	3.82	3.35	0.94	3.9	3
Slovakia	3.29	3.43	4.15	3.60	0.98	4.24	3
Slovenia	4.40	3.90	4.63	4.00	0.66	4.26	3
Spain	4.52	3.88	4.66	3.69	2.41	4.24	3
Sweden	3.89	3.92	4.55	4.10	1.58	4.14	3
EU-Average	4.2	3.7	4.3	3.8	1.8	4.3	3
US	4.2	3.9	4.5	4.2	3.8	3.8	4

Table created based on data from: <https://www.digitaldevelopmentcompass.org/data>, member states that lead in one category are highlighted in blue; the dimension in which they rank first is highlighted in red. 20.9.2024

As can be seen from the table showing the scores of the different EU member states, the weaknesses and strengths of the individual member states are very similar. The EU member states leading in one of the pillars are highlighted in blue and the respective pillar in which they lead is highlighted in red. The EU's most obvious weakness is the economy, which is a strength of the US. Finland, as the leading member state in this dimension, comes closest to the US' score, but still does not reach it. In the 'people' dimension, the EU average and the US score are exactly the same, and concerning 'connectivity', 'government' and 'regulation', the US is only slightly in the lead. Particularly the latter, the US lead regarding regulation, might strike the reader as surprising (which was definitely the case for the author). One can see that there are differences within the EU. Although much regulation is done by the EU, there can of course be differences concerning national regulations and also concerning implementation of EU regulation, which leads to the differences and weaknesses concerning implementation – as has been seen with the GDPR - might have led to lower scores in this dimension. In the dimension of digital public infrastructure, it is the other way round, and the EU takes the lead, but again only slightly. Thus, the main difference, as was already highlighted before, lies in the economic dimension with a clear lead of the US, where many big digital companies originate from. It is particularly the obvious lead of the US in this dimension which generates the 'overall' difference, taking into account all dimensions.

The difference within this economic dimension might be due to the US' focus on economic gains rather than on integrating more norm-based goals into its strategies. This focus can be seen when taking US venture capital investment into account, which is four times the one of the EU, nonetheless with the venture capital volumes of Germany and France growing (Fanni and Hauser 2023: 23). Another reason why European companies lag behind when it comes to investment in new technologies is reported to be due to the focus of European CEOs on responses to the climate change, while US American CEOs focus more on digital and technology (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2023). With regard to the chip industry, both blocs use subsidies to reshore it and make supply chains more secure, which is why many fear a subsidy race (Scott 2023n). According to a study published by the *Institut Jacques Delors*, the EU is the global leader in the export of digital services, even leaving the US and China behind. This raises the importance of sections on digital issues, such as data localisation, in trade agreements, which is only the case in the agreements with Japan, UK and Canada so far (Agence Europe 2023b). The EU could also use its crucial global role in digital services to influence global digital rules in different areas, such as AI or competition, to ensure the prevalence of the

European model of digital governance (Köhler-Suzuki 2023). These recommendations relate to the EU's normative power in the digital realm.

Digital policymaking in the US and the EU is different in that often, the general approach at the heart of policymaking is already different, which relates to the differences already outlined above. Further, the EU is not as 'hawkish' towards China as the US is, which is also true for digital policymaking, since the EU's stance is not to target one specific country only with, for instance, trade restrictions, but it has a more general approach (Scott 2023n). Although a tech war between the US and the EU is most unlikely, there are tensions and a specific discord between the two blocs due to said differences. At times, the EU is even said to try to block out the US and other states from standard setting in the digital realm, sometimes called 'protectionist cybersovereignty' (Robertson 2022). The views on how AI should be regulated are also quite different, with the EU relying on its AI Act and leaving security issues partly to its member states due to a mix of competences – the competences concerning the digital single market lying with the EU and the competences concerning national security lying with the member states, but both being intertwined regarding AI. At the same time, the US' approach is steered toward security issues (Scott 2023n). The analysis of the documents and interviews will show where the actual focus of the EU lies when it comes to its dealings vis-à-vis the US in the digital realm. It shall also be noted that EU member countries are not entirely homogeneous, but there are still differences within the EU, as can also be seen by their scores in the UN's digital development compass.

This first outline of differences and similarities between the EU and the US concerning digitalisation gave a general overview of the different issues impacting the EU's external digital policy towards the US. The following subchapters will delve into the different subfields of digital policy and the relations between the EU and the US within those. Those subfields already hint at the various domains to be identified in the empirical analysis of the documents and interviews, within which different norms and interests will be identified, giving the reader an idea of which norms and interests prevail within which domain.

6.2.3 EU – US – China: a triangle within the global digital sphere

When presenting her new book, “Digital Empires: The Global Battle to Regulate Technology”, Anu Bradford stated that the EU does not have to be forced into a position between the two digital leaders, the United States and China, but does have other options (cited in Vela 2023c). She also indicated that while the Digital Services Act (DSA) is a suitable measure to restrain the likes of Elon Musk and other leaders within the digital industry, there would be further options if the EU could offer alternatives to X and other digital platforms. Bradford (2023) argues the three actors have different regulatory models: the US has a market-driven regulatory model, China a state-driven regulatory model and the EU a rights-driven regulatory model. Those regulatory models are competing partly contradict each other leading to battles concerning technological leadership as well as to regulatory battles. Within the latter, the US tries to defend its techno-libertarian approach, the EU tries to disseminate a rights-based approach through regulation and China an authoritarian approach through exports and building of infrastructure (see for instance Besch et al. 2020: 14; Scott 2023i) . This corresponds to the digital development approaches of those three actors: the US market-centred, liberal model, focusing on self-regulation, the state-centred model of China, and the European human-centred model of digital development (Fritzsche and Spoiala 2021), as outlined in chapter 5.3.4.1 on the geopolitical aspects of the digital actions of said three actors in Africa. The regulatory approaches correspond to their approaches on digital development, since it is also the regulation they try to export and disseminate, also in Africa, particularly through what Ian Manners (Manners 2002: 245) calls transference. Those different approaches certainly have a vital influence on their relations regarding digital issues. With regard to the EU and the US (excluding China), those differences in approaches were also suggested by interviewees rather than differences in values, which will be further discussed in the empirical chapters.

Apart from those different models or approaches, it is also the transformation of the (digital) economy in the last decades, which has had an influence on the relations between the EU and the US. The knowledge-based economy transformed geopolitics in the 1980s, when China was not a relevant global actor; the current data-driven economy again transformed geopolitics, but with China being a very relevant actor, whose rise the US wants to constrain (Ciuriak 2023). Thus, political gains come into play here as relevant type of interest within the digital realm.

Partly, the EU and the US are ‘digital allies’ countering China, particularly when it comes to standards for facial recognition or data protection as well as offering alternatives to, for instance, African countries with regard to AI-based surveillance practices, which all have geopolitical implications (Peterson and Hoffman 2022). Those can be linked to potential

political gains through activities in different domains, such as transregional governance or development cooperation in the digital realm. China has been exporting software to support authoritarian leaders abroad in their surveillance of their citizens to more than 80 countries and it has also installed digital hardware (Beckley 2022). The EU and the US try to counter Chinese influence through such transference in the digital field in third countries, for example in a project in which the two parties build inclusive and secure IT infrastructure for schools in Jamaica and Kenya, particularly in remote areas (Lau 2022b).

As already outlined in the subchapter on the impact of US-China relations on the cooperation between the EU and the US in general (not only in the digital field), a new world order with the focus on values might be developing. While past world orders were built on ingredients of exclusiveness, a common enemy and leadership in currently relevant technologies, this does not have to be the case for future world orders, which could also be based on inclusiveness, a positive sum game and values (Weiss 2022) rather than on a competitive advantage and economic interests. Such a change towards values could then be seen in the digital realm, also in the EU's digital foreign policy, particularly with regard to a digital leader like the US.

Norms and values certainly play an important role in actors' relations in the digital field as already seen in the EU's external relations towards Africa, even if interests play an important role as well – this seems to depend on the perspective as the results of the empirical analysis of this research project show. It is the building of common norms by like-minded partners as opposed to the norms of an enemy that will play an important role in the potential building of a new world order, as is already done within the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (Beckley 2022). Based on this assumption, it would thus be norms that create the exclusiveness of a future world order, with a common enemy adhering to different values than the leading alliance. With the rising relevance of digital issues for geopolitics and in the international sphere in general, it might be, in particular, digital norms that create alliances and enemies within a new world order. This reasoning would also explain the importance different powers, such as China, the US and also the EU place on trying to gain an influence on the development of digital norms on the African continent, as can be seen in the empirical analysis of the digital external policy of the EU towards Africa.

This at least partial similarity of values of the EU and the US in the digital arena and the lack of such similarity of values with China is one reason why some argue that the EU does not stand between the US and China in an equidistant sense, but that the EU is nearer to the US, which is

why the two should be allies in the fight against Chinese influence in global digital issues (Lau 2022b; Torreblanca 2023). There is already a substantial amount of cooperation between the EU and the US for instance via the Trade and Technology Council or the flows of data between the two blocs (Meyers 2023), as will be outlined below in the respective subchapters.

Although the EU might be more similar to the US than to China regarding digital values, there are still differences regarding values and interests as well as disagreements concerning specific policies and instruments. The US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)⁸⁷ is a case in point since it has severe consequences on the European economy (Lau 2022b; Ringhof 2022). The frictions between the two ‘partners in technology’ are based on mutual mistrust with the EU believing the US uses China as an excuse for such protectionist industrial policies like the IRA and the US considering EU policies such as the Digital Services Act (DSA) or the Digital Markets Act (DMA) as being targeted specifically against US American technology firms (Meyers 2023). The DSA and the DMA do aim at reining in big tech-firms, notwithstanding where they originate from or where their headquarters are. The two policies give small firms the possibility to develop and compete in the digital sectors, which supports the development of potential future European digital giants. This support for potential ‘Western’ technology firms is also in the interest of the US, not only in the interest of the EU, though (Meyers 2023), leading to potential economic gains and greater influence over digital standards. What needs to be avoided are modern industrial policies in the EU and the US that are both inward looking and thus would outcompete each other, leading to a lose-lose situation (Bildt 2022). So, what the EU and the US should actually aim at, is the to reach – together – relative gains vis-à-vis China in the digital realm. This endeavour might even include further like-minded partners. It is in particular such ‘relative’ gains as opposed to ‘absolute’ gains that are important in this context, since the aim is to be the stronger actor (or stronger actors in an alliance), which aligns with the realist assumption of preference of relative gains over absolute gains. China might see such a move of the EU to align with the US as a form of bandwagoning, since the EU, while being global regulatory power in the field of digitalisation, is not on a par with the US and China regarding a digital industry with a global impact.

⁸⁷ The Inflation Reduction Act is a US federal law signed into law on 16 August 2022 and thus is also effective from that date onwards. It aims to reduce inflation and carbon emissions by roughly 40 per cent by 2030. This is done by a down payment on deficit reduction and investments in energy security and climate change programmes supporting domestic energy production.

Although the US criticises the EU's AI Act for hampering innovation, the act is potentially important for the US as well, since it makes AI more attractive for customers and investors alike by making AI more trustworthy (Meyers 2023). This helps countering Chinese efforts in the race for leadership in the field of AI, in which China has the immense advantage of having large masses of data available for machine learning due to a lack of data protection (Nye 2022: 1647-49). In this context of protection of personal data, particularly the EU, but also the US, are more value-oriented, which can hinder economic gains in the short term but might help economic gains in the long term, since trustworthiness is valued by customers (Meyers 2023).

Working together in order to counter China will definitely be an important issue for the EU-US relationship in the digital realm in the years to come. China has used its economic leverage in a coercive way already and will do so in the future according to its 14th five-year-plan⁸⁸ with the goal of dominating so-called chokepoints – services and goods other countries are dependent on – in global networks (Beckley 2022). This is where the EU's concept and goal of strategic autonomy serves as a counter-measure. Just as the US, the EU is already trying to diversify its supply chains by extending the range of its partners rather than focusing only on one or two allies. This is particularly important for European SMEs, otherwise getting entangled in the tensions between the US and China (Krpata 2022).

Apart from China, also Russia is an important player in the digital sphere, since the data-driven economy opened opportunities with regard to (dis)information warfare, which Russia seized for instance during the 2016 US presidential campaign, supporting Trump (Ciuriak 2023). This common enemy, who is seen as an imminent threat, while China is seen as a long-term threat (Bildt 2022), also leads to a cooperation between the EU and the US who try to support their shared values and interests on the global digital arena. This can also be seen in the negotiations and discussions concerning the United Nations Cybercrime Convention bringing to light the different approaches of the EU and the US or Western countries in general on the one hand and those of China, Russia and other authoritarian regimes (North Korea, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Belarus, Cambodia) on the other: the focus of the Western NGOs and also the Commission of the EU is on fundamental freedoms, human rights, in particular data protection and the respect of international law (Clasen 2023a). Those differences in Western (also EU and

⁸⁸ The official name of this plan is the '14th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development and Long-range Objectives Through the Year 2035 of the People's Republic of China', setting economic goals in order to strengthen Chinese economy.

US) versus non-Western approaches are closely linked to norms in the digital realm as identified and analysed in this research.

Tobias Gehrke and Julian Ringhof (2023) suggest that the main goal of the EU should be to minimise the opportunities of China as well as the US and other global digital players to put pressure on the EU within the technological realm in the future. Their policy recommendation is the development of a new strategic technology doctrine and upgrading the EU's export control. This is based on the fact that the US and China are strategic competitors in the realm of technology which is why the US restricts trade in key technologies with China and also wants the EU and its members states to do the same. The EU thus needs clearer policies towards China with a focus on de-risking in order to defend its interests according to the two authors. Decoupling has in the meantime been considered impossible due to global interdependences, so de-risking and strategic autonomy are the important goals and concepts the EU bases its global digital strategies on (see for instance Gehrke and Ringhof 2023; Lau 2023a; Meyers 2023).

To what extent and in relation to which types of interests and norms and within which domains will be seen in the results of the empirical analysis of this study. Before that, the following parts of the chapter will give an overview of the different digital issues that are relevant with regard to the EU's external digital policy towards the US.

6.2.4 Semiconductors: investments and export controls

Access to semiconductors is highly relevant in the global digital realm, thus actors try to secure access to those, which can be done by diversifying sources and also by investing in domestic production. This digital sector would also lend itself for the EU member states to profit from a certain 'balancing' out of rising Chinese and US power in this field through common action by and within the EU.

The subsidies in relation with the US Chips Act helped the US being in the lead concerning investments of chip producing companies such as TSMC, Intel and Infineon, bringing their manufacturing to the US (Scott 2023j). This has been countered by the EU's chip subsidy programme ('Chips Act'), which has led to almost 100 billion dollars of investment while the US Chips Act led to an investment of 166 billion dollars (Scott 2023d). The EU's goal is to

gain 20 % of the global chips market by 2030 with the help of the Chips Act, but where the funding should come from is not clear yet and there are still issues such as a tilt towards larger member states concerning new chip factories due to higher probability of extensive public funding in for instance Germany or France (Haeck 2022, 2023b). The relevance of individual member states in the EU's external digital policy can be seen in this context, which was also referred to by interviewees, though concerning an individual digital foreign policy of members states in general not particularly regarding semiconductors.

Apart from investments into its own chip production, the US, towards the end of 2022, also imposed further export bans to China concerning high-end chip production machinery, which was followed by an agreement between the US, Japan and the Netherlands not to deliver chipmaking facilities to China in order to prevent China from producing advanced chips at the beginning of 2023 (Scott 2023e). Negotiations were said to have been long (Lau 2023b), which might be due to the fact that for smaller countries, such as the Netherlands, it is not easy to follow through with such an export ban: first, relations with China as the second largest economy are crucial; and second, the Netherlands does not want to anger other EU member states (Scott 2023e). This might also be the reason why the Dutch government did not comment on the chip deal until the beginning of March 2023, when it finally communicated that the goal was to prevent the use of Dutch technology for weapons of mass destruction, mirroring the argument used by the US in October 2022 with relation to its export controls (Haeck 2023a). The microchip deal⁸⁹, with the major example of the Netherlands' export controls, shows that the Netherlands as member state of the EU and the US have been closing ranks when it comes to China; nonetheless, the EU was hesitating for a long time, since China has been an important trading partner for some EU member states, particularly Germany (Vela 2023b). On the other hand, introducing export controls on semiconductors was not very hurtful for the Dutch company ASML since demand is that high that they are not dependent on Chinese sales (interview 3/6).

The US actually has similar issues since China is the US' biggest customer of chips but at the same time also the US' biggest threat (Heath 2022). Although value-based arguments are put forward when it comes to restricting dealings with China, such as its dealing with the Uyghurs minority, economic interests seem to be at the origin of the outlined issues concerning

⁸⁹ The microchip deal is an initiative of the US with the aim of suppressing the supply of most advanced microchips to China. It is a deal between the only three countries where manufacturers of machinery to produce cutting-edge microchips are located: US, Japan and the Netherlands.

restrictions and export controls. It is certain that the US cannot act alone when it comes to decoupling from China despite its dominant position in the global supply chains of semiconductors, but needs partners (Bauerle Danzmann and Kilcrease 2023). This is where the EU's and US' cooperation within the Trade and Technology Council (see also respective chapter 6.2.6) seems to be an important opportunity to find common ground with regard to interests and norms in order to counter actors like China having different values and interests.

6.2.5 Artificial intelligence

Rulemaking in the sphere of artificial intelligence is advanced by different actors, the main ones are the US, the EU, China, the UK and private companies or lobbies (Scott 2023d). So, states have to deal with powerful businesses not only with other states as potential opponents or partners and EU member states need the EU's 'might' for balancing out other players' power, in order to even have a say on the global AI arena. All those relevant actors have partly aligned, partly opposing interests and values. But even within the EU, there are different approaches of different EU institutions and EU member states, all potentially influencing the EU's external digital policy towards the US.

Three member states, France, Germany and Italy prefer an approach based on self-regulation for AI foundation models (Agence Europe 2023a), which is similar to the usual US-American approach to digital regulation. Those same three member states also agree that the EU shall focus on innovation rather than regulation when it comes to AI, citing China and the US as investing far more than the EU does in this technology (Agence Europe 2023d). Concerning the focus of regulation – namely on either dangers lying in the distant future or on more immediate dangers – Germany, France and Italy prefer a focus on the long-term risks (Scott 2023d). Differences between member states with regard to their separate external digital policies in general, not only concerning AI, were also cited by interviewees, which will be discussed in the respective empirical chapter. In this context it is again relevant that interviewee partly saw the EU as the origin of norms and the member states, particularly large member states, as the origin of interests in the EU's external digital policy, aligning with the realist state- and interest-centredness.

Within the private sector, there are the same two approaches to AI regulation: one focusing on immediate dangers that should be regulated and one focusing on greater dangers lying in the

more distant future. In Washington, it seems that the latter has won for now, meaning that Washington aligns with the views of Germany, France and Italy (Scott 2023d). So, representatives and CEOs of US-American technology companies commend an approach to AI regulation that is based on national security risks (the long-term perspective) rather than risks concerning transparency or data bias (imminent dangers), which are the focus in the EU's AI Act (Scott 2023f). The focus of American businesses is thus on security interests rather than on values like fostering equality and fighting discrimination, which seems to be the EU's focus.

There is not only rivalry and different views concerning AI between different member states and within the private sector, but also between different Commissioners, which was also suggested by some interviewees as outlined in the empirical chapter. Margrethe Vestager, responsible for digitalisation ('A Europe Fit for the Digital Age') wants to establish a Code of Conduct together with the US, while Thierry Breton, responsible for the EU's internal market, put forward the idea of an AI Pact based on the forthcoming AI Act; Věra Jourová, responsible for values and transparency, would like to see the issue of disinformation and generative AI integrated into the voluntary Code of Practice on disinformation (Bertuzzi 2023d). The reason for those outreach activities is that it will still take around two to three years until the AI Act will be in force (Bertuzzi 2023d), but those initiatives are also important with regard to the EU as a global player in the field of AI, particularly concerning in how far the EU will work with the US or with other like-minded partners. This again is vital in relation to the question of interests and norms: the probability of such alliances depends on the EU's potential partners' norms and interests and in how far those align with the EU's norms, but also in how far the EU is prepared to align its norms and interests with those of others. In this context, Bahar Rumelili's categorisation, introduced in the chapter on theoretical concepts and approaches, seems relevant.

Table 44: Perceptions of normativity and relations between states

	EU construction of target state	
Reaction of target state	Inherent difference	Acquired difference
Recognition	Transactional cooperation	Normative convergence
Rejection	Conflict	Normative dissociation

Table based on Bahar Rumelili (2021: 203)

Assuming the EU assesses the differences with the US in the field of AI as acquired – otherwise the US would not be considered a possible like-minded partner nor would the EU have entered into talks within the TTC – there are two possible outcomes: normative convergence and

normative dissociation. This is linked to the different (normative) approaches of the US and the EU regarding AI and in how far those two actors react to the different approach of the respective partner. The differences of those two approaches shall thus be outlined in the following paragraphs.

A first overview shall be given based on: Charlotte Stix' (2023) report: on the one hand, there is the United States National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST), which devised the voluntary AI Risk Management Framework as well as a playbook for its application; on the other hand, there is the EU with its AI Act. As already specified, the US framework is voluntary while the AI Act is binding. Both approaches address the following issues: „the validity and reliability of output, retaining data privacy, ensuring safe, secure and resilient, transparent, explainable and interpretable operations of AI systems“ (Stix 2023). The NIST also has a focus on fairness, i.e., bias should be avoided not only but also with regard to race and gender, while the EU's approach focuses particularly on bias resulting from unrepresentative data. The NIST only set the goals, leaving the details to developers and users while the EU prefers specific technical standards according to the requirements set in the AI Act for risk and quality management, reporting, data governance, transparency, human oversight, conformity assessment, accuracy, robustness and cybersecurity. The NIST relates trustworthiness of AI systems to their sensitivity to context, which also has an effect on the risk management, while the European Commission's draft does not contain an explicit reference to context sensitivity.

Apart from those specific differences as outlined by Charlotte Stix, there is also a more basic difference – namely that it seems to be a challenge to align the EU's definition of AI with the one of the US, with EPP members having a tendency to the US definition while more progressive MEPs would prefer a broader definition (Bertuzzi 2023c). In his report for the Brookings institution, Alex Angler summarised the differences and similarities to the point (Engler 2023): the EU's approach is one of a comprehensive legislation for different digital environments, while the US approach is characterised by a focus on non-regulatory infrastructure. What both, the EU and the US agree on are the risk-based approach, key element of trustworthy AI, and both consider international standards a relevant element. Nonetheless, those risk management regimes are quite different when it comes to specifics and details. Pointedly put, the US rather uses the 'carrot' method while the EU uses the 'stick' method (Chatterjee 2022).

Related to values, the EU and the US are often argued to not be on the same page. The US aims at more relaxed rules, and the EU criticises the US just like it criticises China when it comes to dangerous AI potentially harming people's fundamental rights (Scott 2023l). The US has also been trying to water down the Convention on Artificial Intelligence of the Council of Europe by limiting its application to public bodies only, with the support of the United Kingdom, Canada and Israel (Bertuzzi 2023e). This again shows the normative difference between the EU and the US. The empirical analysis of this research project delivers further insights into this issue.

When it comes to business, though, it is the US and China that have a comparative advantage and are in advance, which is why European companies are not yet developing general purpose AI nor will they do so in the near future (Future of Life Institute 2022). Many European companies rely, for instance, on the general-purpose AI system GPT-3 by OpenAI, a research laboratory based in San Francisco (Future of Life Institute 2022). Thus, there seems to be a focus on values by the EU and a focus on economic gains in the US as well as in China.

This might be the reason why the US does see potential areas to work together with China in the field of AI, such as biomedical research and other broader issues, but cooperation is excluded in the area of national security (Scott 2023o). Thus, within the domain of the digital industry, economic interests might be shared and cooperation could be possible, but when it comes to the domain of security issues - also in the digital realm - cooperation seems unlikely. Such an industry-led approach to AI is not only used in the US and China, but also in Japan and the UK (Scott 2023p). Thus, these countries would also be potential partners for the US, while they are less compatible with the EU's government-led approach. This might also influence the value versus interest orientation of the EU's goals with regard to its digital policy towards the US.

A certain common ground can be seen by the fact that just like with the GDPR, which some US states took as a model, there are a few US states like Connecticut, California and Colorado having designed similar AI laws as those in the EU, with a focus on risk assessment and audits (Scott 2023q). Further, the EU and the US signed an 'administrative agreement on Artificial Intelligence for the Public Good' in the context of the Trade and Technology Council, which will be explained below in the next subchapter. The goal is to cooperate on the use of AI, particularly AI modelling, i.e. machine learning algorithms, in different sectors, such as health care, agriculture and particularly concerning the efficient management of electric grids

including balancing the grid's loads so breakdowns and blackouts can be avoided (Smalley 2023). Training data will not be shared, though, as personal data is difficult to untangle from big data sets, which are needed for training AI (Bertuzzi 2023b).

After this outline of the differences between but also within the EU and the US concerning AI – which can be found in the normative as well as the regulatory approaches, in the orientation towards different interests as well as in differing foci regarding risks – we shall turn to the cooperation between the EU and the US in the Trade and Technology Council (TTC).

6.2.6 The Trade and Technology Council (TTC)

The situation within the TTC is complex since there is on the one hand competition between the EU and the US, but on the other hand there is a framework of integrated cooperation in different digital sectors, such as ICT and cloud services, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and clean technologies (Hamilton 2023). It is in this context that the negotiations within the Trade and Technology Council (TTC) take place.

The Trade and Technology Council was launched on 15th June 2021 at an EU-US Summit. After that, five ministerial meetings have taken place as of January 2024, one in 2021 (29th September), the inaugural meeting in Pittsburgh, two in 2022 (16th May in Paris-Saclay, 5th Dec. in Maryland), one on 31st May 2023 in Luleå, and one at the end of January 2024 in Washington. The TTC is supposed to be a forum of cooperation in order to support the transatlantic alliance but in 2024 a turning point was reached: Europe focuses on digital sovereignty, with US tech companies feeling discriminated against while the US furthers its new industrial policy (Echikson et al. 2024). So, on the one hand we have a geopolitical interest of the EU and on the other an economic interest on the side of the US. With the election in the EU and the US this year, the future of the TTC is uncertain but both sides are hoping for continuance and have taken all necessary provisions so the dialogue can continue if this is still desired by future leaders (interviewee 20)⁹⁰. The areas of policy cooperation include: subsidies, semiconductor production diversification, non-market policies and practices, export controls, best practices (Hess and Kleinhans 2023: 42-43), investment screening, supply chain resilience,

⁹⁰ As of 13th November, the continuance is still unclear according to Christoph Wigand, the representative of the EU Commission in Austria.

artificial intelligence and global trade challenges (Lumet 2022). Cooperation in the areas of research, crisis response and workforce development are also goals of the TTC (Hess and Kleinhans 2023: 43-44). The focus of the last TTC meeting before the EU and US elections, were: artificial intelligence, export controls or bans on certain goods from being shipped to autocratic countries, and additional U.S.-EU funding for developing economies in order to support them in rolling out 5G telecommunications networks and upgrading cybersecurity capabilities (Scott 2023m). According to Sabine Weyand (2022), the goal of the TTC is not common regulations in areas where both parties have already decided on their individual and differing objectives, but rather to focus on those areas where there is mutual understanding and to avoid newly emerging barriers to transatlantic relations. Thus the focus is on where there are common interests and values, thus where the two can be considered like-minded partners.

The efficacy of the Trade and Technology Council is estimated differently by different experts. Julian Ringhof (2022) argues that the TTC will not yield highly visible results and will not make big steps but is rather a tool that will lead to small steps, finding common ground and values, on which tech policy can be based on. In contrast to Ringhof, Frances Burwell and Georg Riekeles (2023) assess the TTC as a useful instrument without any restrictions based on the hitherto results, particularly regarding geopolitics. Luca Bertuzzi's (Bertuzzi 2023a) assessment is more critical, ascribing a declining priority of the TTC for the EU and the US alike, with the renewed outbreak of the Middle-Eastern conflicts and crucial elections in 2024 in the EU and the US. The technology reporter argues that while the initiative had momentum at its beginning in 2021, the outcomes in the following meetings became smaller and smaller, with the meeting in May 2023 in Sweden having led to no other advances than the coordination of sanctions against Russia. He further contends that the goals of the two parties seem to be diverging, with the EU aiming at bringing the US on board concerning the EU's digital regulations; at the same time, the US might see this council instead as a platform to ally with the EU against China and Russia. Another focus of the EU is the US' protectionist inflationary reduction act (IRA), which might lead to an unfair disadvantage for European companies (Ringhof 2022). Nonetheless, the EU and the US do try to cooperate concerning China, but not only within the TTC: number two of the EU's diplomatic service, Stefano Sannino, talks to his counterpart, the Deputy Secretary of State, Wendy Sherman, twice a year about China to align strategically (Lau 2022a). So, it seems that geopolitical interests are in the forefront of the cooperation within the TTC, with the US demanding an alignment of the EU in certain areas.

The US and the EU are aligned when it comes to China since both focus on de-risking rather than decoupling, according to Jose Fernandez, U.S. State Department's undersecretary for economic growth, energy and the environment, also responsible for the TTC (Scott 2023m). The analysis of Mark Scott, Barbara Moens, Sarah Anne Aarup and Doug Palmer (Mark Scott et al. 2023) from Politico paints another picture, arguing that while the latest EU-US Trade and Tech Council in May 2023 was successful in some regards, it was not fruitful concerning China: the US had many references to China in their draft, which EU diplomats deleted and the US wants a harsher and united stance of the West on China, while the EU is divided in this regard. Export controls, which, as mentioned, the US aims at in relation to China, are not a competence of the Commission, who leads the TTC, but a competence of member states (Ringhof 2022). Thus, a realist or intergovernmental lens focusing on the member states as actors makes sense in this context, whose interests might be balanced with a supranational value-based approach, though.

Von der Leyen, outlining a new and coordinated position on China with President Joe Biden in March 2023, as well as others from the Commission, would take a tough stance. However, some EU member states, like France, do not want to displease an important trading partner arguing that such a tough stance on China rather benefits US-American companies than European ones (Mark Scott et al. 2023), meaning the EU would lose while the US would win economic gains. It is on the one hand trade on the other the need to work with China on global issues that holds Europe back from following the US in their strong line against China (Mark Scott et al. 2023). The latter issue, working with China on global issues, should and might be important for the US as well, though. One question that arises regarding the TTC in this context is if the tensions between the US and EU have a positive effect on the relations between the EU and China (Lau 2022a), leaving the EU with potential economic gains.

If the EU and the US do not work together in areas such as cybersecurity, disinformation and the support of developing countries concerning digitalisation, China's global 'normative' influence in the digital influence might rise. Therefore, Frances Burwell and George Riekeles (2023) hold that the EU and the US should cooperate on strengthening and disseminating their shared values such as democracy and rule of law together with like-minded countries, for instance Australia, Japan, India and others, in the field of digitalisation. In this regard, the question is in how far the digital norms of the EU and the US align or not and if they do how they should preferably be diffused. A common stance against China is also important in Africa, which is even treated in discussions within the framework of the EU-US TTC: a memorandum

of understanding was signed between US and European development banks with the aim of better cooperation in Africa and other regions of the world with regard to investment (Heath 2023). This is interesting considering that the US is also seen as a rivalling actor and investor not only as a partner in Africa by the EU, as the results of the analysis in the chapter on the EU's digital policy towards Africa show, leaving Africa with a considerable amount of derivative power.

Regarding the norms and interests that are included in the TTC negotiations – be it deliberately or unintentionally – it is interesting to see where those originate. The US government's unofficial rule is that it is the White House National Security Council and the US Commerce Department that are behind the US digital foreign policy; but with Nathaniel Fick (digital ambassador of the US since September 2022), the State Department also contributes to the US' external digital policy (Scott 2023o). TTC meetings are co-chaired by European Commission Executive Vice President Margrethe Vestager, European Commission Executive Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis, United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken, United States Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, and United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai; European Commissioner Thierry Breton also participates in the TTC meetings (European Commission 2023b). Different departments and directorates of the two negotiating parties stand for and introduce different norms and interests into strategies and policies. The US Department of Commerce potentially advances commercial interests, the US National Security Council security interests and the US State Department geopolitical interests but also values, such as democracy and rule of law. The same is true for the European side, with for instance EU Commissioner for a 'Europe Fit for the Digital Age' Margrethe Vestager focusing on fair competition, having consequences for consumers and their rights, and EU Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton having his focus on economic gains within the domain of digital industry. Data protection, which is related to the value of respect for human rights, a core norm according to Ian Mannings (2002: 242-43), is covered in the negotiations between the EU and the US with relation to the Data Privacy Framework, covered in the next subchapter.

6.2.7 Data flows between the EU and the US: from Safe Harbour to the Data Privacy Framework

The protection of data flows between the EU and the US is an important bone of contention between the two actors and thus a highly relevant aspect of the EU's external digital policy towards the US. The development of this framework, which, if working efficiently and correctly can be considered a procedural norm diffusion (Manners 2002), shall be outlined in order to uncover the challenges concerning the diverging normative approaches of the EU and the US.

In 2015, the European Court of Justice declared the Safe Harbour mechanism as invalid since it does not provide a suitable degree of protection for citizens' private information. It was the Austrian then-law student Max Schrems, who took a case to the Irish High Court after the revelation by Edward Snowden concerning US mass surveillance programmes gaining access to private data through the commercial framework of Safe Harbour (Agence Europe 2015). In analytical terms, this means that the norm of respect of human rights was not adhered to due to the prioritisation of security gains over the respect of this value. At that time, Commissioners Frans Timmermans and Vera Jourová argued that a balance between the respect of privacy and European business interests has to be found (Agence Europe 2015), showing that in this case a norm and an interest - human rights and economic gains - contradict each other based on the official communication of a high official. This can also be related to the EU being a regulatory power (see for instance Bradford 2020), aiming at regulating every aspect and dimension of the digital, so that different dimensions are considered and balanced.

The consequence of this invalidation was that other instruments, such as standard contractual clauses or internal business rules in case of data transfer between subsidiaries, had to be used until a new legal framework would be in place. Negotiations on such a 'new Safe Harbour agreement', later called the Privacy Shield, had already begun in 2013, but were not concluded at that point of time in 2015. Already then, the issue was the EU's focus on necessity and proportionality regarding exceptions for US surveillance authorities in case of concerns of national security (Agence Europe 2015).

In 2020, Max Schrems could claim his next victory, when said Privacy Shield, which was considered adequate by the EU Commission on 12th July 2016, was declared invalid as well. According to the judges in Luxembourg, American surveillance agencies were not sufficiently restricted in their access to data of European citizens pursuant to the principle of proportionality (Agence Europe 2020). Again, the diametrical opposition of the norm of respect for the human right of the protection of private information and economic gains can be seen, in particular

regarding positive reactions of data protection advocates and negative reactions by business lobbies, such as ‘BusinessEurope’ or ‘DIGITALEUROPE (Agence Europe 2020).

After the invalidation of the Safe Harbour as well as the Privacy Shield agreements, the next framework for data flows between the EU and the US had to be devised, the Privacy Shield 2.0, later called the Data Privacy Framework. In March 2022, US President Joe Biden and the Commission President Ursula von der Leyen signed a political agreement, based on which Biden signed the Executive Order 14086 concerning transatlantic data flows. The Executive Order enables EU citizens to file law suits with the US Data Protection Review Court if they feel their data has been collected unlawfully (Manancourt et al. 2022). In turn, Washington can also flag any security concerns with regard to data of US citizens flowing to the EU. So, the before-mentioned redress mechanism can be withheld if a country or region does not meet US standards (Manancourt et al. 2022). After two years of negotiations on a new data transfer deal between the EU and the US, the European Commission finally published its draft adequacy decision, meaning that it sees the protection of the data of EU citizens according to the Executive Order as similar to data protection under the rules of the GDPR (Ustaran et al. 2023). After this, the EDPB (European Data Protection Board) issued its (non-binding) opinion, which was then approved by a committee of national representatives (Bertuzzi 2022a) and the European Parliament finally had the right of scrutiny (Ustaran et al. 2023). The national data protection authorities have issued mixed opinions: some were very critical, such as the DPA of Baden-Wurttemberg, others were quite positive, such as the DPA of Hamburg (Ustaran et al. 2023). Thus, the interests and values of different EU bodies that were potentially included into this adequacy decision differ.

On 10th July 2023, the European Commission adopted its adequacy decision concerning the framework, but probability is high that the ‘new privacy shield’ will again be challenged in court, which would mean that the agreement might be invalid in about two years (Scott 2022). According to the journalist Luca Bertuzzi (2022a), Max Schrems is of the opinion that this new framework will not hold, because the responsible Data Protection Review Court is no actual court, as it is part of the executive rather than the judicative branch. Schrems further states that while the US agreed to reduce its intelligence activities to a necessary and proportionate scope, necessity and proportionality being two important elements of EU law, American and European perspectives on what is considered necessary and proportionate differ greatly (Bertuzzi 2022a). A French MEP, Philippe Latombe, has already filed an application for the annulment of the adequacy decision on the EU-US Data Privacy Framework (DPF) due to a lack compliance

with the GDPR and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Agence Europe 2023c). Philippe Latombe and Max Schrems are supported by members of the German Bundestag, who also see the EU-US data transfer deal critically (Clasen 2023b).

The point of contention concerning the EU-US data deal is the question in how far bulk surveillance according to Section 702 of the U.S. Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) is a breach of EU data protection law (Scott 2023a). This had already been flagged in 2020 by the CJEU, but still has not been solved according to Max Schrems (Roussi and Bordelon 2023). Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance act (FISA) is considered controversial since it allows US intelligence services to monitor foreign citizens and also some US citizens (Roussi and Bordelon 2023; Scott 2023k). This surveillance provision can only be changed by the US Congress, but lawmakers do not seem interested in advancing such changes, and there is not much pressure from the Tech lobby either, presenting itself as convinced that the new agreement is suitable and will hold (Roussi and Bordelon 2023).

The Republican party criticised the surveillance of US citizens based on FISA and there were two new competing bills that could replace section 702, one restricting possibilities concerning the surveillance of US citizens (not of foreign citizens, though) one widening the general possibilities of surveillance agencies (Scott 2023k). The current rules expired on 31 December 2023 and were extended four months so a compromise could be found. Even US politicians see this section of the FISA critically, but are only willing to change it to protect the rights of US citizens, their voters, not those of EU citizens. The norm of human rights, which is, according to Ian Manners (2002: 242-43), a core norm of the EU, is thus not respected. It seems a reasonable expectation that the ECJ will again declare this new framework invalid, based on the argument that the human right to protection of private information is not adhered to.

Coming back to the table regarding different types of how the EU constructs a target state (see table 45 below), in that case the US, and how the target state reacts, the following can be concluded: the US is again seen as having acquired differences concerning the value of data privacy but also as in the end having converged thanks to President Biden's Executive Order 14086. The invalidations of the forerunners, the Privacy Shield as well as the Safe Harbour Agreement, show that assumed normative convergence was actually not achieved, but that there was still normative dissociation. According to above mentioned reactions to the DPF by Max Schrems and others, normative dissociation might again be detected, after a first assumption of convergence.

Table 45: Perceptions of normativity and relations between states

	EU construction of target state	
Reaction of target state	Inherent difference	Acquired difference
Recognition	Transactional cooperation	Normative convergence
Rejection	Conflict	Normative dissociation

Table based on Bahar Rumelili (2021: 203)

The EU uses the format of adequacy decisions for data exchange with many other countries as well. Apart from its framework for data transfer with the US, there are active adequacy decisions concerning Andorra, Argentina, Canada, Faroe Island, Guernsey, Israel, Isle of Man, Japan, Jersey, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Uruguay as of January 2024 (European Commission 2023a). Granting such adequacy agreements leads to an increase of digital trade between those countries that have adequacy agreements with the EU, but this is mostly linked to the EU granting adequacy to the US; only then, there is a rise in digital trade according to researchers of the think tank European Centre for International Political Economy (ECIPE) (Martina F. Ferracane et al. 2023). This puts Anu Bradford's 'Brussels effect'⁹¹ into a new perspective or undermines it to a certain extent, linking the EU's regulatory power to the US (Scott 2023h).

Apart from seemingly playing a part in the EU's role as a regulatory power, the US also tries to expand its own regulatory or normative power. The US has been trying to create a rival data transfer structure to the EU's, the Global Cross-Border Privacy Rules Declaration, established 2022, with Canada, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, and the United States of America as signatories as of January 2023 (US Department of Commerce 2022). The goal is to disseminate existing data rules of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a regional trade body, whose (voluntary) standards should make it possible for local companies to move data freely between countries (Voss 2019). China has also been attempting to extend its own privacy rules (Scott 2022). Thus, data protection and privacy have become global issues, with different actors striving for leadership and seemingly, the preferred method in this context is a procedural diffusion.

To summarise, the US and the EU find it difficult to agree on data protection standards because of the US' neoliberal policies, the lobbying power of the American tech industry and differing legal structures on both sides of the Atlantic (Voss 2019). It is thus a difference in the regulatory

⁹¹ The Brussels effect refers to the de jure or de facto validity of EU norms in other regions of the world. For details, please consult chapter 3.1.1 Normative Power Europe, where this concept is explained thoroughly.

approach as well as the US' economic interests adding to this 'bone of contention'. The US adheres to a post hoc market-based model, trying to find a balance between socioeconomic benefits of data economies and privacy risks, while the EU adheres to an ex ante state-market model emphasising privacy rights (Guay and Birch 2022). The goal of both is consumer trust (Guay and Birch 2022), which can be linked to the norm of consumer rights as used in the empirical analysis of this research project. Nonetheless, from the EU's perspective, the focus is more on the right of citizens than consumers, turning the focus to human rather than consumer rights. Further, both the US and the EU as well as other powers are interested in disseminating their privacy regimes, not only through transference, but there is also a turn towards procedural diffusion. Not only the EU strives for global normative power in this relevant field of privacy and data protection, thus it is not only the Brussels effect that is at work in this field, although it is the dominant effect until now.

6.2.8 Further issues: cyber security, 5/6G, fair share, techplomacy and digital skills

Further issues relevant in the EU's external digital policy towards the US shall be shortly outlined in order to provide a context, in which the results of the empirical analysis, presented in the following chapter, will be embedded.

Cybersecurity

In the field of cybersecurity, the EU and the US cooperate through the EU-US Cyber Dialogue. The last EU-US Cyber Dialogue was already the ninth and took place in Brussels from 6th to 7th December 2023. Based on the press statement of the European Commission (European Commission 2023c), the key priorities still are, as already set out in the Joint Statement by Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and EU Commissioner for Internal Market Thierry Breton (European Commission 2023d): security of digital products and related cybersecurity standards, cyber resilience of critical infrastructure, impact and opportunities of emerging technologies (such as artificial intelligence and post-quantum cryptography) and cooperation between respective cybersecurity agencies. The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) and the United States Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) also officialised a working agreement covering cyber awareness and training, best practice exchange, and knowledge sharing for common situational

awareness. Further, a Pilot EU-U.S. Cyber Fellowship was launched with representatives from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and agencies having exchanges with European and EU Member State officials working in cybersecurity. The EU and the US will also work on mutual recognition of the EU Cyber Resilience Act and the U.S. Cyber Trust Mark, cybersecurity labelling programmes and regulations for Internet of Things (IoT) devices.

Concerning other countries and regions, an important common goal is the enhancement of global cyber resilience and capacity building in Ukraine, Moldova, Western Balkans, Africa, the Indo-Pacific, and Latin America with a view to ensuring coherence in the EU's and the US' action. This is also interesting with regard to the EU's digital policies towards Africa, for which the activities of the US in Africa also play a role as can be seen from the results of this research project as outlined in the chapter on the EU's digital policy towards Africa (see chapter 5.3.4.1).

Another important global actor with regard to cybersecurity is Russia but also other global actors executing malicious cyber activities targeted at supply chains, critical infrastructure and intellectual property as well as ransomware attacks. Those issues were discussed as having to be tackled and solved jointly. Nonetheless, the goal is to not only tackle these problems bilaterally, but also within the frameworks of multilateral institutions and regional organisations, such as the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Regional Forum, the G7, as well as the G20. Further broad cross-regional cooperation should also be sought with Latin America, Indo-Pacific states, and Africa. The next U.S.-EU Cyber Dialogue will take place in Washington in 2024.

With regard to the empirical analysis carried out in this research project, it will be interesting to see which values and interests are in the foreground in the cyber security domain; to see if it is only security gains that are relevant or also other interests; to see if values explicitly mentioned in the Commission's press statement (European Commission 2023c) – the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (the latter corresponds to Mannes' norms of liberty and anti-discrimination) – score high in the analysis.

Apart from national cybersecurity issues, relating to geopolitical interests but also values, it is also the private cybersecurity domain that is relevant, which relates to economic interests. It is sometimes argued that EU cybersecurity companies are typically less competitive than their international counterparts, have more difficulties to scale up but that if they in the end are

successful, they are often sold to American or Chinese companies (Bertuzzi and Killeen 2022). Thus, what comes in here, is not only a security gain but also an economic gain. Due to today's geopolitical significance of cyber security, home-grown, domestic actors would be highly recommendable (Bertuzzi and Killeen 2022), so the EU is not dependent on others, such as the US or China (see for instance Macron 2020). The European Investment Bank and the European Commission thus drafted a report suggesting the implementation of a EU Cybersecurity Investment Platform, since the problems of EU cyber security companies are similar to those of digital companies in general: lack of public programmes and a difficult access to funding (Bertuzzi and Killeen 2022).

Based on the outlined literature and reports, geopolitical and security interests and values, in particular the value of democracy – regarding disinformation during elections – are in the forefront on the national level, and on the private business level, the economic interest is prominent.

5G/6G

On a business level, it is not only cybersecurity companies, but digital companies or even giants in general, that are relevant, which is why the European Tech Champions fund (European Tech Champions Initiative ECTI) has been launched. The goal is to stimulate investment and also to prevent EU technology companies from being bought out by investors from third countries (Bertuzzi 2023c). The fund will be managed by the European Investment Fund (EIF).

This fund could also be used for 5G or 6G providers. In this particular field, the EU is again a laggard, with 15.6 % of 5G patents declared in the EU as of 2022, as opposed to 26.8 % of Chinese patents and 17.8 % of US patents. Europe is the leader in the standard setting for this mobile communications technology, though, with 37 % of the cumulative standards contributions as of 2022 compared to 34 % of Chinese standards and 15.9 % of US standards (Scott 2023b).

This standard setting is not dominated by states, though. It is big tech companies that hold the actual power. As Mark Scott (2023c) reports, the way such standardisation works in technology is that industry-led groups decide which company's intellectual property will become the global standard, and thus will subsequently be licensed so everybody can use it. China Mobile has already issued its 6G recommendations, according to Scott, hoping others to follow those. Important European players are Nokia and Ericsson; an important US-American player is Intel,

but also South Korean Samsung is relevant competition. In China, there are Huawei and ZTE, which are also global players but whose products are banned in the US as well as in some European countries, as outlined earlier. While those globally important companies follow their own business interests, their success is in the economic but also geopolitical interest of the countries where they have their headquarters, which will be further outlined in the following paragraphs.

The US and the EU succeeded in influencing third countries such as Costa Rica, the Philippines, Jamaica and Kenya to turn away from the Chinese 5G provider Huawei, with EU companies Nokia and Ericsson being ready to take over any contracts (Pollet and Hendel 2023). While this discourse around private companies highlights the power of such private actors as opposed to public actors, the focus is not only on their privacy but also on the foreign nature of some companies (Obendiek 2023: 201) through which public actors could exert influence.

The 6G issue is also a relevant topic being discussed within the framework of the TTC (Trade and Technology Council). Since standardisation in the digital realm has become an important geopolitical tool, the already starting meetings of standardisation bodies with relation to 6G are a target for many players. What the West does is to try to have developing economies in their rather than in China's sphere of influence on trusted networks (Pollet and Hendel 2023), which aligns with the findings in the preceding empirical chapter on the EU's digital policies towards Africa in general, not only with regard to 5G and 6G networks. The US might be a partner and a competitor in this at the same time, with similar values in the realm of 5G and 6G technology, a common enemy – China – with completely different values in this domain, but also with the US' own economic and geopolitical interests on the African continent. The latter, the geopolitical goals, might be better served together with the EU, though.

Thierry Breton's 'Fair share' model

A prominent current example of the EU's and the US's different interests in the digital domain constitutes the 'sender pays' or 'fair share' model, which Thierry Breton would like to introduce. Commissioner Breton (Vela 2023a) plans on making Big Tech companies, such as Netflix or Google pay for infrastructure in order to improve EU connectivity and to develop 5G more quickly. Such high-capacity networks are absolutely necessary with the exponentially growing amounts of data that have to be sent and exchanged quickly for businesses to thrive. It is expensive to provide such networks, which is why extensive financial means are needed,

potentially delivered by (US American) digital giants, if the regulation will actually be adopted and enter into force. The US, on the other hand, has its eye rather set on Open RAN (Radio Access Network)⁹², enabling the likes of Cisco to make use of existing hardware, rather than developing new 5G and 6G networks, which the EU does not favour, since this would make American digital giants more competitive still (Scott 2023q). Even if the values of the EU and the US are similar, it is a challenge to work together to advance values in order to counter the influence of Chinese diverging values on a global scale, since EU and US interests only partly converge.

Not only standardisation but also allowing (or not) certain technologies or firms into one's national territory explicitly for security reasons has geopolitical and economic consequences. In the US, a law was proposed in March 2023, which would give the US Commerce Department the power to decide if a technology poses a threat to national security and thus if it may be used within the US (Lekatis 2023; Scott 2023g). Technology originating from the EU will pass this test with high probability and thus there would be a potential market in the US. Nonetheless, considering US protectionist measures, for instance the tariffs on steel and aluminium, leads one to infer that such protectionism might also be extended to the digital realm. In such a case, security interests are put forward as argument, but there are economic and political gains that follow said measure.

Techplomacy

As there are many globally active digital companies from the US, also the interactions between the EU and those companies are a relevant part of the context within which the EU negotiates and discusses digital policies with the US administration. Those relations with tech-companies have been more and more structured and professionalised, with Denmark and France being pioneers (Danish Government and French Government 2019; Wædegaard 2021) and arguing for the relevance of what they call 'techplomacy', also on a European level.

On the first of September 2022, a new EU 'techplomacy' office was opened in Silicon Valley, being tasked with the promotion of EU standards, technologies, digital policies and governance models through cooperation with US stakeholders (Agence Europe 2022; European Council 2023b) in support of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (Bertuzzi 2022b). While the

⁹² Open RAN is a non-proprietary radio access network ensuring interoperability between cellular network equipment from different vendors.

EU delegation has its office in Washington, this office in San Francisco is an additional ‘embassy to US Big Tech’ as it is sometimes called, with the focus on cyber and hybrid threats as well as information manipulation and foreign interference, according to Josep Borrell (Agence Europe 2022).

With the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA) entering into force in November 2022, and the application of the rules in February and March 2024 respectively, there has been much to discuss with Big Tech in a diplomatic way.⁹³ The EU aims at having its legislation properly implemented on the one hand but does not want to lose Big Tech as partner either, particularly for its extensive plans concerning semiconductor production, digitisation of public services, digital IDs and the deployment of high-speed Internet connections (Stolton 2022). Thus, diplomacy has to be used to explain the EU’s measures and underlying interests and values as well as to understand how those policies and also the explanations are perceived by the companies and the US. Only this will make it possible to further react and adapt the EU’s actions as well as to cooperate with the US in this but also other fields within the digital realm.

Digital skills

Apart from patents and the presence of digital giants, the EU also lags behind the US and China regarding its citizens’ digital skills. The US also partly lacks digital talent, but they are able to attract talent, while the EU is not (Boone and Haas 2022: 2), thus, there is a skills gap between the EU and the US. This lack of skill holds back the development of the European digital economy. The European Institute of Innovation and Technology in Budapest devised a plan to develop the deep tech skills⁹⁴ of one million Europeans by 2025 (Smith-Meyer 2022). It remains to be seen how quickly and in how far this skills gap can be closed, which could have effects on economic as well as security gains, considering cybersecurity agencies as well as newly founded digital companies in need of expert staff.

6.2.9 Concluding Remarks on the EU-US relationship in the digital realm

⁹³ In contrast to the GDPR, which is enforced by member states, the DMA and DSA will be centrally enforced by the Commission.

⁹⁴ Deep tech skills are not only digital skills, that would be too narrow, but those skills are rather about making linkages between different fields which should help further innovation.

To put it in a nutshell, the relationship between the EU and the US is characterised by both, divergence and convergence, but the US is still the EU's preferred partner in the global arena (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 324; Smith and Steffenson 2017: 388). It is not only this ambivalence between divergence and convergence but also rivalry and partnership in the global arena that has been a constant theme of EU-US relations (Smith and Steffenson 2017: 389). Building a well-functioning and effective relationship with the US has an impact on the EU's role and power on the global stage (Smith and Steffenson 2017: 415), which is also true in this new geopolitical 'battlefield' of digitalisation and digital issues. As Michael H. Smith (2015: 578) states in his analysis: "[...] there is no area of European foreign policy that is untouched by the presence and influence of the US." Thus, also the EU's digital foreign policy is influenced by its transatlantic counterpart – in the role of a partner with similar values and converging interests in some areas, as an adversary with diverging interests and values in other issue areas. It remains to be seen how the relationship between the two powers will develop in the digital realm.

What could certainly be seen by analysing the context is that although individual member states play a role concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US, which aligns with realist assumptions, it is powerful and globally active digital companies and their interests that also play an influential role, aligning with an assumption of the neoliberal school of international relations. The rising importance of techplomacy underpins the importance of the business sector in international digital relations as does their power with relation to global standard setting.

The empirical analysis realised within this research project delivers a mapping of the norms, interests and domains relevant within this relationship regarding the EU's digital foreign policy and how it is seen by its partner but also partial adversary, the US. Already by scrutinising the context within which the EU builds its digital policy towards the US in this subchapter, it could be seen that the domains of digital industry, of digital security, as well as economic and geopolitical gains seem to play an important role. The analysis of the documents as well as interviews delves deeper into these issues and delivers an overview of the relevant norms, interests, domains as well as how they relate to each other concerning the EU's self-portrayal as well as how the EU is perceived.

6.3 Norm- versus interest-orientation in the EU's external digital policy towards the US

In this empirical chapter, the analysis based on the frequency analysis⁹⁵ concerning norms and interests as well as their subcategories and the domains of the EU's external digital policy towards the US is presented for all three perspectives – projected image, perspectives of EU-insiders and EU-outsiders. Those are then compared and contrasted and the EU's type of digital actor is assessed and discussed. The results are further related to additional themes, which could be identified to be pertinent with regard to norms and interests.

6.3.1 The EU's projected image in its external digital policy towards the US

As in the chapter on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, the first perspective treated will be how the EU presents itself, this time towards the US. The perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US by insiders and outsiders will be covered in the subchapters following this one.

6.3.1.1 Process of document analysis

Since the process of document analysis was already explained in detail in the respective chapter on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa (see 5.3.1.1), only the most essential points shall be repeated, and the specificities of the document analysis concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US shall be outlined.

The documents were selected through research on the EU's website for relevant documents, i.e., documents concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US outlining the EU's goals. The analysis was focused on documents that were as current as possible, going back in time only to scrutinise if there were relevant changes in regularly published documents, such as the press releases related to the Trade and Technology Council (TTC) or the Cyber Dialogues, to see if the analysis of documents related to further TTCs or Cyber Dialogues would present an added value and thus should be included or not. The interviewees were also confronted with the analysed documents and asked for additional documents they considered relevant to the research at hand to ensure no relevant documents would be missed.

⁹⁵ According to Mayring, Gläser-Laudel as well as Saldana as outlined in the chapter on research design.

Some documents were skimmed but in the end were not included in the analysis since they were not suitable, for instance the Commission’s Implementing Decision of 10.7.2023 pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the adequate level of protection of personal data under the EU-US Data Privacy Framework. Such documents without parts on strategic considerations are concerned with legal details rather than the EU’s goals, which are the unit of analysis in this research project. Thus, documents not outlining the EU’s objectives were useless and had to be excluded. Documents of a strategic rather than legal nature or press releases are more suitable for this research project. Below, the analysed documents are listed in a topical rather than a chronological order, thus already outlining the most relevant issues in the EU’s external digital policy towards the US: privacy, trade and competition.

Table 46: List of analysed documents (EU’s external digital policy towards the US)

	Document	Year
1	Press release Data Privacy Framework	2023
2	Didier Reynders on Data Privacy Framework	2023
3	Vera Jourova on Data Privacy Framework	2023
4	Trade and Technology Council on Commission’s website	2023
5	Margrethe Vestager concerning Trade and Technology Council	2024
6	Press release Trade and Technology Council	2024
7	Press release 9 th EU-US Cyber Dialogue	2023
8	Press release 1 st EU-US Cyber dialogue	2014
9	Press release 3rd Joint Technology Competition Policy Dialogue	2023
10	Margrethe Vestager concerning 3rd Joint Technology Competition Policy Dialogue	2023

The procedure of analysis was the same as with the documents in the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa, identifying goals mentioned in the documents and analysing those concerning two dimensions: the norm–interest dimension and the topical dimension (= domains). The first means that the goals are identified as either value- or interest-based and then allocated to different types of norms and interests. Concerning the second – the topical dimension – the goals are ascribed to a topical domain. The various types of norms, interests, and the different topical domains can be found in the table below.

Table 47: Norms, interests and domains within EU external digital policy

Norms	Interests	Domains of EU external digital policy
• peace • liberty • democracy • rule of law • respect for human rights • social solidarity • anti-discrimination • sustainable development • good governance • inter-regional solidarity • consumer rights	• (geo)political gains • economic gains • security gains	• transregional governance in digital realm (e.g. standards concerning the internet) • (digital) industry (digital industry itself and effects of digitalisation on any industrial sector) • digital trade • security issues in the digital realm, e.g. cyberattacks, hybrid threats, cybersecurity • development cooperation in the digital realm • societal digital issues • digital issues in the public sector e.g. e-governance, e-health

As already stressed in the chapter on research design, the exact numbers are only tools, not the goal of this research project. The aim is to gain an overview of the EU's external digital policy towards the US. Detecting tendencies towards norms or interests, specific types of norms and interests, and particular domains shall help gain this overview.

As in the chapter on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, intra-coder reliability was considered at all times. The coding was revisited several times and compared to the coding in the documents as well as interviews with relation to the EU's external digital policy towards Africa to ensure coherence.

6.3.1.2 Mastered challenges of document analysis

Since analysing the documents about the EU's external digital policy towards the US did not present particular challenges, the challenges mentioned in the respective chapter on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa (see chapter 5.3.2.1) shall not be repeated to avoid redundancy.

6.3.1.3 Results of analysis – the EU’s projected image of its external digital policy towards the US

Table 48: Norms versus interests: the EU’s projected image of its external digital policy towards the US

	Numbers	Percentages
Norm-based goals	51	63%
Interest-based goals	30	37%
Total number of goals mentioned	81	

Distinguishing between norms and interests in the EU’s official documents will help to assess if the EU has already adopted the language of power (Borrell 2022) and transformed to a more interest-oriented actor. Eighty-one goals were identified in the analysed documents, of which fifty-one were norm-based and thirty interest-based. Thus, the EU projects itself as an actor focusing on values but not disregarding its own interests. Regarding the results of the analysis of the individual documents, the documents concerning the Trade and Technology Council and the Joint Technology Competition Policy Dialogue are more balanced regarding norms and interests. In contrast, the documents concerning the Cyber Dialogue⁹⁶ (documents 7 and 8) are more oriented towards norms. The following table shows the different types of norms found during the analysis of the documents.

⁹⁶ The Cyber Dialogue focuses on cybersecurity issues while the Trade and Technology Council as well as the Joint Technology Competition Policy Dialogue focus on economic and commercial issues within the digital realm.

Table 49: Norm categories in the EU's projected image of its external digital policy towards the US

Type of norms	Numbers	Percentages
peace	0	0%
liberty	1	2%
democracy	0	0%
rule of law	6	12%
respect for human rights	6	12%
social solidarity	1	2%
anti-discrimination	1	2%
sustainable development	1	2%
good governance	2	4%
inter-regional solidarity	30	59%
consumer rights	2	4%
norm without allocation to type	1	2%
sum total	51	

Note: The percentages are rounded figures; thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100. The norms are not presented in alphabetical order but in the order according to Manners' order as he listed them in his seminal article (Manners 2002) until his last norm category 'good governance'. The two additional norm categories are mentioned in the order in which they appeared during the analysis.

As can be seen, the norm of inter-regional solidarity is by far the most prevalent, which is valid for the documents concerning the TTC as well as the documents concerning the Cyber Dialogue. This norm category, which was not part of the norms as identified by Ian Manners, was already added in the document analysis concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. Intuitively, one might only expect a focus on inter-regional solidarity in the EU's relations with 'digital laggards', but this solidarity seems to play an essential role in the EU's relations with the US (at least in the EU's official discourse – which is what this subchapter is about), undoubtedly being a global digital leader, which is an interesting empirical finding. For clarification, the reader shall be reminded that the norm of inter-regional solidarity is a category covering goals addressing a gain (economic, political or security gain) for the other party, in that case, the United States. Still, this solidarity goes both ways, with the EU and the US trying to cooperate and work together efficiently by mutually respecting each other's interests. An example of such a normative goal of inter-regional solidarity is the improvement of availability of critical raw materials for both the EU and the US (document 4).

Consumer rights is a norm type added during the analysis since some goals are oriented towards consumers rather than citizens; in the latter case, the norm respect for human rights would be relevant. Both goals allocated to the norm of consumer rights were mentioned in the documents concerning the third Joint Technology Competition Policy Dialogue, which is due to the fact

that competition rules should, in particular, benefit consumers in the digital realm. Such consumer benefits should be distinguished from human rights since the difference is considerable. Although one could suspect that the EU's focus on its digital single market programme might make consumer rights more prevalent, they are not when it comes to the EU's documents regarding the EU's external digital policy towards the US.

The norms identified by Manners are far less prevalent in these documents with rule of law and respect for human rights being the ones that are the most represented among Manners' norms. Both are part of what Manners identified as core norms of the EU. Thus, his distinction between core and minor norms within the types of norms he identified seems to hold in the digital arena. The norm of rule of law was analysed in the two documents concerning the Cyber Dialogue and in Reynders' comments on the Data Privacy Framework (DPF). The norm of respect for human rights was only detected as a basis of goals in the documents concerning the Data Privacy Framework, i.e. all these goals concerned safe data transfers. This norm was absent in the other documents concerning the TTC, competition and the Cyber Dialogue. So, finally, one could say that considering all types of norms, not only those identified by Manners, inter-regional solidarity is 'the' core norm in the EU's external digital relations with the US.

While the different documents differ in their balance between norms and interests analysed, the types of norms are similar. However, the texts differ in the kinds of interests analysed. The following table shows the different categories of interests referred to in the goals mentioned in the documents.

Table 50: Interest categories in the EU's projected image of its external digital policy towards the US

Type of interest	Numbers	Percentages
economic gains	17	57%
political gains	5	17%
security gains	8	27%
interest without allocation to type	0	0%
sum total	30	

note: The percentages are rounded figures. Thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100.

The table shows that political gains do not play a role in the EU's official documents, while the focus of the EU's communication about its external digital policy towards the US is clearly on economic gains, such as the "facilitation of trade in technologies" (document 6). Security gains are also present but far less than economic gains. This is true for documents on the Trade and

Technology Council, the Joint Technology Competition Policy Dialogue as well as documents concerning the Cyber Dialogue. What will be interesting to see is the norm- or interest orientation of the different domains and in how far those different domains are covered in the analysed documents.

Table 51: Domains of the EU's external digital policy towards the US in the EU's projected image

Domains	Numbers	Percentages
transregional governance	17	17%
industry	32	32%
trade	29	29%
security	15	15%
development cooperation	3	3%
society	3	3%
public sector	0	0%
sum total	99	

note: The percentages are rounded figures. Thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100. Allocations to multiple domains were sometimes the case; thus the number of the analysed domains is higher than the number of the analysed goals (which was 81)

As mentioned below the table, some goals were allocated to two domains, since it was unclear which domain was prioritised or was more relevant for this goal. This was only the case for the domains of industry and trade, which were sometimes both referred to within one goal. As already done in the chapter on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, the domains which might not be self-explanatory shall be illustrated with examples of the actual analysis: Transregional governance refers to standard setting across regions (or maybe even on a global level) as is the case concerning the Data Privacy Framework concerning the protection of European citizens' data in a particular way and level that corresponds to what the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) sets out as standard. The domain of 'society' refers to societal issues within the digital realm, such as the following goals as outlined in the document concerning the first EU-US Cyber Dialogue: "foster open societies" and "enable social development" (both on p. 3 of said document).

The two domains that appear the most are industry and trade, and the second most important are transregional governance and security. Allocations to the domains of industry and trade feature in the documents concerning the TTC, competition and the DPF, while no such allocations were made in the documents concerning the Cyber Dialogue since the latter is somewhat concerned with security while the TTC, the DPF and the competition dialogue address industrial and trade issues. This seems evident regarding the TTC and the competition

dialogue, less so for the DPF, where trans-regional governance was found less frequently as industry and trade. The domain of security was only analysed in documents concerning the Cyber Dialogue.

Development cooperation occurs between the EU and the US regarding third countries, such as African countries. This domain could only be detected in the document related to the first Cyber Dialogue. In this context, the digital divide was mentioned explicitly, and the related goals were to “bridge the digital divide” and to “enable economic growth” (p. 3 of said document).

Norm-based and interest-based goals can also be combined if they complement each other and a few such cases could be identified in the analysis, as outlined in the table below.

Table 52: Combinations of norms and interests related to domains in the EU’s projected image of its external digital policy towards the US

	Trade	Industry	Trade/industry ⁹⁷	Security	Sums
Inter-regional solidarity & economic gain	5	3	5		13
Inter-regional solidarity & political gain		3	1		4
Inter-regional solidarity & security gain				5	5
Sum total	5	6	6	5	22

It is all three types of interests that combine with one type of norm, inter-regional solidarity. This is because this combination of norm and interest is due to the fact that goals are directed at a European and a US interest. An example is “The new EU-U.S. Data Privacy Framework will [...] bring legal certainty to companies on both sides of the Atlantic.” (press release on Data Privacy framework, 10.7.2023, p.1). The goal of legal certainty for EU companies is an economic interest. In contrast, from the perspective of the EU, aiming at legal certainty for US-American companies is a norm, namely inter-regional solidarity. Not only trying to comply with the EU’s but also the US’s interests is thus a way to combine an interest and a norm successfully in a complementary way. This combination of norms and interests could be seen in the EU’s external digital policy towards the US in several contexts, particularly in the combination of economic gain and inter-regional solidarity within the digital industry and digital trade domains. This complementary combination of norms and interests speaks well to Raffaella A. Del Sarto’s (2016) argument that the EU often pursues interests and norms at the same time, as explained in the chapter on theoretical concepts. The domains were added to see

⁹⁷ In a few cases, the respective norm- and interest-based goals could not be assigned to one domain, which is why there is one column with a combination of the trade and industry domain.

if there are domains within which a combination of specific types of norms and interests is particularly frequent.

The opposite of such explicit combinations of norm- and interest-based goals would be a conflictual relationship of norms and interests where the policy maker would have to prioritise one goal over the other. Such a relationship between norms and interests could not be detected in the documents, which is not surprising, since if there were such conflictual goals, the policy maker would decide beforehand which goal is prioritised and only mention this in the respective policy documents. Such conflictual relationships could thus be detected in interviews, though.

Table 53: Domains and types of norm/interest in the EU's projected image of its external digital policy towards the US

	Domain							
	Develop- ment coopera- tion	Trans- regional gover- nance	Industry	Public sector	Security	Society	Trade	Sums
Norm type								
Anti-discrimination	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Consumer rights	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	4
Democracy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Inter-regional solidarity	3	2	12	0	8	0	11	36
Good governance	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Liberty	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Peace	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respect for human rights	0	5	1	0	0	0	1	7
Rule of law	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
Social solidarity	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Sustainable development	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Uncategorised	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Sum Norms	3	16	15	0	8	3	15	60
Interest type								
Economic gain	0	0	12	0	0	0	12	24
Political gain	0	0	5	0	0	0	2	7
Security gain	0	1	0	0	7	0	0	8
Uncategorised gain	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sum Interests	0	1	17	0	7	0	14	39
Sums total	3	17	32	0	15	3	29	99

note: Allocations to multiple domains were sometimes the case; thus the sums of the interests and norms in this table do not correspond to the actual number of the analysed goals.

One would intuitively expect some combinations, such as the security domain with security gains, but the domain of security also combines with inter-regional solidarity. This means that in this domain, there is cooperation where the two partners aim to support each other's security, or at least the EU tries to support the US's security, not only its own.

The same is true for the domains of trade and industry, where there is cooperation based on the analysis of a high frequency of combinations of said domains with inter-regional solidarity. Rule of law and respect for human rights are the most prevalent norms in the domain of transregional governance. Due to the lack of goals assigned to political gains, nothing can be found concerning their combination with different domains, which the other perspectives covered by the interviews with EU-insiders as well as outsiders could shed some light on.

All in all, the documents show a clear dominance of norms, with inter-regional solidarity being the most relevant norm and combining mostly with the domains of industry and trade. Before turning to the EU-insiders' perspective, the table showing how to assess the EU's type of global digital actor shall be further completed.

Table 54: The way to assess the EU's global digital actorness

		Projection versus Perception	
		<i>Image projected by the EU</i>	<i>Perception of EU-outsiders</i>
EU external digital policies towards	<i>Africa</i>	Norm-orientation	Interest-orientation
	<i>United States</i>	Norm-orientation	To be analysed in the next subchapters

6.3.2 Perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US by EU-insiders and outsiders

6.3.2.1 Process: conduction and analysis of interviews with EU-insiders and outsiders

6.3.2.2 Mastered challenges: interviews with EU-insiders and outsiders

The reader shall be referred to the respective chapters (5.3.2.1 for the process and 5.3.2.2 for the challenges) in the part dedicated to the EU's external digital policy towards Africa of this

thesis since the process was the same and the challenges similar. This should help to avoid redundancy. As outlined in the chapter before, intra-coder reliability was assured at all times through revisiting past coding and noting down instances of coding that were challenging in a separate list to be consulted later on if necessary.

One hurdle the researcher faced when conducting interviews with experts on the EU-African relations in the digital realm was irrelevant concerning the US, namely telephone or internet connections not working properly. Instead, the time difference and a lack of willingness on the part of US officials to talk to a European researcher due to the potential of addressing sensitive topics produced challenges that fortunately could be overcome, just as all other challenges. Concerning the selection of interviewees, it shall again be highlighted that quality was prioritised over quantity, i.e. the suitability of the interviewee regarding the demanded expertise was the utmost priority. (Potential) interviewees not fulfilling this prerequisite were excluded.

Table 55: List of expert interviews, interview series 3

Interview	Interviewee	Date	EU-insider/outsider	Institution/profession
3/1	17	19.2.2024	EU - outsider	NGO official
3/2	18	19.2.2024	EU - outsider	Advocate of consumer protection
3/3	2	19.2.2024	EU - insider	EEAS official
3/4	19	20.2.2024	EU - outsider	journalist
3/5	20	21.2.2024	EU - insider	EU Commission, Cabinet Vestagher
3/6	21	22.2.2024	EU - outsider	US Think Tank (interviewee based in Europe)
3/7	22	23.2.2024	EU - insider	EU Commission, DG CNECT
3/8	23	26.2.2024	EU - outsider	US Think Tank, US University
3/9	24	28.2.2024	EU - insider	EEAS official
3/10	25	06.3.2024	EU - outsider	US Think Tank, US University
3/11	26	06.3.2024	EU - outsider	US official, Dept. of Commerce
3/12	27	07.3.2024	EU - outsider	European Think Tank
3/13	28	08.3.2024	EU - insider	EEAS official
3/14	29	11.3.2024	EU - outsider	European Think Tank

As can be seen in the table above, the EU-insiders are from different institutions of the EU having responsibilities concerning the EU's external digital policy in order to get different

views from within the EU. The same rationale was followed concerning EU-outsiders, who have positions in NGOs, are US officials or work at think tanks. The interviewees' different backgrounds help cover different perspectives and receive a complete picture of the EU's external digital analysis towards the US.

6.3.2.3 Results of analysis and discussion – internal perception: interviews with EU-insiders

Table 56: Norms versus interests – internal perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US

	Numbers	Percentages
Norm-based goals	32	46%
Interest-based goals	38	54%
Total number of goals mentioned	70	

note: The percentages are rounded figures. Thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100.

To ascertain if the EU-insiders follow the proclaimed more interest-oriented geopolitical tendency as announced by high-ranking EU-politicians (see for instance Breton 2021), the frequency of norm- and interest-based goals in the interviews with EU-officials shall be determined. According to the analysis of interviews with EU-insiders, there is almost a balance between norm- and interest-based goals, with only a slight tendency towards interests as opposed to the projected image with a clear tendency towards norms. This shows that the EU presents itself as a normative actor. At the same time, the EU-insiders interviewed for this research project mentioned more interest-based objectives of the EU in its external digital policy towards the US.

Scrutinising the different interviews, there was a remarkable similarity between the interviewees of the EU Commission, with almost the same results concerning the representation of norms and interests and an apparent prevalence of interests. At the same time, there were significant differences between the EEAS officials: one tended towards norms, one towards interests and one was almost balanced. This seems to be due to their different areas of responsibility. Since the interviewees were granted anonymity, it is not possible to give further information on the sub-units in which the interviewees work. Still, the differences will be discussed later concerning the relations between norms/interests and the analysed domains. This instance shows the importance of analysing the goals with regard to their assignment to different domains. Since it is not possible to refer to the sub-units and the interviewees'

respective domains of responsibility and thus discuss differences in norm- or interest orientation, this has to be done by analysing the different domains that were mentioned in the interviews, as is also explained in the chapter on research design.

Table 57: Norm categories in the internal perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US

Types of norms	Numbers	Percentages
peace	0	0%
liberty	4	13%
democracy	2	6%
rule of law	0	0%
respect for human rights	9	28%
social solidarity	1	3%
anti-discrimination	1	3%
sustainable development	0	0%
good governance	4	13%
inter-regional solidarity	10	31%
consumer rights	1	3%
sum total	32	

Note: The percentages are rounded figures; thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100. The norms are not presented in alphabetical order but in the order according to Manners' order as he listed them in his seminal article (Manners 2002) until his last norm category 'good governance'. The two additional norm categories are mentioned in the order in which they appeared during the analysis.

As in the analysis of the documents, the focus is on the norms of inter-regional solidarity and respect for human rights, such as securing an open cyberspace for all people (interviewee 3/9). The focus on the first – inter-regional solidarity – again shows an interesting empirical finding, the high relevance of cooperation between the EU and the US regarding their respective interests in the digital arena compared to other norms. The focus on human rights is in line with the EU's discourse concerning its focus on human-centred digitalisation. While the norm of rule of law plays a role in the EU's documents, it did not in the interviews with EU-insiders. Consumer rights are, just like in the analysis of the EU's documents, only marginally represented.

Table 58: Interest categories in the internal perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US

Types of interests	Numbers	Percentages
political gains	9	24 %
economic gains	17	45 %
security gains	12	32 %
sum total	38	

Note: The percentages are rounded figures; thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100.

While the prevalence of economic gains in the EU documents is apparent, and no political gains can be identified, the picture is slightly different after analysing the interviews with EU-insiders. Political gains are the least represented, but they are present; the prevalence of economic gains is less clearly pronounced, while more security gains can be identified than in the documents.

Table 59: Domains of the EU's external digital policy towards the US – internal perception

Domains	Numbers	Percentages
transregional governance	27	38%
industry	26	37%
trade	1	1%
security	15	21%
development cooperation	0	0%
society	1	1%
public sector	0	0%
goals without allocation to domain	1	1%
sum total	71	

note: The percentages are rounded figures. Thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100. Allocations to multiple domains were sometimes the case; thus, the number of analysed domains is higher than that of the analysed goals (70).

Assigning goals to the different domains is particularly important concerning the analysis of the interviews. Interviewees were granted anonymity, thus they cannot be referred to for instance a specific think tank or a specific subunit within Smart Africa they work for. Therefore, their topical competence is not revealed, so the topical reference has to be covered through this analysis regarding different domains of external digital policy.

As shown in the table above, transregional governance and digital industry are the most essential domains covered in the interviews with EU-insiders. The one time the domain digital trade was analysed, the respective goal was assigned to two domains, digital trade and industry, since both were referred to in the mentioned goal. The domain of security ranks second, but with quite a distance. According to the results of the analysis, all other domains can be

considered irrelevant, which shows that the EU focuses on digital industrial policy and governance issues such as standard setting and security policy.

As a next step the focus will again be on which combinations of norm- and interest-based goals were explicitly mentioned in the interviews with EU-insiders (see table below). One example of such a combination of a norm and an interest is the goal of supporting developing countries with their cybersecurity, which is what the EU and the US cooperation on, and which corresponds to the norm of inter-regional solidarity. The EU's (and also the US's) goals is not merely altruistic. The cyber capacity of countries and regions of the Global South should also be enhanced to eliminate risks for the EU and the US due to global connectedness in the cyber world as explained by interviewee 3/9.

Table 60: Combination of norms and interests related to domains in the internal perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US

	industry	transregional governance	transregional governance/security ⁹⁸	security	sums
human rights & economic gain		1			1
inter-regional solidarity & economic gain	3				3
inter-regional solidarity & political gain	1				1
inter-regional solidarity & security gain	1	1	1	2	5
sum total	5	2	1	2	10

As we can see, it is particularly the combination of the norm of inter-regional solidarity and the interest of security gains that combine the most according to EU-insiders. Nonetheless, it is not the domain of security that is the most frequent one within which combinations of norm- and interest-based goals are analysed, but it is the industry sector. Just as in the documents, no conflictual relationships between norms and interests could be identified, i.e. norm- and interest-based goals that the EU pursues but which would exclude each other.

The last step in analysing the interviews with EU-insiders is scrutinising how the different norm and interest categories combine with the various domains. As seen in the table below, the one combination that stands out is economic gains in the industry domain, such as standard setting

⁹⁸ In one instance, it was not possible to assign the respective norm- and interest-based goals to one domain, which is why there is one column with a combined domain.

which should benefit the EU industry as mentioned by interviewee 3/3. Two more that may be mentioned are respect for human rights in the domain of transregional governance, like an open internet as referred to by interviewee 3/13 which the EU and the US strive for unitedly, aiming at securing the right of every citizen to not be restricted in his/her access to the internet and security gains in the domain of security, as supporting developing countries with their cybersecurity in order to reduce the “weakest link” in the global cybersecurity (interviewee 3/9).

Table 61: Relations between domains and types of norms/interests in the internal perception of the EU’s external digital policy towards the US

	Domain								
	Develop- ment coopera- tion	Trans- regional gover- nance	Industry	Public sector	Security	Society	Trade	Uncate- gorised	Sums
Norm type									
Anti-discrimination	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Consumer rights	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Democracy	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Inter-regional solidarity	0	3	5	0	2	0	0	0	10
Good governance	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Liberty	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Peace	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respect for human rights	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	1	9
Rule of law	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social solidarity	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sustainable development	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Uncategorised	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sum Norms	0	22	6	0	2	1	0	1	32
Interest type									
Economic gain	0	1	13	0	3	0	1	0	18
Political gain	0	2	4	0	3	0	0	0	9
Security gain	0	2	3	0	7	0	0	0	12
Uncategorised gain	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sum Interests	0	5	20	0	13	0	1	0	39
Sums total	0	27	26	0	15	1	1	1	71

Note: one interests was allocated to two domains; thus the sum of the interests in this table does not correspond to the actual number of the interest-based goals.

Overall, EU-insiders have quite a balanced view of the EU's norm- and interest-orientation, tilting only slightly towards interests, with economic gains being the most relevant interest. EU-outsiders' view is less balanced, as can be seen in the next chapter.

6.3.2.4 Results of analysis and discussion – external perception: interviews with EU-outsiders

The results in the table below show if a tendency towards a powerful and interest-oriented language and general approach is perceived by EU-outsiders.

Table 62: Norms versus interests in the external perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US

	Numbers	Percentages
Norm-based goals	29	29%
Interest-based goals	70	71%
Total number of goals mentioned	99	

note: The percentages are rounded figures. Thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100.

From the perspective of EU-outsiders, the tendency goes clearly in the direction of interests, with more than two-thirds of the goals stated in the interviews with EU-outsiders being interest-based. One interviewee stood out, interviewee 3/2, an NGO official and consumer rights advocate, who only stated interest-based and no norm-based goals. Two other interviewees (3/4 and 3/12) almost only mentioned interests, one being a journalist and the other being employed by a European think tank. An interviewee whose stating of interest- and norm-based goals was almost balanced, was a US official of the Department of Commerce (3/11). The prevalence of interests in the statements of the NGO official hint at a critical stance towards the EU, which could already be recognised during the interview. The strong normative perception of the EU by said US official might show the effect of differences between the US and the EU's priorities in the digital policy field, the former being more oriented towards the interests of its industry and the latter aiming at a human-centred digitalisation, in the official's perception.

Table 63: Norm categories in the external perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US

Types of norms	Numbers	Percentages
peace	0	0%
liberty	1	3%
democracy	2	7%
rule of law	2	7%
respect for human rights	14	48%
social solidarity	0	0%
anti-discrimination	0	0%
sustainable development	0	0%
good governance	0	0%
inter-regional solidarity	7	24%
consumer rights	0	0%
norm without allocation to type	3	10%
sum total or norm-based goals	29	

Note: The percentages are rounded figures; thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100. The norms are not presented in alphabetical order but in the order according to Manners' order as he listed them in his seminal article (Manners 2002) until his last norm category 'good governance'. The two additional norm categories are mentioned in the order in which they appeared during the analysis.

While in the internal perspective, i.e., in the interviews with EU-insiders, the norm of inter-regional solidarity ranked first and respect for human rights second, it is the other way around in this external perspective, a compelling result. It was particularly the protection of the EU citizens' data when transferred to the US that was mentioned, for instance by interviewees 3/1 and 3/10, the first particularly referring to sensitive data. This reversal concerning the highest-ranking norm could be related to the EU being perceived as more oriented towards the protection of citizens' data than the US and thus aiming at changing the US' orientation also in that direction of improved data protection. The EU's self-portrayal as actor orientated towards digital humanism and human-centred digitalisation seems to be perceived. Consumer rights are rarely the basis of the EU's goals in its external digital policy towards Africa and the US. The same is true in the EU's external digital policy towards the US, where it was hardly present in the last two perspectives, and it is not present at all in the perspective of EU-outsiders.

Table 64: Interest categories in the external perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US

Types of interests	Numbers	Percentages
political gains	41	59%
economic gains	26	37%
security gains	3	4%
uncategorised	0	0%
sum total	70	

Note: The percentages are rounded figures; thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100.

In this perspective, geopolitical gains are prevalent, such as reducing the influence of Russia and China in the Global South in cooperation with the US (interviewee 3/6), with more than half of the analysed interest-based goals, and economic gains rank second. In the internal perspective, the ranking was again the reverse, with economic gains being more clearly the front-runners. Security gains are only marginal in the analysis of this perspective and were higher in the internal perspective.

The following table again shows the prevalence of transregional governance and industry domains, with almost the exact percentages as in the internal perspective presented before. Digital trade ranks third in the external perspective, which is different from the internal perspective, where security ranked third but is only marginally represented in the external perspective. While development cooperation was not present at all in the interviews with EU-insiders, it could be seen in this external perspective, showing the perception of EU-outsiders of the EU and the US cooperating in their development policies in the digital realm.

Table 65: Domains of the EU's external digital policy towards the US – external perception

Domains	Numbers	Percentages
transregional governance	28	28%
industry	43	43%
trade	14	14%
security	5	5%
development cooperation	3	3%
society	5	5%
public sector	0	0%
uncategorised	1	1%
sum total	99	

Note: The percentages are rounded figures; thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100.

The last step of the analysis regarding EU-outsiders' perspective on the EU's external digital policy towards the US again scrutinises how the different types of norms and interests combine with the different domains (see table below). The most frequent combination was the one of

political gains within the domain of industry, closely followed by economic gains in the same domain. Thus, both economic and political gains can be considered highly relevant in the domain of the digital industry, not only economic gains, which one might think intuitively. Political gains in the domain of transregional governance rank third but are already far behind the first two ranks.

Although only a few goals belong to the security domain, the interest-based goals in that domain cover all three types of interests, not only security gains in the narrow sense, which would be the most intuitive combination of interest- and domain category. As interviewee 3/11 explained, cybersecurity should be strengthened for the sake of different actors in various sectors, namely governments, NGOs and also companies, so the benefits are manifold and serve the interests of different actors and sectors.

Table 66: Combinations of norms and interests related to domains in the external perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US

	Industry	Transregional governance	Trade	Sums
democracy & political gain		1		1
human rights & economic gain			1	1
human rights & political gain		1		1
inter-regional solidarity & economic gain	1		1	2
inter-regional solidarity & political gain	2			2
Sums	3	2	2	7

With regard to the combinations of norms and interests, it is again combinations with the norms of inter-regional solidarity, which could be identified the most, but there were no combinations with security gains in this perspective. In this perspective, the norm of respect of human rights was combined with a geopolitical gain, which was raised by interviewee 3/11, stating the desire of the EU and the US to foster human rights-based behaviour in the digital realm just for the sake of the value on the one hand but also to diminish Chinese global influence in the digital realm which is not human-rights based.

With regard to the combination of norms and economic gains, the explanations of one interviewee (3/14), an EU-outsider were insightful, saying that Ignacio Garcia Bercero, Director at the Directorate General (DG) Trade, would often underline the vital connection between development and trade. Theoretically, this means that inter-regional solidarity and economic gains are combined within the domain of digital trade. The interviewee further argued

that the EU started covering digital aspects more in its free trade agreements. Research carried out during this research project has shown that the digital domain has not been covered yet in the Economic Partnership Agreements with different African regions, as was mentioned in the chapter on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. There is no trade agreement between the EU and the US that can currently be analysed. So, this is to be scrutinised in future trade or economic partnership agreements, to see in how far economic gains and inter-regional solidarity will actually be combined in a mutually beneficial relationship in the digital development domain in the future.

Only in this perspective, the perspective of EU-outsiders, also conflicting norm- and interest-based goals could be identified (see table below).

Table 67: Conflicting norm- and interest-based goals in the external perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US

	Industry	Trade	Sums
All types of norms vs. economic gain	1		1
Human rights vs. economic gain		1	1
Sums	1	1	2

Interviewee 3/6 referred to the conflict between the goal of fostering different norms (this is why all types of norms are concerned) and making the digital industry respect those values while at the same time there is the fear of diminishing the possibilities of the European digital industry to develop. The usual counterargument by Commissioner Vestagher to such argumentation is that if consumers feel protected and feel that a digital product is safe, then this is also good for business. Following this argument, economic gains and strict-value based regulation perfectly complement and reinforce each other. Interviewee 3/1 highlighted the conflict between the goals of free flow of data and the goal of protecting sensitive data. This contradiction between economic and political gains and the respect for human rights is only a partial contradiction, though, since if a concrete distinction can be made between non-sensitive and sensitive data, this conflict could be solved.

Further, even different gains can conflict, so trade-offs are needed: only one could be identified in the interviews with non-EU experts (none in the other two perspectives), where an economic gain and a political gain stand in diametrical opposition to each other. On the one hand, there is the goal of being competitive in the cloud industry, which, according to the interviewee (3/6), would also mean resorting to and cooperating with US-American firms. On the other hand, the

goal of reaching digital sovereignty in this realm is to develop European companies and avoid cooperation and, thus, dependence on US-American companies.

Table 68: Relations between domains and types of norms/interests in the external perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US

	Domain								
	Develop- ment coop- eration	Trans- regional gover- nance	Industry	Public sector	Security	Society	Trade	Uncate- gorised	Sums
Norm type									
Anti-discrimination	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Consumer rights	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Democracy	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Inter-regional solidarity	1	0	4	0	0	0	2	0	7
Good governance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Liberty	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Peace	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Respect for human rights	0	5	1	0	2	4	2	0	14
Rule of law	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Social solidarity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sustainable development	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Uncategorised norm	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Sum Norms	1	12	6	0	2	4	4	0	29
Interest type									
Economic gain	0	6	12	0	1	0	7	0	26
Political gain	2	10	25	0	1	1	1	1	41
Security gain	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
Uncategorised gain	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sum Interests	2	16	37	0	3	1	10	1	70
Sums total	3	28	43	0	5	5	14	1	99

As the table above shows, most of the norm-based goals are found in the domain of trans-regional governance, while most of the interests refer to the domain of digital industry. Overall, EU-outsiders see the EU as clearly interest-oriented in its external digital policy towards the US, with political gains being slightly in the lead before economic gains.

The last field can now be filled in the table showing how to assess the EU's type of global digital actorness (see table below), namely the orientation of the EU-outsiders' perception of the EU's external digital policy toward the US, which is interest-oriented. As the table shows, the two perspectives – the image the EU projects and the perception of EU-outsiders – in the EU's two external digital policies – towards Africa and the US – are in the same categories according to their norm- or interest orientation based on the analysis. In both cases, the image

the EU gives itself is norm-oriented, while EU-outsiders perceive an interest orientation of the EU.

Table 69: The way to assess the EU's global digital actorness

		Projection versus Perception	
		Image projected by the EU	Perception of EU-outsiders
EU external digital policies towards	<i>Africa</i>	Norm-orientation	Interest-orientation
	<i>United States</i>	Norm-orientation	Interest-orientation

6.3.3 Image versus perception: the EU as an incoherent realist actor in its external digital policy towards the US

The table showing the way to assess the EU's type of global digital actor already gives an overview of the results of the analysis, which leads to categorising the EU as an incoherent realist actor with regard to its external digital policy toward the US as can be seen in the table below.

Table 70: The EU's external digital policy towards the US: ideal types and result

		Image projected by the EU	
		<i>Norm-oriented</i>	<i>Interest-oriented</i>
Perception of EU by outsiders	<i>Norm-oriented</i>	coherent normative actor presentation as normative actor, perception as normative actor	incoherent normative actor presentation as realist actor, perception as normative actor
	<i>Interest-oriented</i>	incoherent realist actor presentation as normative actor, perception as realist actor	coherent realist actor presentation as realist actor, perception as realist actor

While the EU presents itself as a normative actor regarding its external digital policy towards the US in its documents such as press releases and on its website, EU-outsiders such as think tanker or US officials perceive the EU as being oriented towards interests. The EU can thus be

assigned to the same type of global digital actorness as regarding its external digital policy towards Africa. At first sight, it seems the EU does not make a difference between a ‘digital leader’ like the US and a ‘digital laggard’ like Africa.

Giving oneself an image of a normative actor when it comes to a developing continent, such as Africa, seems intuitive in order to avoid a reputation of exploiting or at least taking advantage of actors with less leverage on a global level. This is particularly relevant with regard to the EU’s – or rather some EU member states’ – history with the African continent. The US, on the other hand, does not need support from the EU, which would exclude the norm of inter-regional solidarity, which is the most relevant value in the EU’s external digital policy towards the US. If one expected a normative orientation of the EU, then rather an orientation towards the values of human or consumer rights, the latter particularly with regard to the high relevance of the EU’s digital single market. Further, the fact that the EU does not have produced any global digital giants like Meta or Google would also incline one to think that the EU openly communicates its wish and goal to develop its own digital giants and reduce the power of American digital giants.

So, at first sight, it seems the EU does not make a difference between a ‘digital leader’ like the US and a ‘digital laggard’ like Africa. Looking more closely to this value that is most relevant in both external digital policies of the EU, the one towards the US and the one towards Africa, namely inter-regional solidarity, gives one clues on where the difference actually lies, though. This will be thoroughly discussed in the chapter comparing these two external digital policies of the EU. First, the different perspectives on the external digital policy towards the US shall be compared and contrasted.

Table 71: EU’s external digital policy towards the US: norms versus interests – comparison of different perspectives⁹⁹

	Projected Image	Internal Perception	External Perception
Norm-based goals	63%	46%	29%
Interest-based goals	37%	54%	71%

⁹⁹ As already mentioned, the perspective of EU-insiders is not included in the typology of the EU global digital actorness, which is why it is relevant to compare all three perspectives, as done in the following tables. The perspective of EU-insiders can neither be assigned to the image the EU projects through its public communication in for instance press releases or other publicly available documents, nor can it be assigned to the perception of EU-outsiders. Nonetheless, this perspective was included in the analysis to see in how far there are differences in

As can be seen in the table above, the projected image, based on the analysis of EU documents, has a focus on norms, the internal perception – based on interviews with EU-insiders – is almost balanced with a tendency towards interests, and the external perception – based on interviews with EU-outsiders – has a clear tendency towards interests. Thus, outsiders perceive the EU as a realist actor motivated by its own economic, political, and security interests rather than by its norms. At the same time, the EU presents itself as a normative actor based on its policies, mostly on values. Thus, the EU corresponds to the type of an incoherent realist actor. Incoherent because of its normative rhetoric in official documents versus an interest-based perception by EU-outsiders.

Nonetheless, the EU also communicated that interests are, at least to a certain extent, relevant to its digital policy towards the US. This shows that the EU has mastered a first small step towards the use of ‘language of power’, as demanded by Josep Borrell (2020), among others. What is more interesting and relevant, though, is that in fact, the internal perception, i.e. the view of EU-insiders, is placed in between the other two perspectives concerning norms and interests. The number of norm-based goals reduces from the projected image towards internal and external perception. In contrast, the number of interest-based goals increases starting from the projected image towards the internal and external perspective. Additionally, the internal perception is rather balanced, with 44 % of norm- and 55 % of interest-based goals. One can thus construe that in internal communication and meetings, which the researcher unfortunately did not have access to, interests are more present than in the EU’s publicly available documents.

Concerning the type of norms that were prevalent, the norm of interregional solidarity prevails in the EU’s projected image, which in the case of the EU’s external digital policy towards the US shows the partnership and the mutual respect and support for each other’s interests, since this often goes in both directions. This includes for instance the effort of supporting bilateral digital trade as well as the reduction of red tape for EU and US companies alike. Nonetheless, the latter, the goal of reducing bureaucracy in the digital realm, – as was mentioned in the documents several times – was in the interviews said to be rather one-sided, namely the EU should reduce red tape for the benefit of US-American companies but not the other way round.

In contrast, the value of respect for human rights prevails in the perspective of EU-outsiders in the EU’s external digital policy towards the US. The EU thus presents itself as focusing on

comparison with the other two perspectives concerning norms and interest, mainly to see if the EU-insiders’ perspective can count as a perspective lying between the image and the perspective of outsiders.

working with the US as a partner and ally. At the same time, EU-outsiders perceive the EU as an actor focusing on human rights in its external digital policy towards the US, which is only represented with a low percentage (10%) in the EU's self-representation. It is intriguing that outsiders do perceive this orientation towards human rights strongly, while it is not widely present in the EU's publicly available documents. One explanation could be that it is an important issue in the exchanges of EU officials with US officials behind closed doors and thus is strongly perceived by US officials but then not so much included in the concluding official statements. Another one is that human rights are not that prevalent in the eyes of some EU-outsiders or in the US digital policies and thus perceived like through a magnifying glass, seeming bigger and more relevant than they actually are based on the EU's perspective.

Regarding the different types of interest, it is interesting to see that political gains are – as are economic gains – highly relevant in the perspective of outsiders. Political gains could not be identified at all in the EU's documents, with economic gains prevailing in this 'image perspective'. The EU thus presents itself as an economic rather than a (geo)political actor. At the same time, EU-outsiders do perceive the EU as aiming at political goals, such as increasing its influence in Africa and reducing Chinese influence at the same time or improving the EU's independence in the digital sphere, making it more unlikely to be blackmailed by other actors weaponising the EU's dependence on for instance semi-conductors or rare earths. Those are topics where the EU and the US have to work together and both, neither the EU nor the US will be able to solve those issues on their own. This might be why such geopolitical goals of the EU are perceived more strongly by EU-outsiders, since this is what might be most talked about in meeting between EU and US officials, be it in the course of the Trade and Technology Council, the Cyber Dialogue or within the United Nations. The same goes for standard setting, which will be mostly discussed within the ITU and where again the geopolitical goal of undermining Chinese, and partly also Russian, influence should be contained. Also, this issue can only be solved in partnership with the US, or other actors, and thus might be even more visible to EU-outsiders as a goal of the EU in its external digital policy towards the US. Another issue with regard to geopolitical issues is of course that those are sensitive and thus are rather discussed behind closed doors, rather than presented to a wider public in official documents, which can be read by the targeted other global actors. Thus, for strategic reasons, such geopolitical goals are rather discussed discreetly.

Table 72: Prevailing domains in different perspectives of the EU's external digital policy towards the US

Perspective	Projected Image	Internal Perception	External Perception
Domain	industry	industry/trans-regional governance	trans-regional governance

The table above showing the domains prevailing in the three different perspectives again proves the internal perception lies between the two other perceptions. The prevalent domain of the EU's external digital policy towards the US based on the EU's projected image – industry – and the prevalent domain of said policy in the perspective of EU-outsiders – trans-regional governance – are the two domains being prevalent at equal terms according to EU-insiders. Thus, while the EU focuses on digital industrial policy in its documents on its external policy towards the US, the EU-outsiders rather perceive a focus on the management of the digital and standard setting in the EU's digital relations with the US.

Concerning how different norms and interests combined with the domains, the results were evident in the external perception where economic and political gains combine well with the industry domain (see table 66). In the perspective of the EU's image, the combinations were more balanced with less outstandingly frequent combinations, but again with the combinations of economic gains with industry and trade being in the lead (see table 52). Thus, the combinations are similar but the dominance of the combination of economic and political gains with the digital industrial domain is less pronounced in the EU's self-image.

With regard to the complementary combination of norm- and interest-based goals, it was in all three perspectives particularly the norm of inter-regional solidarity that combined well with different types of interests. This shows that the explicit combination of norms- and interest-based goals in the EU documents is also reflected on the receiving end, in the perspective of EU-outsiders. What should be particularly highlighted is the new digital-security nexus, which could be seen by the combination of inter-regional solidarity and security gains. This follows a similar pattern as the climate-security nexus in the EU's discourse, as referred to by Keukeleire and Delreux (2022: 258), also suggesting a certain discrepancy between said discourse and actual practice. In the digital realm, the EU's actions in the following years have to be awaited to evaluate how far the EU's discourse and its goals, as laid out in official documents, will be put into practice.

Conflicting norm- and interest-based goals could only be identified in the perspective of EU-outsiders. It was primarily economic gain on the side of the interest involved but changing types of norms on the normative end of the dichotomy. Other examples of conflicts between goals were trade-offs rather than actual conflicts. As one interviewee (3/14) put it, they can be explained by the “fine balance” the EU tries to achieve between reaching different types of goals and keeping the cost for reaching them at a minimum. Interviewees 3/7 and 3/12 highlighted that the EU’s trying to regulate according to its objectives on the one hand and trying to work with and profit from US expertise on the other could lead to trade-offs, also suggesting that there were no fundamental conflicts but only difficulties to ‘balance’ the different goals. Interviewee 3/2 suggested that in some instances, it was geopolitical goals that were pursued by the EU at the expense of consumers’ privacy, meaning that there is the goal of digital sovereignty or the related concept of economic security of the EU on the one hand and the human rights issue of data protection of EU citizens on the other. Economic goals and, thus, economic gains play an essential role concerning digital sovereignty, linking economic goals with geopolitical ones. Interviewee 3/6 referred to the EU’s (in his view French-driven) goal to limit US companies to make space for the growth and development of European companies, particularly in fields where there were no European champions – he stated the cloud industry as an example. In abstract terms, there is thus a conflict between economic and geopolitical gains versus the norm of inter-regional solidarity because foreign, in this case in particular US-American companies, are restricted. Rather than limiting each other’s companies in pursuit of their own economic and political gains, the EU and the US could find ways to cooperate to strengthen their respective digital sovereignty, potentially using the platform of the Trade and Technology Council (TTC).

Since this research design was carved out to identify norms, interests and domains, the relationships between those can only be analysed to a certain extent within this research project. Based on the outcome of this research, looking further into contrasting and complementary relationships, which might help practitioners find ways to combine values and interests efficiently and avoid or mitigate conflicts between those, is worth the analysis and could be aimed at in future research projects.

6.3.4 Additional themes and issues with relevance to norms and interests in the EU’s external digital policy towards the US

As in the chapter on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, also in this chapter, further relevant aspects concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US, shall be discussed. As already outlined, those aspects correspond to what Dubois and Gadde (2002: 555) call "related issues", which can already be identified in this research project and could be further explored with suitable methods in the future (see 4.1.1. on the abductive approach in the chapter on Research Design).

This additional analysis to identify related issues was done by identifying relevant remarks or explanations in the interviews and allocating them to broader themes using the coding methods of holistic and structural coding (Saldaña 2009: 66-70, 118-20). Then, they were linked analytically to norms, interests, domains, and other related theoretical concepts outlined in the chapter on theoretical approaches. This analysis helps put the core analysis results (see preceding chapters) in a broader context and identify research desiderata for future research.

The following topics will be discussed in this chapter:

- The norm/interest - digital sovereignty nexus
- China as a factor in the EU's external digital policy towards the US
- EU norms and interests versus US norms and interests
- Differences between member states
- Interests of member states – with particular consideration of France
- 'Hidden' goals and potential conflicts between communicated and actual goals

6.3.4.1 The norm/interest - digital sovereignty nexus

There is no all-encompassing and unitary definition of digital sovereignty, particularly when used by politicians and practitioners. The concept is sometimes mentioned as a goal of the EU in documents and by EU politicians, referring to the EU's independence or at least its reduced dependence, particularly vis-à-vis one other actor, thus a diversification of dependence by cooperating with various other actors rather than only working with one or a limited number of other actors being the goal. This can be directly linked to geopolitical gains regarding the categories used in this research project. Other terms connected with or replacing digital sovereignty are protectionism (interviewees 3/4, 3/6) or strategic autonomy (interviewees 3/5, 3/8, 3/10, 3/12).

Interviewees agreed that all those terms were used differently, i.e. with different definitions in mind. Some referred to the differences between different Commissioners or member states

(interviewees 3/1, 3/4, 3/5, 3/8, 3/10), with some Commissioners being more nuanced and/or oriented toward adding an ‘open’ in front of the term strategic autonomy, such as Margrethe Vestager or Ursula von der Leyen and Northern as well as Eastern member states. At the same time, the French are not content about adding this adjective. Other Commissioners are considered to be more “candid”, as one interviewee (3/1) put it, such as Thierry Breton. The latter’s mandate is to foster the EU’s (digital) industry, which is in line with this, and thus, an explanation for this more direct approach. Finland was said to refuse such terms, arguing that the EU can only be autonomous together with the US, even if that can be considered a paradox, since it would at least make those two actors dependent on each other, but cooperating could make them less dependent on third parties, such as China.

Protectionism was often linked with France¹⁰⁰, with one interviewee (3/6) even calling protectionism “French-type digital sovereignty” and also relating it to “Anti-Americanism”, in line with France’s usual allocation to the camp of Europeanists in the opposition between Atlanticists and Europeanists concerning the tension between European integration and transatlantic relations (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 303). The examples this interviewee gave were the cloud industry and telecommunications, where US-American companies should be side-lined, according to his view. Another interviewee (3/4) accused Commissioner Vestager of having become more protectionist in the last four years.

Apart from allocating particular definitions or terms to different actors, two interviewees (3/8, 3/12) suggested changes in the meaning and use of different terms over time, with both agreeing that when those terms came up, there was a focus on defence and classic foreign policy in a narrow sense¹⁰¹. They further agreed on the trend moving now towards using the term economic security rather than strategic autonomy or digital sovereignty, as can also be seen by the more frequent use of this term in EU documents, such as in the press release concerning the TTC meeting in January 2024 as well as by Commissioner Vestager with relation to the TTC. In this context, economic security was mentioned as an explicit goal the EU pursued by Vestager, corresponding to the concept of geopolitical gain. Interviewee 3/12 underlined the turn to economic policy as becoming more relevant in digital foreign policy since the EU’s economic

¹⁰⁰ See the subchapter on interests of member states with particular consideration of France later in this chapter for more information.

¹⁰¹ ‘Foreign policy’ in a narrow sense refers to security, defence and diplomacy as opposed to ‘external action’, such as trade or development.

cloud could be used in the more narrow or classic domain of foreign policy, which corresponds to one interviewee's (3/5) explicit connection of all those concepts with geopolitical interests.

Digital sovereignty and related concepts were not only mentioned concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US in general but China as a particularly relevant factor was referred to by some interviewees (3/1, 3/6) in the specific context of digital sovereignty. China was raised by further interviewees in other contexts, particularly regarding geopolitics, which is also related to the concept of digital sovereignty and has gained importance since 2020, as interviewee 3/5 stresses. This is why this interviewee considers it essential to cooperate with like-minded partners like the US, particularly vis-à-vis China, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

6.3.4.2 China as a factor in the EU's external digital policy towards the US

6.3.4.2.1 Protectionism, economic security and related concepts in the context of China's role in the EU's external digital policy towards the US

Interviewees linked the factor of China in the international digital realm to the concepts of protectionism, economic security, and dependence discussed before, such as interviewees 3/2, 3/4, and 3/6. While interviewee 3/6 argued that the EU saw the US and China as potential threats to its economic security, he further stressed that China was the common enemy with regard to their respective economic security. Thus, inter-regional solidarity would not only be a very relevant value in the EU's external digital policy towards the US but also a reasonable strategy since it links economic security – an interest-based concept – with said value.

Interviewee 3/2 particularly underlined the EU's goal of reducing its dependence on China in the field of supply chains concerning important material for the technological industry and infrastructure, which mainly relates to 5G infrastructure, also highlighted by interviewees 3/5, 3/12 and 3/7. This dependence is a clear link to economic security and might lead to more 'protectionist' measures based on interests rather than values. Data protection issues regarding TikTok and foreign subsidies were also highlighted (interviewee 3/5). On the other hand, there have been links with values, particularly regarding values the EU and the US have in common, while China and Russia constitute 'normative counterparts'. This is particularly relevant concerning standard setting but also concerning data protection, for instance, issues related to the Chinese company Tiktok show (interviewee 3/5), as will also be outlined in this chapter

later, as will be the differences between member states and different EU bodies and differences between the EU and the US regarding their approaches to China.

6.3.4.2.2 Differences between Member States and EU institutions in their approach to China in the digital realm

While interviewee 3/4 stated that Brussels had become more protectionist and more willing to stand up against China, referring to Commissioner von der Leyen as being a “China hawk” and thus standing out within the Commission, he also stressed that there were differences between the approaches of member states as well as between the approaches of different EU bodies towards China, also outlined by interviewees 3/1, 3/5, 3/10 and 3/11. It was explained that the EU, particularly Germany, depended on trade with China. Thus, Germany was more hesitant to follow the US policies regarding export control, while others, like the Baltic and some Scandinavian countries, followed the US quite quickly. Thus, all in all, Northern countries were said to tend to be more hawkish towards China. In contrast, Eastern countries were said to be more open to the Chinese perspective and partly even have been part of the Belt and Road Initiative (interviewee 3/4).

6.3.4.2.3 The EU’s versus the US’s stance towards China as a global digital actor

Even though the stances of the EU and the US towards China are different – with the US seeing China as a more relevant threat than the EU does, particularly concerning great power conflicts (interviewee 3/3, 3/10) – the approaches of both actors, the EU and the US, have been changing (interviewees 3/1, 3/4, 3/5, 3/6, 3/12). Interviewee 3/4 argued that the EU’s stance on China had hardened and thus had become more like the US stance from 2018 until now, but the EU’s stance was still not as hawkish as the US’s. Interviewee 3/6 saw EU-internal reasons, i.e., the EU’s very own interests, as the origin of this change rather than the US pressure on the EU. This is in line with Vestagher’s argumentation that the turn of the EU’s stance towards China into more critical and hostile directions was not due to an approximation of the EU’s approach to the US-American approach, stressing that even if the EU might use American risk analysis, the conclusions the EU would draw from this analysis might be very different from those of the US (Scott 2024). This already hints at the fact that, even if the EU and the US are more like-

mindful than the EU and China and thus might cooperate to counter Chinese influence, there are specific differences between the two actors. In how far those differences can be attributed to values or interests will be further discussed in the respective subchapters¹⁰² below. Other interviewees, such as interviewee 3/12, did stress that the US successfully explained to the EU in how far China could become a problem, and China proved this point through its reaction to the Ukraine war – taking a stance the EU was not satisfied with. According to this interviewee, this is due to the constant exchange between the EU and the US within the Trade and Technology Council (TTC). Thus, both, the EU's own interests as well as the US's influence through dialogue, also addressing normative issues, had their part to play.

Regarding the flow of data – a very relevant aspect of the EU's external digital policy towards the US and other actors – the US has been changing its approach, becoming more hesitant to the free data flow for geopolitical reasons (interviewee 3/1). This interviewee also put China forward in this context, showing that geopolitical interests are foregrounded for the US in data flows. Observing and analysing future developments concerning the tendencies concerning values and interests of both actors, the EU and the US, will be interesting.

The interviewees agreed that China was not a partner in value-based digital policy, while the US was such a partner to a certain extent. Thus, the common goal of the EU and the US has been to move against China in certain areas, as will be outlined in the next part of this chapter.

6.3.4.2.4 The EU and the US as like-minded partners with similar goals countering China & Russia in the global digital arena

As one interviewee (3/12) pointed out, the EU tended to forget Russia when it came to digital issues, which could not be said about the interviewees who did mention Russia, but rather as a second thought after China, the latter being considered the more relevant actor for the EU. Thus, the EU designs its external digital policy towards the US and its general external digital policy concerning its assessment of Chinese actions in the global digital field. Several interviewees (3/6, 3/3, 3/5, 3/7, 3/9) argued explicitly that the EU and the US had to work together in the global digital arena because of China and Russia.

¹⁰² See the subchapter on EU norms and interests versus US norms and interests

Many interviewees highlighted the like-mindedness of the EU and the US concerning values – as opposed to Chinese or Russian values in digitalisation – with the US and, particularly, the EU having more of a human-centred approach (interviewee 3/3) to digital issues. This is why the EU also worked with the US in multilateral fora, such as the UN, where it was challenging for the EU when it came to working with China, with disagreement on very many levels. At the same time, there was complete agreement with the US regarding values in the digital arena, as interviewee 3/9 illustrated.

Interviewee 3/1 suggested that the debate concerning global data transfers should be steered towards the issue of China and Russia as global digital actors: in the last ten years approximately, the focus of discussions and frictions around global data transfer issues had been on the transatlantic debate, although there were relevant issues with regard to data transfers vis-à-vis actors like China and Russia, which actually should be debated urgently. This attention was now turning to China and Russia, which might appease the discussion in the transatlantic context. So, in this context, China and Russia bring the EU and the US closer together and put the challenges concerning data flows between the EU and the US in another perspective. The EU and the US values concerning privacy in global data transfers (this concerns the value of respect for human rights) are more similar than those of the EU and China or Russia.

In summary, the interviewees all shared the view that the EU and the US were like-minded partners regarding their values in the digital arena, particularly concerning the value of respect for human rights. Regarding China and Russia, one can see the value of democracy and the rule of law as significant. Still, in the digital arena, human rights are at the forefront. Interviewee 3/7 suggested that the EU and US were aligned concerning their objectives while China and Russia opposed those objectives without particularly referring to neither interests nor values, which leads us, after this first focus on values, to interests within the EU's external digital policy towards the US and its relation to China as a global digital actor.

In the interviews, China was linked to issues such as dependence, particularly concerning 5G and supply chains for products relevant to digitalisation, while Russia was referred to concerning cyber-attacks. In abstract terms, this means that China is pertinent regarding geopolitical and security gains. At the same time, Russia is relevant regarding security gains, which concerns not only the domain of security in the digital realm but also digital industry and trade since those two domains are also affected by cyber-attacks.

Geopolitical interests are at the forefront regarding China's role in the global digital arena, thus also concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US. Interviewee 3/5 mentioned geopolitical motivations and considerations of the EU already at the beginning of the interview and said that it was concerning those geopolitical issues that the US was relevant for the EU. He referred to geopolitical considerations about vulnerability concerning computer chips, supply chains in which China plays a significant role, and cyber-attacks concerning Russia. This aligns with the results pertaining to the objectives given by EU-outsiders but not with what could be analysed in the EU's relevant documents, where economic gains prevailed.

Geopolitical reasoning is not prevalent in the EU's official communication concerning its external digital policy towards the US. However, outsiders perceive geopolitical motivation based on this analysis's results. Also, interviewee 3/5, a high-ranking EU official with far-reaching competencies and influence concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US, highlighted the EU's geopolitical motivations. The differences between issues discussed in the Trade and Technology Council (TTC), focusing on digital trade and industry versus issues addressed in the EU-US cyber dialogue, shall also be highlighted, as was explicitly referred to by interviewee 3/9, an EU official working on cyber security issues. According to this EU official, there was usually complete agreement between the EU and the US concerning topics relevant to the EU-US cyber dialogue, even to the point that in meetings between the EU and the US, there were no debates at all: one party usually started outlining their points and the other party reacted by saying that there was nothing to add and that they agreed. So, in the EU-US cyber dialogue, the EU and the US objectives seem to align. Since values vastly outnumbered interests based on the analysis of the EU's documents, it can be inferred that the agreement between the EU and the US on said issues concerns value-based objectives, not interest-based ones.

An interesting and repeatedly made comment by this interviewee was that EU officials working on EU-US Cyber Dialogue and those working on the TTC hardly cooperate, which should be enhanced in her view. Concerning this research project's results, such cooperation might lead to the identification of various relationships (conflicting, complementary, etc.) between interests and norms in those different areas, the awareness of which might lead to higher efficiency and coherence in the EU's external digital policy towards the US.

6.3.4.2.5 Standard setting and China's relevance in the EU's external digital policy towards the US

A critical issue within digitalisation in a global context is standard setting, which is thus also very relevant within the EU's external digital policy towards the US and where cooperation between the EU and the US is of great relevance according to many interviewees (3/6, 3/7, 3/8, 3/9, 3/10, 3/11, 3/13) to counter Chinese standards. It was already outlined and explained in detail in the chapter on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa that China has been very active concerning standard setting within the ITU, which was reiterated in the interviews concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US. It was stressed that while there were many Chinese officials in relevant working groups and committees, there was a lack of Europeans. The EU and the US did cooperate concerning the election of a new ITU Secretary General, the details of which can be found in chapter 5.2.3 on other powers than the EU in Africa and 5.3.4.1.1.3 on internet governance.

6.3.4.2.6 The Global South and China's relevance in the EU's external digital policy towards the US

As this reference to the EU-Africa chapter already shows, the Global South is relevant regarding the EU's external digital policy towards the US (interviewees 3/1, 3/4, 3/6, 3/12). Summarising the pertinent statements of the different interviewees, China and Russia, which have been disseminating their values concerning the digital sphere in the Global South, were given as reasons why the EU and the US also work together in the Global South, namely to curb the influence of those two states. Interviewees 3/12 and 3/1 stated that African countries mainly depended on Chinese infrastructure. One can see how this changed the voting of African officials in international fora like the UN and how their views on collaborating with the EU or the US changed. This aligns with what was outlined in the preceding paragraph and the paragraphs concerning the ITU in the chapter on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa.

In summary, the links between China as a global digital actor and the EU's external digital policy towards the US are in particular geopolitical considerations and interests connected to the value of inter-regional solidarity. The latter is a vital norm based on the analysis of the EU documents. At the same time, human rights constitute an essential value according to the study

of the interviews of EU-insiders and outsiders, with EU-insiders putting inter-regional solidarity and human rights at approximately equal importance, while EU-outsiders subordinate inter-regional solidarity to human rights.

6.3.4.3 EU norms and interests versus US norms and interests

Almost all interviewees agreed that the US was the most like-minded partner of the EU, with one interviewee arguing the two actors have become more similar recently (interviewee 3/10), in line with their exceedingly similar approach towards China in the digital realm. This logically leads to cooperation in different fields of digitalisation. There was only one dissenting voice, interviewee 3/14, an EU-outsider and think tanker, suggesting that the EU and US were sometimes more different concerning values than was usually believed, stating the fact that there was no large-scale free trade agreement between the EU and the US at the moment as proof. He further underscored his argument by highlighting the different approaches of the EU and the US in the digital arena, with the EU being concerned with fundamental rights while the US focused on consumer rights. Nonetheless, he conceded that, in comparison to China, the EU and the US were aligned.

6.3.4.3.1 Shared values and interests

The shared values advanced by interviewees can be subsumed under respect for human rights, anti-discrimination, rule of law, and democracy, with the first, human rights, prevailing. As a reminder, the value of human rights was also highly ranked according to the analysis of the interviews with EU-outsiders and insiders. Hence, the relevance of this value as a shared value aligns with its significance in the EU's external digital policy towards the US.

The interviewees stated various examples underpinning the argument that the EU and the US are like-minded partners concerning digital issues. The risk-based approach towards AI was agreed upon within seconds, according to interviewee 3/5, a high-ranking Commission official. He also referred to President Biden's speech concerning artificial intelligence (AI), suggesting it could have been a press release of the EU since the approach taken and issues addressed aligned perfectly with the EU's approach to AI. After scrutinising the speech to triangulate the

given information, the author of this thesis comes to the same conclusion as the interviewee and agrees.

Another example given was the UN Cyber Convention, where there was strong consensus between the EU and the US during negotiations (interviewee 3/10), which is in line with interviewee 3/9 underlining the agreement of the EU and the US concerning cybersecurity, cyber threats and cybercrime. The Declaration for the Future of the Internet, put forward by the EU, the US and other international partners, signed in 2022, also shows the similar positioning of the US and the EU (interviewee 3/18). However, the relevance of this declaration was questioned by another interviewee (3/12), who argued that this declaration was talked about a lot but that nothing much was achieved in the end. On the other hand, interviewee 3/13 only used the declaration as an example to underpin the argument that the EU and the US subscribe to the same values in the digital realm. As the name says, this declaration can be allocated to ‘declaratory’ as opposed to ‘operational’ foreign policy (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 180), the first also having its relevance and merits. This joint support of the Internet's openness is not only due to shared values but also common interests, according to interviewee 3/3, stating examples that could be allocated to economic interests being at play on both sides of the Atlantic.

Interviewee 3/1 gave two engaging illustrations, one “at a granular data protection level” and one “at a geopolitical level,” as she called it. The privacy and data protection specialist argued, “The principles that are the core of how privacy and data protection work in both the EU and the US are very much the same.” Thus, although there have been debates around and problems with the Privacy Shield and before the Safe Harbour agreement, in principle, the same value is the basis in the US and the EU, even if a comparative privacy device was missing in the US. At the “geopolitical level”, as the interviewee called it, she stated free trade as an example, which is not a value based on the conceptual framework used in this research but is somewhat related to an interest, namely economic gain. This suggests that the EU and the US might also have similar interests, making them potential rivals or partners if the value of inter-regional solidarity plays a role. With regard to the global chip shortage and the related necessity to have access to critical raw materials, interviewee 3/3 argued, “[...] of course we look on the same market, so we are a bit, hunting for the same prey.”

6.3.4.3.2 Similar values and interests - different regulatory approaches

Apart from the same values of the EU and the US, which most of the interviewees agreed upon, several interviewees (3/3, 3/4, 3/5, 3/6, 3/7, 3/8, 3/10) – EU-insiders as well as EU-outsiders – conceded that although the EU and the US had the same values, their approaches to regulation were indeed different. Interviewee 3/5 expressed this eloquently: “[...] the Europeans would have this tendency to put this into law, and the Americans would generally try to find less intrusive ways.” Such regulatory differences concerning values have already been referred to by Keukeleire and Delreux (2022: 36), stating EU-member states versus the US and India as examples.

Interviewee 3/5 explained that it was more difficult in the US to push through digital legislation, which he often heard from different US-American actors, who recognised the EU’s strength in institutions and regulation where the US had a weakness. Also, the above-mentioned argument of interviewee 3/1 regarding privacy and data protection being based on the same values in the EU and the US but with different regulatory approaches in this particular digital field aligns with the argumentation of other interviewees. One explanation of interviewee 3/10 seems pertinent, outlining that the EU’s approach was to allow companies to develop by creating a regulatory space, so regulation should support the development of the private sector. In contrast, the US allowed companies to build freely by giving them space, regulating only later when firms had already developed. Even an EU-insider (interviewee 3/3) criticised the EU slightly by saying that the EU made it more difficult for companies to grow because of its focus on regulation based on values, thus giving preference to various values over an economic gain.

Further, the preference of the US for public-private partnerships as opposed to regulation was stated (interviewee 3/7), as was the fact that the US preferred Open RAN. At the same time, the EU wanted to stay with traditional telecommunication networks (interviewee 3/6). This strongly relates to economic interests, where European companies, namely Nokia and Ericsson, are leaders in this field, while there are no US champions in this digital sector. Thus, for the US, the development of Open RAN would be more economically attractive than for the EU. Apart from the differences in the approaches to putting values into practice, it was also mentioned that the EU and the US sometimes had the same goals. Still, both did not act upon them, although they could act together, for instance, concerning the Global South in the digital realm, where they had plans but needed to follow through and cooperate more, according to interviewee 3/6.

Apart from differences in regulatory approaches, there were also differences in risk perception (interviewee 3/10), with the US already having seen Huawei as a security risk early on, whereas European countries in, particularly Germany, did not see that as a problem, which had changed to a certain extent, and there had also been many issues concerning data protection. Both examples are amply documented in the media and have also been explained in depth in this thesis's chapter laying out the status quo of the relations between the EU and the US in the digital realm (see chapter 6.2). Further, differences in the prioritisation of values were addressed by several interviewees (3/8, 3/9, 3/11, 3/12).

Interviewee 3/8 highlighted the EU's focus on privacy rights as opposed to the US's focus on freedom of speech. Thus, according to this interviewee, the values themselves were not different but how they were prioritised, which led, for instance, to difficulties concerning the Data Privacy Framework (DPF) and its predecessors. The EU's focus on a human-centric approach in the digital arena was also much more robust than in the US, as analysed by interviewee 3/12, also suggesting the importance of economic gains for the EU, which could be seen by the EU's focus on its digital single market, stating the high relevance of interoperability to the EU. Within cybersecurity, for instance regarding phishing, ransomware and spyware, the EU and the US are in accordance concerning values, the only difference again being prioritisation according to interviewee 3/9. It should be added that this does not only concern values but also common interests, particularly security gains, as can be seen from the results of the analysis of the EU's documents. Interviewee 3/11 further nuanced that there were differences in prioritisation between the EU and the US but that priorities differed more over time than between the two actors.

6.3.4.3.3 Differences between different policy areas and EU/US internal differences

Differences between the EU and the US, based on values or interests, also vary concerning different digital sectors. Depending on the policy areas within the digital realm, the constellation of actors and, thus, also the relationship between the EU and the US are different, as the argument of interviewee 3/9 suggested when highlighting that there was more agreement in the EU-US cyber dialogue, covering in particular cyber security, cyber threats and security issues in the digital realm, while the issues treated in the Trade and Technology Council, namely mainly economic and trade issues, were more contentious. This can also be seen looking at the results of the analysis of the EU's documents in this research project, showing that in TTC

documents, the domains of digital industry and trade prevail, while in documents concerning the EU-US Cyber Dialogue transregional governance and security issues in the digital realm are in the foreground. One interviewee's arguments concerning AI were similar, saying that the EU and the US were more aligned regarding AI and less aligned regarding the DMA (Digital Markets Act)¹⁰³ and the DSA (Digital Services Act)¹⁰⁴. The interviewee explained that regarding the last two mentioned legislative acts, the US felt that those targeted US companies, which is why, according to the interviewee, the TTC as a discussion and communicative forum between the EU and the US was of vital importance, giving the EU the opportunity of explaining its regulatory approach and focus on competition to the US.

Linking this to the concepts of interests and norms, the US interpreted those pieces of legislation as expressions of the EU's economic interests rather than any values. It shall be stressed, as was done already before, that the DSA and the DMA are not part of the EU's external digital policy towards the US since they do not only target US companies but every digital company corresponding to the characteristics stated in the DSA and DMA, no matter the origin of the respective company. Nonetheless, those two regulations must be addressed in some contexts within this thesis due to the before-outlined US impression of those two legislative acts being directed at US companies.

While there are differences between the EU and the US, there are also differences within the EU and the US when it comes to different values or different approaches to and prioritisation of values, similar to the internal differences already mentioned concerning how to deal with China. Since it is already a challenge to even out differences within the EU and the US, i.e. between concerned member states and between commissioners, directorates, ministries or agencies, it is even more of a challenge when the EU and the US have to agree, since the representatives at the table often have no leeway for negotiations between each other left, after the already complex internal negotiations (interviewee 3/8). This is, of course, true for interests and values alike.

¹⁰³ The Digital Markets Act complements competition rules with an ex-ante approach aiming at reducing the power of very large digital companies and making the digital sector fairer and contestable.

¹⁰⁴ The Digital Services Act protects the users' safety and fundamental rights by preventing illegal and harmful activities as well as the spread of disinformation.

6.3.4.3.4 Value-based differences between the EU and the US with relation to Othering

With regard to Diez's (2005) concept of 'Othering', with its four different occurrences as seeing or representing the 'Other' as different, inferior, violating universal principles or as an existential threat¹⁰⁵, the EU and the US see each other as only partly different. Thus, there is an 'Othering' only to a certain extent and only concerning a slight difference. Concerning Bahar Rumelili's (2021) typology of different relationships of actors concerning their different normative approaches¹⁰⁶, the EU constructs the difference in norms in the digital arena between the US and itself as acquired (as opposed to inherent). The US reaction is one of at least partial recognition (as opposed to rejection) since there is complete alignment in some areas, such as cybersecurity, and partial alignment in others, such as privacy or AI. Thus, Rumelili's typology must be complemented by a category positioned between the ideal types of normative convergence and normative dissociation to cover the relations between the EU and the US in the digital realm, as is also the case in the EU-Africa digital relations, where this complementation of Rumelili's typology has already been made, see the table below as a reminder. Concerning the diffusion of the EU's norms to the US, it is a procedural diffusion based on Manners' (2002: 244) categorisation since institutions, such as the Data Privacy Framework, the Trade and Technology Council or the EU-US Cyber Dialogue, are used as tools for diffusion.

Table 73: Construction and reaction of target state

	EU construction of target state	
Reaction of target state	Inherent difference	Acquired difference
Recognition	Transactional cooperation	Normative convergence - Full normative convergence - Partial normative convergence (= adaptation of EU norms according to third state's own values)
Rejection	Conflict	Normative dissociation

Table adopted and further developed based on categorisation by Bahar Rumelili (2021: 203)

In summary, there are some differences in values but mainly differences in regulatory approaches constituting a particular challenge, as interviewee 3/8 argues, stressing the strong

¹⁰⁵ see chapter on approaches and concepts for details

¹⁰⁶ see chapter on approaches and concepts for details

commercial ties between the EU and the US: „Our two domestic systems are interacting in such deep ways across all of our federal agencies, all of the EU directorates, that it's sort of what I call Transatlantische Innenpolitik.” At first sight, these mentioned strong commercial ties hint at economic interests rather than values. Still, since they necessitate strong cooperation (as also highlighted by interviewee 3/10) in the area of regulation, even if the approaches differ, there is a link to norms as well.

6.3.4.4 Differences between member states

As several interviewees explained (3/4, 3/5, 3/6, 3/8, 3/10, 3/12), there were divergences between the member states, between the EU and its member states as well as between different EU institutions when it comes to the approach to digital policies, which is why there was not a unified picture for the US concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US as interviewee 3/8 pointed out. He further stated that the same was true for the US, though, since there were also different approaches to digital policy within the US as the federal states had the competence on digital regulation.

In some areas within the digital policy field, there are more, and in some, there are fewer differences.¹⁰⁷ According to interviewee 3/14, there is more division concerning the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and competition – both being domestic policies with an external dimension – than with digital trade, which belongs to the area of external action. For instance, the Nordic countries are displeased with the DMA, while France is content with this legislation pursuant to the interviewees' information. Interviewee 3/6 argued that the front within the EU was united when it came to reigning in and holding accountable large US platforms. It shall again be stressed that the DMA, as well as the DSA, are not addressed to US platforms only but to platforms of any origin; US officials or employees from US think tanks, as interviewee 3/6, sometimes tend to argue that US companies are the target of such EU legislation.

Specific differences between the member states concern certain issues relevant to digital policies, such as digital industrial policy, competition rules, regulation of large platforms, or free speech. With regard to openness versus protectionism, in particular, concerning US digital companies, Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Scandinavian countries, are more open. In

¹⁰⁷ Differences concerning China and digital sovereignty as well as related to concepts such as economic security or strategic autonomy are treated in the respective subchapters and will not be treated in this subchapter.

contrast, Western and Southern Europe, particularly Spain, France and Italy, have a critical approach (interviewees 3/6, 3/8, 3/10, 3/12). This has to do with different states of the respective countries' digital industries and, thus, different economic interests. Italy was a digital laggard, as interviewee 3/6 argued, and hence was often against new digital developments, including gig work. At the same time, Spain focused on its telecommunications company Telefónica, and France was digitally savvy, having start-ups and even unicorns, whose interests France tried to serve. Germany, in turn, was divided due to a large number of different actors, with several ministries involved in digital issues and a cloud industry that was very relevant to Germany. So, this interviewee essentially referred to economic interests or lack thereof of the different member states within the domain of the digital industry. Further, one must not forget that the member states are also competitors; they do not only compete with the US or China, but also among themselves, which might diminish unity. Interviewee 3/12 not only referred to economic interests and the domain of digital industry but also to geopolitical interests and sensitivities, which are different.

Apart from the domains of the EU's external digital policy towards the US and the different types of interests, it seems valuable to also resort to Keukeleire and Delreux's (2022: 24-25) typology of various relations between member states' interests to better understand those differences. The two authors present three different types of relationships between member states' interests:

- common interests
- converging interests, but member states are competitors
- diverging and incompatible interests.

Common interests have two main characteristics: one member state cannot pursue this interest alone, and a member state could profit from the positive results without contributing to the costs. The first characteristic is especially true for digital issues, which cannot be tackled by one country alone; alliances have to be formed, or global institutions have to be used to act together.

Concerning the second type of interest-relationship, 'converging interests but member states are competitors', it is clear that this is undoubtedly true in the digital realm since the member states want to make their own national digital companies grow and make them competitive, in particular France. This relates to economic and geopolitical interests because this helps strengthen their own digital sovereignty, so they have the same interests but with a national

rather than a European focus. Those companies of different member states would be competitors not only of US-American or Chinese digital companies but also with each other.

With regard to the last category, ‘diverging and incompatible interests’, one example within the digital field would be Germany’s interest concerning its economic ties with China versus the goal of other member states to foster specific values within the digital realm and thus not wanting to do business with China due to its authoritarian tendencies concerning the use of mass surveillance. In this instance, not only do member states’ interests differ, but the prioritisation of one member state’s interests does not converge with the prioritisation of other member states’ values. Keukeleire and Delreux (2022: 26) also refer to more constructivist concepts, such as values, stating that „differences in worldviews and role conceptions can be considered obstacles that are more difficult to overcome in defining EU foreign policy than differences in interests or in power.“ Since values are closely related to or even influence and feed into a country’s worldview and role conception, differences between those can be considered at least as relevant as differences between interests, if not more important, based on the authors’ evaluation. This contradicts the realist claim that values are only concerns of the second order (see, for instance, Hyde Price 2006, p. 222).

In summary, the EU member states’ economic and geopolitical interests are partly converging, namely within the groups of member states having the same development of their digital industry and/or the same geopolitical sensitivities, such as being turned towards the US, that would be for instance Eastern European member states, or rather critical of the US, that would, for example, be France. Further, all member states are competitors, even if their interests converge. With regard to diverging and incompatible interests, this is true to a certain extent between those different groupings of the member states along the lines of said development of their digital industry, corresponding to economic gains, as well as geopolitical issues. Apart from that, values also play an as important role in that values of some member states are in a conflicting relationship to interests of other member states depending on differences in prioritisation, as was shown with regard to China.

6.3.4.5 Interests of member states – with particular consideration of France

The member states' interests and norms have already been discussed in the chapter on the EU’s foreign digital policy towards Africa. Also, in the expert interviews concerning the EU’s external digital policy toward the US, member states were referred to, or rather, one member state was referred to as having a strong external digital policy, namely France. Other member

states were only mentioned in comparison and to clarify differences between them, but not concerning having their own solid external digital policy or trying to impact the EU's external digital policy heavily; the last two were only assigned to France.

Interviewee 3/10 argued that the EU aimed to develop European tech giants. However, this was usually not explicitly said by EU representatives, such as EU Commissioners, but instead being part of the rhetoric of national governments. This aligns with interviewee 3/7 explaining that the member states' interests were integrated through public-private partnership meetings between the EU and the US, such as in December 2023, when such a meeting took place. He further outlined that in this context, the EU ensured that the origins of the participating companies were equally distributed so that not only companies from two or three member states participated and profited but from as many member states as possible. So, in this case, an interest, a primary concern according to realist approaches, is in the foreground, and it originates in states, the most critical actors on the international scene, according to realist assumptions. Also according to the European integration theory of liberal intergovernmentalism it is the member states that are the most relevant decision takers concerning the EU's policies and they decide based on their interest (Moravcsik 1993). The EU's responsibility is to coordinate to ensure a balance between member states, which, in this particular instance, equates the EU, often argued to be a political system between a state and an international organisation, with the latter rather than the former.

Apart from economic interests, security interests were also mentioned as originating from the member states since security is a member state competence and also concerning digital issues, member states insist on having competence regarding such policies (interviewee 3/4). Still, while the competence lies with the member states, the EU's independence could be at stake, as interviewee 3/5 argued. This was the case with regard to 5G and Huawei¹⁰⁸, for instance, where the security interests of the states and the EU's independence are relevant issues. Thus, there were discussions between the EU and member states, according to interviewee 3/5. Put concisely, security gains on a national level and supranational level are at play. Considering the EU's own digital companies Ericsson and Nokia, which might profit, also economic gains are included, even if those can be regarded as 'second-order concerns' after the security gains in

¹⁰⁸ Huawei is not considered a trusted vendor due to its relations to Chinese government, i.e. in certain situations Huawei could be bound by instructions of the Chinese government based on Chinese law.

this particular instance. The EU's role in such a case is restricted to giving recommendations due to member state competence.

France is a particularly visible and outspoken member state in relation to the EU's external digital policy, as outlined by several interviewees (3/4, 3/5, 3/6, 3/10). In this context, protectionism was considered typical of the French external digital policy and the French interpretation of digital sovereignty or strategic autonomy¹⁰⁹. This more protectionist interpretation of digital sovereignty could be seen in the French views concerning ENISA (*European Union Agency for Cybersecurity*), the cybersecurity certification scheme and the DSA, according to interviewee 3/5, a high-ranking EU official.

Further, the same interviewee (3/5) stated the famous 36-hour-trilogue on the AI act in December 2023 as an example, where mainly the French tried to broaden the scope of member state competence in the EU's digital policy making by putting forward arguments of the member states' security interests based on the dual use of AI tools. Whenever in the area of interests it is security gains that are relevant, the issue of member state competence is discussed, even if, in this case, the AI act, a single-market related instrument, where the competence lies with the EU, not the member states.

For France, not only security interests are relevant concerning the EU's external digital policy, but also economic interests, as seen by its interventions and rhetoric in industrial policy. Interviewee 3/6 referred to the French being exceptionally active regarding limiting US American companies, lately in particular concerning the cloud industry, to find space for its own companies. Interviewees 3/5 and 3/10 argued along the same lines but referred to the AI Act, whose scope the French wanted to reduce for the benefit of its own companies, particularly the French AI company Mistral.

French visibility and initiative regarding issues of the EU's external digital policy can also be found in the media, as research in order to triangulate the given information shows. The French so-called SREN (*sécuriser et réguler l'espace numérique*) bill was reported to clash with the DSA according to the European Commission (Hartmann 2024b). The reaction of the French Telecoms Federation (*Fédération française des télécoms, FFT*) to a potential regulatory framework of the EU, outlined in a White paper, is proof of the orientation of the French

¹⁰⁹ For more information on digital sovereignty and related concepts with regard to norms and interests in the EU's external digital policy towards the US see the respective subchapter.

industry towards digital leadership of the EU (Agence Europe 2024). France wants to save strategically important European data from the reach of the US as well as China by adding further sovereignty requirements (e.g. headquarters located in the EU) for cloud providers to be ranked on the highest level of the cloud certification scheme and thus being allowed to sell services handling highly sensitive data. Germany, Ireland, Slovakia, the Netherlands, and other smaller countries oppose this proposal because cloud services companies used by EU member states are based in the US (Gkritsi 2024). As Téophane Hartmann states in Euractiv's weekly tech brief: "Industry organisation France Industrie published a plea on Monday in favour of a European industrial strategy serving competitiveness and strategic autonomy." (Hartmann 2024a). France Digitale, an independent collective of start-ups, pushed for increased competitiveness by calling for a 'Buy European Act', prioritising national companies in public procurement (France Digitale 2024).

Put concisely, it is within the domain of security, also in the digital arena, where member states have competence and thus member state interests influence the EU's external digital policy towards the US¹¹⁰, while it is in particular French economic interests that feed into the EU's external policy towards the US as long as other member states do not disagree with France and prevent such influence. Although member states want to keep their competence in security matters in the digital sphere, one can see a shift towards more common digital foreign policy from approximately 2020/21 onwards, starting with the Danes, according to interviewee 3/4. With regard to competence, it shall be clarified that external digital policy is indeed a mixed competence, as some interviewees argued, and as can be underpinned with the argument that external digital policy is not a 'classic' foreign or security policy, but is instead a case of external action (digital trade, digital development) and internal policy with an external dimension, based on Keukeleire and Delreux's categorisation (2022: 41).

6.3.4.6 'Hidden' goals and potential conflicts between communicated and actual goals

Since goals are the basis of the distinction between norms and interests, as outlined in the chapter on research design, further questions concerning goals were asked in the interviews, if the interviewees had enough time. Those questions concerned potential hidden goals the EU

¹¹⁰ Although examples were used not only from the EU's external digital policy towards the US, but also from the EU's general external digital policy, it can be inferred from those examples what the effects on EU's external digital policy towards the US can be.

might have and the EU's rhetoric about its goals, i.e. if there is a potential conflict between which goals are communicated and potential actual goals not being communicated.

With regard to 'hidden' goals, interviewees 3/1, 3/7, 3/9, 3/10, 3/13 as well as 3/14 clearly and immediately denied the existence of such 'hidden' goals, stressing the EU's transparency and openness and one interviewee argued that if there were any 'behind-the-scenes' deals and hidden goals, those were to be found on the national, not on the European level, adding to the argument that interest orientation, in general, could be seen more often on the national than on the EU level, as discussed in the subchapter on the interests of member states. Other interviewees (3/4, 3/10, 3/11) did not argue that goals were hidden entirely but that some issues were not usually discussed publicly. All matters referred to belonged to the domains of digital industry and digital trade, and concerning the interest/value dimension to economic gains.

Four interviewees (3/7, 3/9, 3/10, 3/13) answered negatively about the potential conflict between actual and communicated goals. One interviewee (3/7) added that since there were no controversial issues, there was no need to say one thing and do the other. Further, he referred to the EU's global fostering of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace and its countering authoritarian regimes. Hence, the EU was actually doing what it said, meaning it bases its external digital policy on values. The examples mentioned can be allocated to the values of democracy and rule of law, which, according to the results of the analysis of the documents as well as the interviews were somewhat in the background concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US. The interviewee also argued that a progress tracker showed the EU had done what had been planned.

Interviewee 3/9 added that while concerning her line of work, namely the EU-US cyber dialogue, the goals the EU communicated equalled its actual goals, she could imagine that this was different concerning issues discussed in the Trade and Technology Council. Thus, she suggested that there was congruence between actual and communicated goals in the domain of security in the digital arena. At the same time, there might be conflicts between actual and communicated goals in the digital industry and trade domains. Since the TTC was not in her line of work, she could not know what happened and was expressed within the TTC, so this can only be considered an opinion. Still, as an expert official working in the digital arena for a few years already, this can undoubtedly be regarded as an informed opinion. Thus, in light of her remark, it might be interesting for future research projects to scrutinise differences between the

domain of security in the digital arena and the domains of digital trade and industry with regard to potential inconsistencies between communicated and actual norms and interests involved.

Six interviewees (3/1, 3/4, 3/6, 3/11, 3/12, 3/14) did refer to and gave examples of differences between the EU's communication and what was actually done in digital policy-making. The examples they advanced did not always refer to the EU's external digital policy towards the US but also to the EU's general external digital policy. However, they were still very significant and enlightening regarding the EU's external digital policy towards the US.

Interviewees 3/4 and 3/6 argued that the taming of the digital giants through the DSA and the DMA had widely been communicated and had not happened yet since full implementation would probably be delayed due to a lack of resources and technical expertise. Interviewee 3/4 also stated the example of the EU's commercial interests that were hardly discussed publicly. At the same time, the EU's rights-based approach was widely communicated since the latter was easier to sell to the audience than the former. Thus, he suggested that values were expressed as the EU's motivation for its external digital policy towards the US due to considerations concerning strategic public relations since an interest-based EU might not be well received by the public.

Interviewee 3/11 referred to the EU's external digital policy towards China as not exactly corresponding to what the EU communicated, based on which the EU would actually have to stand up to China more clearly. Being a US official, this interviewee's focus in his job might be the EU's acting towards China since his employer, the US government, aims at convincing the EU to limit Chinese impact in the global digital arena. This relativises his example to a certain extent and further research in the EU's communication outside as well as in negotiations concerning China would be needed to verify his analysis.

Interviewees 3/1 and 3/12 referred to privacy in general and the privacy shield in particular, saying that while privacy regulation should support SMEs (small and medium enterprises), it was actually a burden to those and that the Data Privacy Framework was, in the end, less strict than planned and announced. Interviewee 3/14 referred to the issue of data localisation, where the EU could be accused of having double standards, communicating to avoid data localisation but fostering it through GDPR and not fighting it within the WTO (World Trade Organisation).

Regarding the question if the EU communicates very much about a particular value, which in the end is not that relevant in its actual external digital policy towards the US, three interviewees

3/1, 3/10, 3/12) answered in the negative, saying that the EU was as value-based as it communicated. Interviewee 3/12 stated the EU's handling of health data as an example: health data of EU citizens had been sent to the US only as an exemption during the pandemic to foster the creation of a vaccine. After that period, the EU immediately stopped sending this health data, although the US would have liked these data flows to continue. The latter was not done because it was sensitive data that had only been sent to the US in the case of this particular health emergency. This example refers to the value of respect for human rights.

Interviewee 3/11 suggested that there were some inconsistencies between the EU's communication concerning the value-based digital policies and the actual relevance of those values: he referred to human rights being communicated as very relevant in the EU's external digital policy towards the US, which he agreed with, but notwithstanding the high relevance of this value, it was sometimes disregarded in case of trade-offs, according to him. This suggests that specific interests, which types cannot be inferred from this information, are sometimes considered more relevant than values, in line with the realist argument that values are subordinated to interests, which are first-order concerns.

In all treated issue areas, namely 'hidden' goals and potential conflicts between communicated and actual goals, the main domains addressed were digital industry and digital trade. The interests referred to were economic gains, and the values referred to were respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

6.3.5 Review of discussion of results concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US in relation to the theoretical framework

The respective shares of types of interests and norms differ in the three perspectives, with the EU's projected image being the most norm-based and the perspective of EU-outsiders the most interest-based one, just like in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa.

Table 74: Norms versus interests in the three perspectives concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US

	Norm-based goals	Interest-based goals
EU's projected image	63%	37%
Internal perspective (EU-officials)	46%	54%
External perspective (EU-outsiders)	29%	71%

In the chapter on the last-mentioned policy, it was already explained that the reason why EU-outsiders perceive the EU as more interest-oriented than EU-insiders might be because the former do not only consider the EU's strategies but also what is discussed in negotiation and done in practice. This is in line with research concerning the EU's external policies, which has already shown the prevalence of interest-oriented goals over value-based goals (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022: 221,22) in specific domains. This can be confirmed concerning the external perspectives on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US.

What is also similar to the results concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa is the interest-orientation of member states, with the EU being the 'referee' trying to distribute gains in a balanced manner as well as providing fora to communicate with the US, such as the Trade and Technology Council or the EU-US Cyber Dialogue. Further, the EU delivers domestic laws with an external effect, which are not addressed to a particular country, though, such as the Digital Markets Act (DMA) or the Digital Services Act (DSA). Still, they are discussed in said fora due to their relevance for US-American digital companies. France is the most relevant player in the context of member states' interests, with its own digital industry and economic gains at heart. Thus, it tries to influence the EU's domestic digital laws having an external effect accordingly, such as the AI Act.

Differences between EU and US norms regarding digital issues do exist. However, the two actors are largely like-minded, making them allies in countering different-minded actors such as China in particular but also Russia. Concerning the former, the EU and the US started with different approaches, which have been aligning recently. China is also a relevant factor concerning the Global South, where China is very active, also in the digital sector. Thus, the EU and the US plan to work together to counter Chinese influence in the Global South, but the implementation remains to be desired. Another relevant issue with regard to China is standard setting, where China is very involved as well. Also, in this context, activity on the part of the EU and the US leaves room for improvement.

While the values of the EU and the US are at least primarily aligned, their respective regulatory approaches differ, though, with the US tending towards public-private partnerships and a non-binding approach and the EU to binding regulations. A further interesting aspect is that it also depends on the policy area how much the EU and the US agree, with the domain of cyber security being one where the two actors usually agree and the domains of digital industry and trade, where there are more controversial issues lending themselves to debate.

An essential concept in the EU's external digital policy towards the US is digital sovereignty, which could be linked to conflicting relationships between interests and values and is defined differently by different actors. Lately, politicians, such as Commissioner Vestagher, have been using the concept of economic security more often. Just like digital sovereignty, economic security also lacks a precise definition, but it can be linked to geopolitical gains based on the analysis.

7 Comparison and Discussion of Results

Before giving a short outline of this chapter, a concise overview of the question and how it was approached in this research project shall be provided. This thesis aims to **show if there is an interest-orientation in the EU's external digital policies towards the US and Africa** and if this interest-orientation or lack thereof is **perceived**. Thus, it is assessed in how far there is a **gap** between how the EU **portrays** itself and how it is **perceived** concerning the **driving factors** behind its **external digital policy**. Another layer is added due to **potential differences** between the EU's **presented** and **perceived driving factors** in its **external digital policy** towards a **digital leader**, the US, versus towards a **digital laggard**, Africa. Based on the literature, interests and norms¹¹¹ drive actors' global policies and goals lend themselves best to distinguish between them (see for instance Tocci 2008b). Hence, those two concepts – interests and norms – were rigorously operationalised for the analysis.

The results presented in the individual empirical chapters on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US shall be compared and discussed in this chapter. First, the similarities and differences will be carved out regarding the three perspectives – projection of the EU's image, perception by EU-insiders and by EU-outsiders and their respective focus on norms, interests and the relevant domains. Then, themes closely related to norms and interests in the EU's external digital policies, such as the role of China or normative differences between world regions, will be outlined. Finally, the EU's potential strategic intention behind its normative discourse will be discussed concerning its economic and geopolitical interests as well as concerning the EU's approach to the US as an equal partner and lack thereof vis-à-vis Africa.

¹¹¹ The term norm is used in the sense of values, not in the sense of legal norms.

7.1 Comparison of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US: same ideal type but differences within

Table 75: The EU's external digital policy – perception versus image: ideal types of the EU's global digital actorness

		Image projected by the EU	
		<i>Norm-oriented</i>	<i>Interest-oriented</i>
Perception of EU by outsiders	<i>Norm-oriented</i>	coherent normative actor presentation as normative actor, perception as normative actor	incoherent normative actor¹¹² presentation as realist actor, perception as normative actor
	<i>Interest-oriented</i>	incoherent realist actor¹¹³ presentation as normative actor, perception as realist actor	coherent realist actor presentation as realist actor, perception as realist actor

In both cases, in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa as well as towards the US, the EU corresponds to the ideal type of an incoherent realist actor, meaning it presents itself as a normative actor in its publicly available documents but is perceived as a realist, i.e. interest-oriented, actor by EU-outsiders. Still, there are differences in the intensity of the differences between those two perspectives, the image the EU gives itself and the perception of EU-outsiders.

The norm-orientation of the image projected by the EU is less robust in the EU's external digital policy towards the US than the one towards Africa. The interest-orientation of the perception of EU-outsiders is quite similar in both external digital policies, though. So, although the EU is, in both cases, an incoherent realist actor, the EU is more coherent in the case of its external digital policy towards the US since the difference between the image perspective and the EU-outsider's perspective is less pronounced.

¹¹² Whenever the presentation and the perception contradict each other – one being norm-oriented the other interest-oriented – the EU can be assessed as an incoherent actor. A decision concerning the naming of those two incoherent ideal types had to be taken in order to distinguish them from each other. Which perspective shall be the name giver? Since it is the actual perception that in the end makes the EU a normative or realist actor, not the intentions or the wish of how to be seen, the perception of outsiders was used for the names of the two incoherent ideal types.

¹¹³ See footnote 2 above

Further, there are differences concerning the third perspective, namely the perception of EU-insiders with respect to those two external digital policies of the EU. The following subchapters will examine the mentioned differences, which will be visualised with the help of another categorisation of the EU as a global digital actor (see table below) apart from the one already presented in previous chapters. In this table below, the contrasting dimensions are not different perspectives, but it is the EU's external digital policy towards a digital leader, the US, which is put in contrast to the EU's external digital policy towards a laggard, Africa. The different ideal types of a global digital actor regarding the policies towards leaders and laggards are the following: normative actor or realist actor if the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US are the same concerning their normativity (or lack thereof); upward normative, downward realist actor or upward realist, downward normative actor if the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US are the opposite of each other concerning their norm/interest-orientation. The terms upward and downward were chosen to 'visualise' the relation between the EU and a digital leader, where the EU directs its policies 'upward'¹¹⁴, and the relation between the EU and a digital laggard, where the EU directs its policies 'downward'¹¹⁵.

Table 76: EU's external digital policy towards a digital leader (US) versus a digital laggard (Africa): Ideal types of the EU's global digital actorness

		External digital policy towards Africa (digital laggard)	
	Goals	<i>norm-based</i>	<i>interest-based</i>
External digital policy towards the US (digital leader)	<i>norm-based</i>	normative actor	upward normative, downward realist actor
	<i>interest-based</i>	upward realist, downward normative actor	realist actor

7.1.1 Projected image of the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US

¹¹⁴ Although the US is not in the lead in all digital domains compared to the EU, the term upward was used nonetheless since only some EU member states are equal to the US in some digital domains, but overall, the US can be considered in the lead.

¹¹⁵ The use of both terms, upward and downward, is a simplification for reasons stated above under footnote 2, and it is not meant in a judgemental manner but refers to the UN digital development compass. The terms are used to help differentiate the relations in the digital arena between the EU and the US versus the EU and Africa.

Starting with the first perspective, the image the EU gives itself in its publicly available documents, the EU can be categorised as a normative actor, even when contrasting its external digital policy towards a digital leader, the US, with its external digital policy towards a digital laggard, Africa (see table below).

Table 77: Projected image – EU’s external digital policy towards Africa versus the US: ideal types of the EU’s global digital actorness

External digital policy towards the US (digital leader)	Goals	External digital policy towards Africa (digital laggard)	
		<i>norm-based</i>	<i>interest-based</i>
	<i>norm-based</i>	normative actor	upward normative, downward realist actor
	<i>interest-based</i>	upward realist, downward normative actor	realist actor

Although the image the EU projects is normative in both cases, there is a difference concerning the depth of the gap between norm-based and interest-based goals mentioned in the documents. Regarding the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa, there are 93% norm-based and 7% interest-based goals. In comparison, 63% norm-based goals versus 37% interest-based goals are in the documents regarding the EU’s external digital policy towards the US. Thus, the norm-orientation of the EU in its external digital policy towards a digital laggard is by far more pronounced than the normativity of its external digital policy towards a digital leader in this perspective of self-portrayal.

Table 78: Norms versus interests: the EU’s projected image of its external digital policy towards Africa and the US

Goals	EU’s external digital policy towards	
	Africa	US
Norm-based goals	93%	63%
Interest-based goals	7%	37%

After the perspective of the EU’s projected image, the perspective of EU-outsiders, i.e. the external perspective, shall be further scrutinised by comparing the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa with the one towards the US.

7.1.2 EU-outsiders' perspective on the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US

The perspective of EU-outsiders paints the reverse picture, with interest-based goals being in the lead in both cases, in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa as well as towards the US. Thus, the EU can be categorised as a realist actor, as outlined in the table below.

Table 79: Perspective of EU-outsiders – EU's external digital policy towards Africa versus the US: ideal types of the EU's global digital actorness

External digital policy towards the US (digital leader)	Goals	External digital policy towards Africa (digital laggard)	
		<i>norm-based</i>	<i>interest-based</i>
	<i>norm-based</i>	normative actor	upward normative, downward realist actor
	<i>interest-based</i>	upward realist, downward normative actor	realist actor

However, this perspective does not show a relevant difference between the gap between norm- and interest-based goals in those two external digital policies of the EU. So, while the EU's projected image in the case of its external digital policy towards Africa is far more normative than its external digital policy towards the US, EU-outsiders perceive the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US as quite similar concerning their lack of normativity and prevalence of interests.

Table 80: Norms versus interests in the external perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US

Goals	EU's external digital policy towards	
	Africa	US
Norm-based goals	23%	29%
Interest-based goals	77%	71%

After the external perspective, the internal perspective will be examined to assess the EU's global digital actorness regarding the contrast between its external digital policy towards a digital laggard and a digital leader.

7.1.3 EU-insiders' perspective on the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US

It is when observing the differences in the EU's external digital policies towards the US and Africa from the internal perspective that the analysis of the results becomes even more intriguing, as can be seen in the tables below. First, the EU can be assessed as an upward normative and downward realist actor since the EU's external digital policy towards Africa is considered normative and the EU's external digital policy towards the US is seen as interest-oriented according to EU-officials.

Table 81: Perspective of EU-insiders – EU's external digital policy towards Africa versus the US: ideal types of the EU's global digital actorness

		External digital policy towards Africa (digital laggard)	
		Goals	
External digital policy towards the US (digital leader)		<i>norm-based</i>	<i>interest-based</i>
	<i>norm-based</i>	normative actor	upward normative, downward realist actor
	<i>interest-based</i>	upward realist, downward normative actor	realist actor

Observing the exact figures (see tables below), there is a clear difference in the gap between norm-based and interest-based goals in those two external digital policies. While EU-insiders perceive the EU's external digital policy towards Africa as clearly normative, the perception of the EU's external digital policy towards the US only shows a slight tendency towards interests, with almost a balance between norms and interests rather than an overwhelming preponderance of interests. Thus, one could also adapt the name of the category of the EU's global digital actorness to '**upward balanced, downward normative**'.

Table 82: Norms versus interests – internal perception of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US

Goals	External digital policy towards	
	Africa	US
Norm-based goals	78%	46%
Interest-based goals	22%	54%

So, the insider's perspective is the only one where the EU's external digital policies towards a digital leader, the US, and a digital laggard, Africa, are seen to diverge. While the EU draws a normative picture of itself in both external digital policies, the EU-insiders paint a different picture only when it comes to the EU's external digital policy towards the US. This can be due to the EU and its officials actually looking 'down' on Africa and thus orientating the EU's policy towards solidarity and the interests of Africa rather than focusing on the EU's interests. In contrast, with regard to a digital leader like the US, the EU still wants to be seen as a normative actor, as the analysis of its publicly available documents shows. At the same time, its officials in their daily jobs consider the EU's interests when addressing a digital leader like the US. This will be further discussed in one of the following chapters, focusing on the EU's interest-based goals behind its norm-oriented discourse. First, the different types of norms, interests, and domains shall be compared between the external digital policies of the EU covered in this research project.

7.1.4 Types of norms, interests and domains: comparing and contrasting the EU's external digital policy towards a digital laggard (Africa) versus towards a digital leader (US)

A comparison of the leading norm categories, all interest categories – since there are only three, all three shall be compared – and the leading domains in the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US will deliver an overview of the main differences and similarities beyond the norm-interest dichotomy.

The norm of inter-regional solidarity ranks almost always first and human rights second in the EU's external digital policy towards a leader and a laggard. The relevance of those two norms in the EU's external digital policy towards the US and Africa aligns with Johanne Døhlle Saltnes (2021) assessment that it is those two norms¹¹⁶ that collide regarding the EU's trade policy towards Rwanda, proving their relevance as well. The author revealed that the EU gave priority to the development norm over the norm of human rights, which relates to this research project's results also coming to the conclusion that among those two very relevant norms, inter-regional solidarity mostly ranks first.

¹¹⁶ Although Saltnes calls the norm 'development' rather than inter-regional solidarity.

Nonetheless, this does not automatically mean that the ‘quality’ of this inter-regional solidarity in both of the EU’s external digital policies tackled in this project is the same, as will be outlined in the later chapter ‘7.3.4 Cooperating versus educating – who is considered an equal partner?’ There is a difference between the paternalistic quality of the EU’s inter-regional solidarity towards Africa and its cooperative inter-regional solidarity towards the US.

There are **two outliers**, though, where inter-regional solidarity is not the leading norm. First, in the **EU-outsiders’ perspective on the EU’s external digital policy towards the US**, where it is the other way round: the norm of respect for human rights ranks first, while inter-regional solidarity ranks second. This can be interpreted as marking the difference in norm prioritisation between the EU and the US. While the US focuses more on the norm of liberty (freedom of expression), the EU focuses more on human rights (in connection with digital, this is the protection of citizens’ data). This might be why the EU’s focus on the norm of human rights is perceived strongly by EU-outsiders concerning the EU’s external digital policy towards the US, since this difference is in the foreground particularly regarding the Data Privacy Framework (DPF)¹¹⁷.

Concerning the latter, I suggest that it is particularly relevant in the EU-US relations concerning the digital sphere due to the DPF’s highly politicised¹¹⁸ nature and vital importance for the US and its digital giants. Hence, it certainly is very relevant in the EU-outsiders’ perception. Looking at how the EU communicates about the DPF in particular, the focus is on human rights rather than on the more ‘cooperative’ norm of inter-regional solidarity, which constitutes an exception in the EU’s communication concerning its external digital policy towards the US. Thus, the focus is on a norm where there are differences between the EU’s and US’ approach leading to said politicisation. The stronger focus of the perception of EU-outsiders of the EU’s external digital policy towards the US on the norm of human rights can be interpreted as a consequence of this high relevance of the DPF in their perception and the EU’s communication’s focus on the norm of human rights rather than on inter-regional solidarity regarding this particular policy. This is not the case concerning the EU’s communication about other external digital policies. The EU’s catering to the needs of the US is therefore less present

¹¹⁷ The Data Privacy Framework (DPF) should ensure secure data flows between the EU and the US.

¹¹⁸ The politicisation of the DPF can be related to the history of this framework, which is marked by challenges in court by the Austrian lawyer Max Schrems. Already the forerunners of the current framework, Safe Harbour and the EU-US Privacy Shield, were confronted with complaints in front of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) and further legal action regarding the current DPF has already been announced by Max Schrems’ NGO *noyb* (none of your business). *noyb* argues that the new Data Privacy Framework is not very different from its forerunner, the Privacy Shield and thus, it still has many considerable weaknesses.

while the challenge concerning the different approaches of the EU and the US regarding human rights in the digital age are seen as a stronger driving force behind this policy.

The **second outlier** can be found in the **EU's officials' perspective on the EU's external digital policy towards the US**, where inter-regional solidarity can be considered as on a par with human rights (28% versus 31% respectively). This could be due to the EU insiders having knowledge of what is discussed behind closed doors, where respect for human rights might be in the forefront. Further, the above outlined arguments with relation to politicisation and the Schrems cases concerning the DPF and its forerunners might also be valid in this context. The ongoing issues concerning data flows between the EU and the US might also shift the focus of EU officials' perception towards human rights as a main driving force of the EU's external digital policy towards the US, since this is what some of the interviewed officials are also concerned with in their daily work.

The most essential interests are almost always economic gains, except again for the EU-outsiders' view on the EU's external digital policy towards the US, where political gains rank first. Thus, **respecting the interests of the targeted country (=inter-regional solidarity), human rights, and the EU's economic gains are primarily at the core of the EU's external digital policy** in the covered cases. The leading domains are trans-regional governance, industry, trade, and security in both external digital policies; in the case of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, development cooperation is also highly relevant.

Table 83: Leading norm categories in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US in all three perspectives

	EU's external digital policy towards Africa	EU's external digital policy towards the US
Image projected by EU	inter-regional solidarity (42%) human rights & sustainable development (15 %)	inter-regional solidarity (59%) human rights & rule of law (12%)
Perception of EU-insiders	inter-regional solidarity (50%) human rights (32 %)	inter-regional solidarity (31%) human rights (28 %)
Perception of EU-outsiders	inter-regional solidarity (83%) human rights (17 %)	human rights (48%) inter-regional solidarity (24%)

100% = total number of norm-based goals

Table 84: Interest categories in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US in all three perspectives

	EU's external digital policy towards Africa	EU's external digital policy towards the US
Image projected by EU	economic gains (75%) political gains (17%) security gains (8%)	economic gains (57%) security gains (27%) political gains (17%)
Perception of EU-insiders	economic gains (64%) security gains/political gains (both 18%)	economic gains (45%) security gains (32%) political gains (24%)
Perception of EU-outsiders	economic gains (60%) political gains (25%) security gains (5%) (10 % uncategorised)	political gains (59%) economic gains (37%) security gains (4%)

Note: 100% = total number of interest-based goals. The percentages are rounded figures. Thus, the sum of percentages is not always 100.

Table 85: Leading domains in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US in all three perspectives

	EU's external digital policy towards Africa	EU's external digital policy towards the US
Image projected by EU	transregional governance (28%) development cooperation (26%) industry (25%)	industry (32%) trade (29%) transregional governance (17%)
Perception of EU-insiders	industry (33%) transregional governance (22%) security (18%)	transregional governance (38%) industry (37%) security (21%)
Perception of EU-outsiders	trade (38%) development cooperation (27%) industry (15%)	transregional governance (28%) industry (43%) trade (14%)

100% = total number of goals

After gaining an overview of the differences and similarities between the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US regarding interests, norms, their subcategories, and domains,

issues identified as being strongly related to those two policies shall be outlined and summarised.

7.2 Recurring themes in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US

In the empirical chapters on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US, the primary analysis was the frequency analysis concerning norms, interests, their subcategories and domains of said EU's external digital policies. Nonetheless, the study was continued and deepened to uncover aspects related to norms and interests. Those aspects correspond to what is called "related issues" by Dubois and Gadde (2002: 555), and were identified in the research project at hand, potentially lending themselves for future research (see 4.1.1. on the abductive approach in the chapter on Research Design). Such further research on those topics was beyond the scope of this thesis since answering new research questions concerning those related issues would ask for new and different research designs. Hence, this identification of related issues aimed to help put the core analysis results in a broader context and identify research desiderata for the future.

7.2.1 China as a link between the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US

China is a theme that connects the EU's external digital policy towards Africa with the one towards the US. The EU and the US try to unite against China regarding norms and standards in the digital realm, globally but also with regard to Africa in particular, where China already has a certain influence, also in the digital sector. The EU and the US try to counter China's influence globally and in Africa, particularly regarding internet governance and surveillance, i.e., China's wish for a more 'sovereign' and thus fragmented internet and its lack of focus on privacy and data protection. China's influence on Africa and other regions mainly passes through its infrastructure supply and presence in international fora, such as the ITU (International Telecommunication Union), where the EU and the US cooperate to counter China. A challenge is the EU's and the US' different stances towards China (and the differences between EU-member states), with the first being less hesitant to counter China since China is

an important business partner for some member states, and the latter, the US, being more ‘hawkish’.

There is also a link between the theme of China, particularly concerning Africa, and the EU’s strategic use of normative discourse, as well as the lack of an equal partnership between the EU and Africa (both issues are discussed below in the respective subchapters). The EU portrays itself as focusing on norms and solidarity to ensure Africa benefits from the EU’s policies towards its Southern neighbour. At the same time, the EU criticises China as being focused on its own interests, leaving African interests behind. This ‘China-bashing’, as it is sometimes referred to, is not well-received in Africa since the Chinese approach is considered less paternalistic and more ‘equal’ than the EU’s approach from the African perspective.

7.2.2 Interest-oriented member states versus a normative EU

Member states and their own interest-based external digital policies were also a theme during the analysis of both the EU’s external digital policy towards the US and the one towards Africa. This is because member states do have competence in the domain of security within the digital realm. Still, the external digital policy – not being a ‘classic’ foreign or security policy – is a mixed competence. Even in security matters in the digital sphere, a shift towards a more common digital foreign policy can be observed.

As discussed in the next chapter, associating member states with interests and the EU with values might partly be due to the EU’s (strategically) normative discourse. It also aligns with the realist school of thought of International Relations, seeing interests as states’ first-order concerns, as well as with Andrew Moravcsik’s European integration theory of liberal intergovernmentalism, outlining the rationality of member states focusing on their interests (Moravcsik 1993). It was, in particular, France (in the EU’s external digital policy towards the US) and France and Germany (in the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa) that attracted the attention of the interviewees. The difference between the two is the more positive image of Germany in Africa, having left the continent already after the First World War, in contrast to France, whose economic interests also feed into the EU’s external digital policy towards the US.

7.2.3 Different norms in different regions of the world

The third recurring theme was the different values in the digital realm that prevail in other regions and countries. This was more prominent regarding the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, where the US came in as an ally against Chinese and Russian influence in the digital realm in Africa as well as the questioning of European or Western norms' universality in the digital realm.

Nonetheless, the so-called 'like-minded' partners of the EU and the US also have their differences regarding values, particularly human rights regarding privacy and data protection, as the difficult negotiations concerning the Data Privacy Framework are proof of. An interesting aspect is the evaluation of some interviewees that it is not the difference in values but rather the different regulatory approaches and ways to integrate and implement values in digital policies by the EU and the US that are relevant. In this context, it was outlined that the EU's tendency was to create binding laws while the US finds less intrusive ways and focuses on public-private partnerships. Further, the EU was said to support the development of the private sector by creating a regulatory space. In contrast, the US was evaluated as having a tendency to give companies the space to develop first, regulating only later. Concerning Africa, it is considered crucial by particularly EU-outsiders that neither the EU nor the US impose 'Western' digital values on African countries in a paternalistic manner, but give the continent a possibility to develop its own norms in the digital sphere.

7.3 The EU's (potential) strategic intentions behind its normative discourse

7.3.1 The EU's strategic normative narrative

The normative discourse as was assessed regarding publicly available documents in this research can be due to the EU being rooted in its self-conception as normative power or at least as normative actor. On the other hand, this normative orientation of the image the EU gives itself can also be the result of strategic intention. The tension between the internal perspective and the image the EU gives itself regarding the EU's external digital policy towards the US, as outlined before, already shows the EU's intention to present itself as normative actor in publicly available documents, while EU officials responsible for said EU policy have a more interest-based approach in their daily work. In general, the differences between the three perspectives –

the image the EU gives itself, the perspective of EU-insiders and the one of EU-outsiders – within both external digital policies are more substantial than the differences between the respective perspectives of the two external digital policies. Thus, a strategic intention concerning the EU's discourse, i.e. how the EU presents itself – norm-based in both its external digital policy towards Africa and the US – seems perfectly plausible.

Regarding the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, where on the one hand both perspectives, the image perspective as well as the internal perspective, paint a normative picture, there was an interesting discovery within the image perspective. There was one document of a more internal nature that could be used for this research project, thanks to information from interviewees. The Commission staff working document from 2017 was the one document regarding the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, where most of the interest-based goals were found. This document was publicly available but still hard to find on the EU's website and as the title – staff working document – already says, it is of a more 'internal' nature than a press release. The latter is usually more prominently presented on the website and thus more visible to journalists as well as used by those in their reporting. This is also consistent with what some interviewees said concerning a norm-based communication of the EU being more appreciated by audiences within as well as outside the European Union (for instance interviewee 3/4). Delving more into the theoretical framework used in this research project, two types of interests could be identified that might actually be followed while norms are used in the EU's discourse: economic and geopolitical interests.

7.3.2 Strategic use of norms in a geopolitical context

Starting from a geopolitical angle, the EU strategically uses norms when fighting against China and Russia regarding spheres of influence in the global digital arena. This is partly done together with the US and partly even concerning Africa, where China and Russia have a certain impact, also in the digital realm. China and Russia constitute a common enemy in the digital sphere since they represent values different from those of the EU and the US. This is particularly relevant concerning the norms of respect for human rights, democracy and liberty. Although the focus is on norms, the actual goal is to enshrine those norms as global standards and improve their influence on other countries, particularly countries of the Global South.

7.3.3 Economic interests hidden behind norms?

Regarding economic interests linked to norms, digital giants originating from other countries and regions can be curtailed with the help of norms such as data protection (norm of respect for human rights). Neither can this be considered a conscious linking of a norm and an interest, nor is it part of the EU's external digital policy towards the US. Still, it is part of its domestic policy, which also has an external dimension, such as the Digital Services Act (DSA)¹¹⁹, the Digital Markets Act (DMA)¹²⁰, or the AI (Artificial Intelligence) Act¹²¹. Such policies are domestic in that they are applied within the EU, i.e. for companies that do business within the EU, but have an external dimension since those companies can also be companies from outside the EU. Thus, those regulations also affect how such globally operating companies act, both within and outside the EU, as Anu Bradford argues concerning the so-called Brussels effect¹²². Those policies are not directed at US companies but at any digital companies operating in the EU.

Nonetheless, this is relevant to the EU's external digital policy towards the US (or any other 'digital leader') since globally active US digital companies such as Meta or Google exist. At the same time, it is irrelevant for the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, as there are no globally active African digital companies. This relevance is shown since such regulations are also discussed in the fora dedicated to the EU's actual external digital policy towards the US, such as the Trade and Technology Council or the Cyber Dialogue between the EU and the US. Those fora are used to explain those domestic policies with an external effect. Such explaining is undoubtedly necessary since adhering to such regulations based on norms such as human rights (data protection), liberty (free speech), and also consumer rights (mainly through the DMA focusing on competition) leads to a certain restriction as well as costs or loss in revenue of affected companies. This is often used to underpin the argument that the EU actually

¹¹⁹The Digital Services Act protects the users' safety and fundamental rights by preventing illegal and harmful activities as well as the spread of disinformation.

¹²⁰The Digital Markets Act complements competition rules with an ex-ante approach aiming at reducing the power of very large digital companies and making the digital sector fairer and contestable.

¹²¹The AI Act is a regulation based on a risk-based approach to AI, i.e. there are four different levels of risk starting from minimal and ending with unacceptable risk. The different forms of AI have to respect different rules according to their level of risk.

¹²²Anu Bradford's (2020) concept of the Brussels effect explains the compliance of companies with a global presence with the EU's regulations, such as the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). It thus refers to the de jure or de facto validity of EU norms in other regions of the world. For details concerning the Brussels effect, please consult chapter 3.1.1 on Normative Power Europe, where this concept is explained thoroughly.

wants to support the development of its own digital giants by constraining already existing digital giants originating from other countries, particularly the US.

In short, while those policies are not part of the EU's external digital policy towards the US nor Africa, they are linked to the EU's external digital policy towards the US since they are discussed with the US in the respective fora. In this context, it can thus be inferred that the norms behind those policies could also be linked to economic interests, even if not explicitly, and hence, in the EU's discourse, the norms are nonetheless in the foreground as the normative results concerning the image the EU gives itself, even relating to a digital leader such as the US, show.

Another example within the EU's external digital policy towards the US is the Data Privacy Framework (DPF), which is norm-oriented but could also be linked to economic interests. While within the Trade and Technology Council, the norm of inter-regional solidarity is in the foreground, it is the norm of respect for human rights (in this particular case, data protection) which is enshrined in the DPF, a framework organising data flows compatible with the EU's GDPR. Again, while there is a norm that prevails, there is a connected economic interest, indirectly supporting European companies and making them more competitive by making sure American companies have to adhere to the same strict data protection rules as European firms have to.

7.3.4 Cooperating versus 'educating' – who is considered an equal partner?

To assess whom the EU considers an equal partner, scrutinising how and in how far a policy, in that case, the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US, is negotiated – or not negotiated, is revealing. As was outlined in the respective empirical chapters, the EU and the US debate their cooperation regularly in different fora, in the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC), in the EU-US Cyber Dialogue and the Joint Technology Competition Dialogue. The Data Privacy Framework has also been repeatedly discussed between high officials of the US Department of Commerce and of the EU Commission. In the case of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, the meetings were scarcer, particularly EU-AU summits, which were frequently postponed, covering digital issues, among other topics.

There is no EU-Africa Trade and Technology Council or EU-Africa Cyber Dialogue. While in the case of the EU's external digital policy towards the US, the relevant documents are related to those fora, such as press releases or statements concerning those, the relevant documents in

the case of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa are often unilateral strategic documents, such as Multi-annual Indicative Programmes (MIP), the comprehensive strategy with Africa, the Global Gateway Strategy or Digital4Development documents.

So, the EU's external digital policy towards the US is more oriented towards dialogue with the US, while the EU's external digital policy towards Africa is more one-sided. Additionally, a paternalistic approach of the EU was referred to by interviewees. It can thus be concluded that the EU deals with the US as an equal partner with whom the EU hence cooperates, while the EU looks down on Africa, rather deciding unilaterally what to do. The equal partnership with Africa, as proclaimed in 2017 by the European External Action Service (2017), has thus not (yet) materialised.

Apart from the quality and quantity of the interactions between the EU and its counterparts, the next part will also examine how norms and interests are combined within the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US, which is insightful regarding the existence of an equal or unequal partnership.

The first lines of the following tables show the percentages of the norm-based goals, which were explicitly combined with interest-based goals in the documents (projected image) and in the interviews with EU-insiders (internal perception) compared to the total number of norm-based goals (=100%) in the documents and interviews respectively. The second lines show the percentages of the goals based on inter-regional solidarity that were combined with interest-based goals regarding the total number of goals based on inter-regional solidarity (=100 %). Only those two perspectives are scrutinised since how the EU and its officials see Africa and the US is relevant for assessing whether the two actors are considered equal partners.

*Table 86: EU's **projected image** of its external digital policy towards Africa and the US: explicit combinations of norms/inter-regional solidarity with interests compared to total number of norms/norms of inter-regional solidarity*

Combined goals	EU's external digital policy towards	
	Africa	US
combination norm & interest	8%	43%
combination inter-regional solidarity & interest	19%	73%

100% = total number of norm-based and inter-regional solidarity-based goals, respectively

*Table 87: **Internal perception** of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US: explicit combinations of norms/inter-regional solidarity with interests compared to total number of norms/norm of inter-regional solidarity*

Combined goals	EU's external digital policy towards	
	Africa	US
combination norm & interest	18%	31%
combination inter-regional solidarity & interest	37%	90%

100% = total number of norm-based and inter-regional solidarity-based goals, respectively

In the projected image, as well as the internal perception, norms are more often combined with interests in the EU's external digital policy towards the US than towards Africa. The difference between the EU's external digital policy towards the US and Africa is even more substantial in the case of the combination of inter-regional solidarity and interests. This shows that in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa, from the perspective of the EU (projected image) as well as from the perspective of EU-officials (internal perception), a norm is instead the pure basis of a goal and even more so is inter-regional solidarity mostly the only motive behind a goal, without any reference to an interest.

Turning the angle now towards interests and investigating the percentages of the combinations of norm- and interest-based goals again but compared to the total number of interests this time gives us even further enlightening insights, as seen in the tables below. The calculation is again also made regarding inter-regional solidarity to make it visible that it is often only or almost only this norm that is combined with an interest.

*Table 88: EU's **projected image** of its external digital policy towards Africa and the US: explicit combinations of norms/inter-regional solidarity with interests compared to the total number of interests*

Combined goals	EU's external digital policy towards	
	Africa	US
combination interest & norm	100%	73%
combination interest & inter-regional solidarity	100%	73%

100% = total number of interest-based goals

*Table 89: **Internal perception** of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US: explicit combinations of norms/inter-regional solidarity with interests compared to the total number of interests*

Combined goals	EU's external digital policy towards	
	Africa	US
combination interest & norm	64%	26%
combination interest & inter-regional solidarity	64%	24%

100% = total number of interest-based goals

As can be seen, every single interest mentioned in the documents, i.e. in the image the EU projects in its external digital policy towards Africa, is combined with a norm. There is not one interest-based goal that stands alone and is not related to the norm of inter-regional solidarity, i.e., there is always also the interest of the African continent mentioned. This is an indirect and subtle way of communicating 'We, the EU, support Africa' rather than advertising Africa as an equal partner – which is done explicitly in other documents and on the EU's website, as referred to before. So, there is a contradiction between what the EU communicates expressly on its website and what can be found in its strategic documents when analysing its goals.

This is not the case in the EU's external digital policy towards the US, where most interests are combined with norms, but not all of them. Thus, we can infer that the combination of an interest with the norm of inter-regional solidarity is considered a necessity in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and as desired in the EU's external digital policy towards the US, also showing the EU's intention of creating a normative image.

Concerning the EU's officials, they still combine most of the interests with norms regarding the EU's external digital policy towards Africa. Still, regarding the EU's external digital policy towards the US, only a tiny part of its interests is combined with norms according to EU-officials. So, also, in this perspective, the combination of an interest with a norm can be assessed as more critical in the EU's external digital policy towards a digital laggard (Africa) than in the EU's external digital policy towards a leader (US). This tendency to combine more interests with norms rather than having them stand alone as motivating factors with regard to Africa aligns with the EU's one-sided, paternalistic approach towards its Southern neighbour, which combines better with a more norm-, in particular, solidarity-oriented rhetoric. This also hints at the difference in the nature of solidarity shown towards Africa and the US, with the first being more of a paternalistic and derogatory nature. At the same time, the second is more cooperative and mutual.

Regarding the norm of inter-regional solidarity, it shall again be underlined that this norm is the most frequently referred to in the EU's external digital policy towards the US and Africa, not one of Manners' (2002) core norms¹²³, which is an interesting empirical outcome and contribution of this research. This is partly why it is also the norm most commonly combined with interests, but this is also because it conveniently combines with an interest since it is an interest of the partner country (= norm of inter-regional solidarity from the EU's view), which is combined with an interest of the EU. In the case of the EU's external digital policy towards the US from insiders' perspective, interests were also combined with the norms of human rights and democracy. However, most combinations were still with the norm of inter-regional solidarity. The norm of human rights shall still be highlighted as another significant norm in the EU's external digital policies analysed in this research project, since it either ranks second or even outranks inter-regional solidarity once.

Let us now link Diez' types of Othering¹²⁴ (Diez 2005: 628) with what we have seen concerning the EU's quality and quantity of interactions with its two counterparts at hand, Africa and the US, as well as with the EU's and its officials' view on the mixed (=based on norms and interests) motivation versus the pure value-based motivation of the EU's goals in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US. In both cases, we can exclude the EU from seeing Africa or the US as an existential threat or violating universal principles since the EU has been interacting with both rather than being at war or resorting to other drastic measures.

It can be inferred that the EU views Africa as inferior since the EU rather unilaterally decides what to do in its external digital policy towards Africa. Thus, the EU is in an 'educating mode' rather than a 'cooperative' mode. Further, when it comes to inter-regional solidarity, it is also rather a 'unilateral' than 'mutual' solidarity since the EU, as well as its officials, view the EU's goals as being rather purely norm-based than being motivated by both norms and interests. Further, interests are always, or at least most of the time, combined with the norm of inter-regional solidarity.

A mixed motivation, i.e. a norm- and interest-based motivation, is more often the case regarding the EU's external digital policy towards the US. This can be linked to the US being considered different and not inferior and even to the US being seen as an equal partner. This is shown by

¹²³ Peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights are core norms of the EU according to Ian Manners.

¹²⁴ According to Diez, the 'Other' (in this case Africa or the US) can be represented as different, inferior, violating universal principles or as an existential threat.

the fact that the EU and the US openly combine their mutual interests and norms cooperatively, which is possible because the EU and the US are in constant exchange in the different fora dedicated to the relations in the digital realm between those two actors.

Thus, the EU sees the US as an equal partner, not Africa. However, this was announced in 2017 and has been reiterated regularly since then, such as by Ursula von der Leyen in her opening speech at the tenth EU-AU summit. Regarding the scarcity and postponing of meetings between EU and AU officials, one cannot only ask how far Africa is an equal partner but also if creating such an equal partnership is a priority of the EU, as is often stated (see for instance European Commission 2022b).

7.3.5 Perception of interviewees and the relation to history

What further has to be considered as a potential difference between the EU's external digital policy towards the US and Africa is that concerning the latter, the history of the EU's relations with its counterpart is more critical than with the former. African interviewees' perception of the EU's external digital policy might not only concern said policy but also what happened in the past in other policy areas. Those experiences and the collective memory of Africans concerning their past in relation to Europe or particular member states can hardly be eliminated regarding perception. Their perception is based on what happens regarding digital policy but also on associations with the EU and member states, which were built on the past and said collective memory. As Tim Murithi (2023: 25) puts it: „But African societies do not see the past as past. They see it as present, still looming large over the pan-African landscape.“

Thus, to change African perception, the actual (not rhetoric) equality of the partnership between the EU and Africa has to be at the forefront for a certain time until African officials and citizens will perceive it as such. This entails the EU's effort to be frank with Africa, to put its interests on the table openly and to negotiate with and listen to Africa so the interests of both sides are taken into account.

7.4 Comparison of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US - summary and final remarks

While the EU is an **incoherent realist actor** (representing itself as normative, being perceived by EU-outsiders as interest-oriented) concerning **both, its external digital policy towards Africa, a digital laggard, as well as towards the US, a digital leader**, there are **differences between those two external policies**. Those can be seen when scrutinising the view of EU-insiders. In contrast, the EU's communication (self-image) and the view of EU-outsiders (external perception) are similar in both external policies. In this second perspective, the **perspective of EU-officials**, the EU is motivated by norms when it comes to its external digital policy towards Africa but is driven by interests with regard to its external digital policy towards the US. This corresponds to the ideal type of an **upward¹²⁵ realist/downward¹²⁶ normative actor**, or, since interests and norms are almost balanced in the EU's external digital policy towards the US, to the ideal type of an **upward balanced/downward normative actor**.

The occurrence of similar themes in both external digital policies is another similarity. Still, some themes only occur in one or the other external digital policy¹²⁷. One linking factor between the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US is China, as the **EU and the US cooperate regarding Chinese influence in Africa**, and the US puts a certain pressure on the EU aiming at the EU's alignment with the US' hawkish stance towards China, also in the digital realm. In **both foreign digital policies, the member states were associated with interests. At the same time, the EU was related to norms in several instances. It was also concluded in both cases that there are norm differences concerning digitalisation between the EU and Africa and between the EU and the US. However, in the latter case, the differences were considered minor.**

Finally, the EU's **potential strategic intentions behind its normatively oriented discourse** were discussed, referring to the EU's self-identity and its wish to present itself as a normative actor, the **strategic use of norms regarding geopolitics** as well as in a **business-related context** and the **strategic combination of interests with norms**. The latter issue was also related to the **EU's different approaches concerning inter-regional solidarity with Africa and the US – the first being paternalistic and derogative and the second being cooperative and mutual**. This puts the EU's purportedly equal partnership with Africa into question.

¹²⁵ = towards a digital leader

¹²⁶ = towards a digital laggard

¹²⁷ See the respective empirical chapters: 5.3.4 and 6.3.4

8 Conclusion & Outlook

This research project aimed to assess if and how far there is an interest-orientation in the EU's external digital policies towards the US and Africa. Further, potential tensions between how the EU presents itself and how it is perceived concerning the driving factors behind its external digital policy towards the US and Africa were uncovered. In this regard, potential differences regarding how the EU approaches a digital leader versus a digital laggard should be unearthed. Following the literature, saying that interests and norms drive actors' policies in the international arena, those two concepts, norms and interests, were operationalised for the analysis. The unit of analysis were goals since those were referred to as most suitable for distinguishing between norms and interests in the relevant literature. This concluding chapter shall give an outline of the contributions of this research project as well as the relevance of the results, followed by an outlook for potential future research based on the findings of this research project.

Since the preceding chapter, 'Comparison and Discussion' (chapter 7), offers a summary by comparing the analysis results of the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US, the reader shall be referred to this chapter for a general overview of the results. The results which should be highlighted at this point are first the ones showing that announcements of EU leaders did not materialise, second the result concerning norms- and interest categories and third the ones uncovering tensions between the EU's external digital policy towards a digital leader and a digital laggard and between the different perspectives on both external digital policies of the EU.

1. The EU's interest orientation in progress?

- a. While the stronger inclusion of interest-based elements in the EU's Global Strategy 2016 (Masters and Landsberg 2021: 72) as well as announcements of a stronger geopolitical orientation of the EU by high-ranking EU officials (Borrell 2020; Breton 2021; von der Leyen 2020b) would suggest a stronger interest orientation particularly towards geopolitical interests in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US. No such interest-orientation in publicly available documents concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US could be determined.
- b. The announcements that the partnership with Africa will be an equal one rather than an asymmetrical one (European External Action Service 2017) are also

linked to this issue of the EU's potential geopolitical orientation. An asymmetrical relationship is one focusing on the EU's delivering of support for Africa's development in the digital realm, thus the main driver of the EU's actions would be the norm of inter-regional solidarity. Considering Africa as equal partner concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa entails a more balanced approach by the EU, i.e. that different norms and also interests drive its actions rather than predominantly inter-regional solidarity. This announcement has not materialised either, with inter-regional solidarity being the prevalent motivator behind the EU's actions based on the EU's rhetoric.

2. Types of norms and interests

- a. It was interesting to see if the norm of inter-regional solidarity was the most prominent one in this policy field, rather than one of Manners' core norms. Nonetheless, Manners' core norm of respect for human rights is also a vital norm in the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US, outranking inter-regional solidarity even once, and usually ranking second.
- b. Regarding interests, it was economic gains that prevailed from the EU's perspective rather than the geopolitical gains; a prevalence of the latter would be in accordance with the announcement of a more geopolitical Europe.

3. Tensions between perspectives and policies towards a digital leader or laggard

- a. Tensions between two perspectives – the image the EU gives itself versus the perception of EU-outsiders
In both cases, in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa as well as towards the US, the EU corresponds to the ideal type of an incoherent realist actor, meaning it presents itself as a normative actor in its publicly available documents but is perceived as a realist, i.e. interest-oriented, actor by EU-outsiders.¹²⁸
- b. Tensions between the EU's external digital policy towards a digital leader versus towards a digital laggard

The EU-insiders' perspective is the only one in which the EU's external digital policies

¹²⁸ There is a parallel between the EU as normative empire with a norm-based discourse and interest-based actions (Del Sarto 2016) and the EU as incoherent realist actor with a norm-based discourse and an interest-based perception of EU-outsiders.

towards a digital leader, the US, and a digital laggard, Africa, diverge. In this internal perspective, the EU's external digital policy towards the US is seen as almost balanced with only a slight tendency towards interests, while the EU's external digital policy towards Africa is regarded as clearly normative. The EU thus corresponds to the ideal type of an 'upward balanced, downward normative' actor.

This thesis's theoretical contribution consists of providing a **framework to assess the EU's global digital actorness**. The first part of the framework is based on contrasting the image the EU gives itself and the perception from the outside regarding the EU's orientation towards norms or interests (see point 1. above and table below).

Table 90: The EU's external digital policy towards Africa & the US: ideal types based on different perspectives – image versus perception of outsiders

		Image projected by the EU	
		<i>Norm-oriented</i>	<i>Interest-oriented</i>
Perception of EU by outsiders	<i>Norm-oriented</i>	coherent normative actor presentation as normative actor, perception as normative actor	incoherent normative actor presentation as realist actor, perception as normative actor
	<i>Interest-oriented</i>	incoherent realist actor presentation as normative actor, perception as realist actor	coherent realist actor presentation as realist actor, perception as realist actor

The second part of the framework compares and contrasts the EU's external digital policy towards a digital leader, the US, with the one towards a digital laggard, Africa, again regarding the EU's interest versus its norm-orientation (see point 2 above and table below).

Table 91: *Ideal types of the EU's global digital actorness contrasting external digital policy towards a digital leader, Africa, and a digital laggard, the US*

		External digital policy towards Africa (digital laggard)	
		Goals	
		<i>norm-based</i>	<i>interest-based</i>
External digital policy towards the US (digital leader)	<i>norm-based</i>	normative actor	upward normative, downward realist actor
	<i>interest-based</i>	upward realist, downward normative actor	realist actor

EU's self-
presentation EU-insiders' perspective EU-outsiders' perspective

Interestingly, the EU's official documents on its external digital policies are always highly normative, no matter if the EU is confronted with a global digital leader or a digital laggard. In both cases, the focus is on the EU's solidarity with the vis-à-vis. Thus, according to the perspective of the image the EU gives itself, the EU is a normative actor. In the perspective of EU-outsiders, the EU is in both cases perceived as an interest-oriented actor, thus the EU corresponds to the ideal type of a realist actor. In the perspective of EU-officials, as already highlighted under point 2. above, there is a tension between how the EU is perceived as a global digital actor when confronted with a digital leader versus a digital laggard. Thus, the EU corresponds to an upward realist/downward normative actor, or rather an upward balanced¹²⁹/downward normative actor. Additionally, a typology of norms and interests, as well as domains of external digital policy, have been devised to ascertain which types of norms or interests prevail in which contexts.

The **empirical contribution** consists of analysing the different perspectives on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa and the US showing, for instance the great importance

¹²⁹ The norm-and interest-based goals were almost balanced in the perspective of EU-insiders with regard to the EU's external digital policy towards the US.

attributed to the EU's focus on supporting the third party's interests in the digital realm (=inter-regional solidarity) in almost all perspectives concerning the two external digital policies. This analysis finally also allowed for a normative and practical contribution, uncovering discrepancies between the EU's discourse and what is actually perceived. Thus, based on the results of this research, advisable changes in the EU's discourse, negotiations, strategies, and policies could be inferred. On the other hand, it could be seen that what was outlined as relevant issue areas in the chapters delivering the respective context for the EU's external digital policies towards Africa (chapter 5.2) and the US (chapter 6.2) were covered in the EU's strategic documents.

Apart from the substantial gap between how normative the EU presents itself and how interest-oriented it is viewed by 'outsiders', there was also another surprising and, in the view of the author, disappointing result: the lack of a genuine equal partnership between the EU and Africa in the digital realm. It might not be surprising when looking at the history of the relationship between the EU – and before the EU's existence between EU member states – and Africa. Still, it is surprising concerning the continued claims of an equal partnership by EU officials and since such a new policy field opens a window of opportunity for change. Thus, the development of the EU's external digital policy towards its Southern neighbour presented a chance to embrace a mutually appreciative and cooperative partnership with the African continent as a substitute for a more classic 'development-based' approach, often perceived as paternalistic. Unfortunately, this has not materialised, as the results of this research show. The EU should take its attitude towards the US in its external digital policy as a model, where the EU has chosen a cooperative approach to inter-regional solidarity.

Aside from the different qualities the particular norm of inter-regional solidarity can adopt and thus foster an equal partnership or not, a potential euro-centrism of norms in the digital realm lends itself to further research regarding an (un)equal partnership between the EU and Africa in the digital realm. As long as EU foreign policy stays based on Eurocentric norms and their dispersion, the EU's discourse about Africa will also stay paternalistic (Staeger 2016a: 981), making the EU's goal of developing an equal partnership, as stated in several EU documents, impossible. European norms – or norms for digital issues developed in Europe – take up much space in the strategic documents on the EU's digital policy in Africa, as seen in the analysis of the relevant documents and the number of times norms were explicitly mentioned in the expressed goals. Thus, the role of those Eurocentric norms in the EU's external digital policy

towards Africa (and maybe also towards other similar actors) should undoubtedly play a central role in future research concerning the equality of the partnership between the EU and Africa.

Further exciting results concern EU-insiders' perspective and the combination of norms and interests in EU documents. While the EU presents itself in its documents as being motivated by norms in both cases – in its external digital policy towards Africa as well as towards the US – EU-officials view their ‘employing institution’ as having a balanced motivation when it comes to its digital policy towards the US and a norm-based motivation concerning Africa.¹³⁰ This implies the relevant EU officials working intentionally towards interest-based goals in the case of the policy towards the US. Further, every single interest-based goal was combined with a norm-based goal in the documents concerning the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa; this was also done concerning the US but to a lesser extent, i.e. only a part of the interests were combined with norms, not all of them. This suggests the EU’s intention to appear as a normative actor vis-à-vis Africa, since interests’ combination with norms seems obligatory every single time interests are mentioned officially; a more interest-oriented language is avoided, although a more geopolitical Commission (von der Leyen 2020b) or EU actually should be more open about its own interests in order to at least move into the direction of the demanded “language of power” (Borrell 2020).

Relating these findings to the actual processes leading to the EU’s external digital policies towards those two actors – regular negotiations and cooperation with US officials versus scarce meetings with African officials and thus rather unilateral decisions on the side of the EU – leaves us with two different approaches applied by the EU. A cooperative approach towards the US, where mutual interests are discussed and common goals negotiated on the one hand. An only superficially cooperative approach towards Africa, on the other hand, owing to the scarcity of meetings between officials from both sides and an only seemingly normative orientation¹³¹, honest debates and negotiations were hampered, resulting in a rather unilateral approach of the EU. The author of this study did not anticipate this due to repeated claims by the EU that there was or at least would be an equal partnership with Africa for a few years already, starting in 2017. By 2024, it could be assumed that this partnership-based approach could have been put

¹³⁰ The insiders’ perspective is the only one, where the EU’s external digital policies towards a digital leader, the US, and a digital laggard, Africa, diverge.

¹³¹ It is only a seemingly normative orientation, since EU-outsiders assessed the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa as interest- oriented

into practice, particularly concerning such a new field offering a window of opportunity for such a new approach.

This is also linked to the frequently expressed goal of the EU having to learn the ‘language of power’, of which interest-based communication or language is the first step. Presenting one’s interests as the basis of one’s goals is a precondition of a language of power instead of a language focused on values and norms. Nonetheless, one does not exclude the other; both types of communication can co-exist, but interests also have to be present to develop a language of power alongside a language of norms. The EU-outsiders perceive the EU’s interests anyway, even if they are not openly communicated in official documents, as this research shows.

As outlined in the chapter on the Global Gateway (5.3.4.8), this strategic document constitutes a first step towards a more openly interest-oriented approach of the EU. This is even more accentuated in a recent internal document from 2024, the Briefing Book on International Partnerships, which was leaked to politico. In this document, the Directorate General International Partnerships (DG Intpa) stresses the importance of the EU offering African countries alternatives in a „battle of offers“, arguing that emerging markets are geopolitical actors. Those developing countries should, therefore, be considered as critical strategic partners, which have to be addressed „with a policy mix driven by economic interest, and less so by more traditional and narrow development and foreign policy approaches.“ (DG International Partnerships 2024: 1) This document does not concern digital policy but all policy fields, including the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa. It mentions the EU’s economic interest explicitly as well as the EU’s moving away from the traditional paternalistic approaches, which EU-outsiders partly criticised in the interviews. This direction towards a more interest-based approach by the EU in this recent internal document suggests changes in the EU’s rhetoric, so further research is needed concerning those potential developments.

Being more direct about the EU’s interests from the start might facilitate negotiations and make those more efficient on the one hand; on the other hand, this runs counter to a strategically normative discourse of the EU, as outlined in the preceding chapter under 7.3.1. What has to be decided by the EU’s representatives is how far a normative discourse for strategic reasons achieves the desired effect. In this regard, the negative perception of the EU’s critical discourse concerning China’s actions in Africa by African citizens must be considered. In this regard, the EU presents itself as a norm-based actor, while China only cares about its interests rather than

norms. This discourse is not perceived well in Africa. So, the question is, where is a strategically normative discourse helpful, and where does it have a negative impact?

This relates to the types of decisions the EU has to make about its norm- or interest-based motivation, as outlined in table 40 in chapter 5.3.4.2.3 on contradiction versus complementarity of norms and values. Whenever there is a contradiction between a norm and an interest, the EU can either take a ‘normative decision’, i.e. pursuing the norm-based goal, or a ‘realist decision’, i.e. pursuing the interest-based goal. In case a norm and an interest do not contradict each other, the EU’s decision concerns only how it wants to communicate. The EU can either communicate openly about this complementarity and thus a combination of a norm and an interest (which I called an ‘open realist normative decision’) or the EU can pretend to have a purely normative focus, i.e. hide the interest behind a norm, which I called ‘hidden realist normative decision’.

Another unanticipated outcome was the EU’s focus on the norm of inter-regional solidarity rather than on one of Manners’ (2002) core norms¹³². Based on the literature, in particular Manners’ articles, those norms should have been more present, particularly in the perspective of the EU’s self-portrayal. Apart from this hypothesis inferred from the literature, the EU’s discourse also raises the conjecture of a focus on Manners’ norms. The EU’s so-called human-centric approach is referred to in many documents, press releases and the EU’s website regarding its digital policies, insinuating a focus on such human-centred norms as respect for human rights, peace and liberty. Nonetheless, one of Manners’ core norms – human rights – is a significant norm in the EU’s external digital policies towards the US and Africa. Usually, this norm occupies the second rank but it also outranks inter-regional solidarity in the external perception of the EU’s external digital policy towards the US and is on a par with inter-regional solidarity in the EU’s officials’ perception of said policy.

Based on the results concerning the perception of EU-outsiders of the EU being more norm-oriented than its member states, whom some interviewees considered the true origin of interest-motivation, it would be interesting to scrutinise the member states’ interests further. For this, Andrew Moravcsik’s liberal intergovernmentalist lens and realist approaches to international relations theory and Chad Damro’s market power Europe (MPE) concept could prove helpful. The latter concept, which also focuses on EU rhetoric rather than the implementation of policies in alignment with this research project, could help shed light on interest contestation. The

¹³² Peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights

concept of market power Europe is based on three characteristics of the EU's identity: its material existence as a single market, its institutional features, and the existence of different interest groups or interest contestation. This last feature is relevant in our context. Those different and contested interests are, for instance, reflected in public consultations made in several areas of digitalisation, such as concerning the implementation of the 5G network, the safety of applications as far as the data exchange with third countries is concerned, or the contractual PPPs (public-private-partnerships) in the field of cybersecurity, all of which are also relevant in the EU's external digital policies towards third countries and regions. Research questions could focus on which interest groups introduce which norms and interests into the EU's external digital policies in which domains. In this context of differences between member states and their potential lack of willingness for collective foreign policy making in the digital realm the use of the lens of 'De-Europeanisation' might be of use for further research (see for instance Müller et al. 2021).

It is not only the potential interest-orientation of member states versus the norm-orientation of the EU but also the different interests or interest prioritisation of member states that are interesting for future research. An example outlined in this thesis is France being mainly focused on developing its own digital companies, which at the same time also caters to the security interest of other member states, allowing for data storage in European clouds rather than US American ones, which are still the cheapest possibility at the moment. Here, we see member states' different economic and security interests, which potentially rank their interests differently but could cater to each other's interests. Research into those different rankings of interests and how to combine those efficiently would undoubtedly contribute in practical and normative terms to a future political agenda.

Future research could thus look into the interests of different groups and member states and how those interests find their way into the external digital policy-making of the EU. As Damro states, internal regulatory outcomes depend on the relative influence of competing interest groups trying to influence regulations to serve their interests. Regarding the externalising nature of MPE, foreign interest groups must also be included in the analysis. Finally, interest groups might push for externalisation – or not (Damro 2012: 688-89).

This can be linked up with Simon Schunz' and Chad Damro's (2020) later work on another conceptual framework, the expanding actorness approach, within which policy entrepreneurs might push for the EU to be active externally in originally internal policy fields. The two authors

suggest three analytical steps, starting with assessing the EU's opportunity by scrutinising the global constellation of norms and interests regarding a particular policy field, in this case, global digital policy. This research project thus already delivers certain insights for this first step. The second step is the assessment of the EU's presence in this policy area, where this research project can also offer valuable insights concerning the EU's external digital policies towards Africa and the US. The third step of the analysis concerns policy entrepreneurship, asking who becomes active as a policy entrepreneur and how and why. As the authors explain, the last question concerns norms and interests, which is another link to this research project's theoretical framework.

Also, how the EU's regulations and rules are, in the end, externalised – through coercive or persuasive means, or both (Damro 2012: 691) – could be investigated in the digital realm and certainly lends itself to interesting future research projects. Again, a link can be seen to Manners' NPE since Manners also worked out different types of diffusion, as mentioned in the chapter on the theoretical approaches. Both typologies - Damro's with connection to MPE and Manners' with relation to NPE - can hence be used for future research in the digital realm.

A relational approach to the EU's global digital actorness is another exciting path, for which this research delivered a suitable basis. While IR scholars endorse substantialism, diplomats and practitioners instead subscribe to a relational ontology, so the latter tend to criticise IR scholarship as reductionist (Adler-Nissen 2015: 285-86). Thus, rather than seeing the interests and norms that are at the basis of policy decisions as fixed, those are in continuous flux as they relate to each other, to different contexts, are perceived differently by various actors (as was shown in this project), who then again influence other actors based on their perception and this network of mutual influences widens. This research has taken a first step towards reconciling those two ontologies – the substantialist and the relational – by integrating different perspectives on the question of the EU's global digital actorness and by scrutinising in how far interests and norms are explicitly combined or seen as being combined. Investigating the relations between those perspectives from within and outside the EU, and between norms and interests, could be the next step, taking us (as already this research project does) even further beyond the realist distinction between first and second-order concerns. Also, the relation of what the EU does in its external digital policy to African or US agencies can be interesting for future research, for which the linking of this research project's results with Rumelili's (Rumelili

2021: 203) combinations of construction of the target states¹³³ with the reaction of target states¹³⁴ is one possible first step. Concerning the construction of target states and ‘Othering’¹³⁵, it is also interesting to see which norms are particularly relevant in this context, i.e. which norms are referred to when the EU constructs a targeted country or region, for instance, Africa, as being an ‘Other’. Can one even create a list of priorities concerning those norms relevant to Othering?

Also, Africa’s potentially strengthened agency through its ‘derivative power’¹³⁶ lends itself to future research. Hodzi (2020: 263) sees Africa’s derivative power¹³⁷ as unsustainable because it depends on external funding and does not speak with one voice since different African countries have different interests. This is why Africa’s derivative power might slowly diminish. It remains to be seen to what extent derivative power plays a role within EU-Africa digital relations and, if yes, whether it will—with time—diminish, stay, or even grow.

With regard to the United States, the difference in the prioritisation of norms between the EU and the US could be further investigated. In particular the in the US highly prioritised norm of liberty in the form of freedom of speech (at the cost of for instance data protection, child protection or the take down of harmful contents) could be scrutinised, also regarding potential links to interests concerning the US digital industry, i.e. economic interests. This would have been beyond the scope of this research project, where the holistic picture was gained through the analysis of different perspectives. Still, such an analysis concerning the norm of freedom of speech in the digital arena might add further insights to this holistic approach, Particularly the entanglements of this norm with other interests and its relation to other norms, as well as the question of whose liberty is actually in focus are exciting and highly relevant aspects to be considered in future research.

This thesis also already took the first step, as suggested by Markus Kornprobst and Corneliu Bjola, with relation to the new field of research of digital international relations and the

¹³³ The difference between the EU’s and a target state’ norms can be constructed as inherent or acquired (Rumelili 2021:203).

¹³⁴ The reaction of the target state can be recognition or rejection of the other states’ norms (Rumelili 2021:203).

¹³⁵ Forms of Othering are, according to Diez (2005: 628-29): constructing the other as different, inferior, violating universal principles or as existential threat.

¹³⁶ As outlined in the chapter on theoretical concepts, Africa’s derivative power consists in the presence of and interest in its continent by rivalling powers, based on which Africa can gain leverage.

¹³⁷ As already critically remarked in the chapter on theoretical concepts, this concept of Africa’s derivative power actually does not refer to the whole of Africa and its citizens but rather to the African elite. What is done based on this derivative power does not necessarily reflect the views of African citizens at large.

development of new analytical tools for this field, calling for “upgrading, augmenting and rewiring” the study of international relations (Bjola and Kornprobst 2024: 286). The first step, upgrading, involves using existing approaches for digital aspects or issues. This has been done in this research project by using constructivist as well as realist approaches and scrutinising how far already existing categories, such as Manners’ core and minor norms, are relevant and how far new and which new categories are needed, such as the norm type of inter-regional solidarity, which is mostly more relevant than Manners’ norms in the field of the EU’s external digital policy. The categories used and developed in this research could be further broken apart in future projects or used to scrutinise variations and differences more nuancedly. According to Bjola and Kornprobst, there is still some research ahead of the IR discipline, with two other steps, augmenting¹³⁸ and rewiring¹³⁹, which could also be accomplished by building on this study’s results. Not only the second but also the third and last step, rewiring, can be based on this research since the two authors relate this step to normative reflections, tensions and conflicts, which this research project has already uncovered and scrutinised regarding the EU’s external digital policy towards Africa and the US.

Based on this research focusing on the EU’s strategies and how those are perceived, one could also scrutinise the implementation of the EU’s planned external digital policies. The flagship projects which were started in Africa based on the Global Gateway strategy, for instance, have only been presented in 2023, so the implementation results can only be investigated in the future. Those results could then be compared to the EU’s underlying (norm- and interest-based) goals to see if they will have been achieved or how far the measures even correspond to what was communicated in strategies. It will be interesting to see if norm- or interest-based goals are more successfully realised and which unintended results might have been achieved with the implemented measures. Based on the actual implementation, EU-outsiders’ perception might also change, which would constitute an exciting research desideratum. In this context, further studies into the EU’s different approaches to the norm of inter-regional solidarity in its external

¹³⁸ The two authors define augmenting as one step further than upgrading, which only consists of adding ‘new software’ as they put it, while augmenting also consists of adding ‘new hardware’ by “expanding the epistemic horizon that the digital sphere superimposes on the IR logic of inquiry of global ordering processes.” (Bjola and Kornprobst 2024: 287)

¹³⁹ [...] rewiring engages with the ethical ramification that digital technologies extend to processes of global ordering. [...] The ‘digital run is thus bound to lay bare the sites, issues and forms of normative contestation that digital disruption has activated in global politics and to stimulate novel ethical reflection about the condition that can mitigate and possibly dissolve some of the emerging normative tensions and conflicts.

digital policy towards digital leaders and laggards and how this solidarity is put into practice are highly relevant.

The concept of derivative power, which was used in this PhD project concerning Africa, can also be used to scrutinise the role of swing states, such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, or Saudi Arabia, who will determine geopolitics to a certain extent since they can play great powers against each other and thus gain leverage from the competition between the US and China. In most areas, those middle powers are free to choose except for foundational technologies (semiconductors, AI, quantum technology 5G), where they have to choose between the US and China (Kupchan 2023). The importance of those states and how far they use their derivative power is undoubtedly an exciting aspect for academia to further pursue. The EU has already started to develop its external digital policy towards India, particularly since establishing a Trade and Technology Council with this country. Further research could also focus on comparing the EU's policies and those of the UN or the EU's external digital policies towards other countries. The EU has Trade and Technology Councils and Cyber Dialogues not only with the US but with various countries, such as India or Japan.

As one can see, potential future research agendas abound, derived from different theoretical concepts as well as from emerging empirical puzzles based on the results of the research project at hand. To conclude, many new insights were presented here concerning a new policy field, the EU's external digital policy towards a digital leader, the US, and a digital laggard, Africa. This research aimed to show the similarities and differences between those two policies and the tensions between different perspectives (the image the EU gives itself, the view of EU-insiders and EU-outsiders) on those policies. In this way, this research revealed contradictions as well as a partly strategic use of normative discourse by the EU. Delivering such a holistic picture of the EU's external digital policies has hopefully improved the reader's understanding of this subject's complexity and highlighted where the EU should impugn its own discourse and the impact it has on EU-outsiders.

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Annex

Digital Development Compass: African States

State	People	Connectivity	Government	Regulation	Economy	Digital Public Infra-structure	Overall
Algeria	2.83	3.16	2.44	2.22	0.51	4.06	2
Angola	1.78	1.88	2.19	2.10	0.50	3.19	1
Benin	1.75	2.04	3.65	3.30	0.70	4.80	2
Botswana	2.29	2.40	2.58	2.66	1.72	2.51	2
Burkina Faso	1.61	1.42	3.62	3.27	0.39	3.31	2
Burundi	1.33	1.20	2.07	1.53	0.52	2.83	1
Cabo Verde	3.12	2.61	3.77	2.77	0.75	4.80	2
Cameroon	2.04	2.06	2.16	2.32	0.35	3.35	2
Central African Republic	0.63	0.96	1.12	1.44	0.23	2.14	1
Chad	0.49	0.78	1.45	3.00	0.26	1.46	1
Comoros	1.55	1.56	1.35	1.94	0.45	2.02	1
Congo	1.39	1.82	0.94	2.48	0.33	2.87	1
Côte d'Ivoire	2.27	2.30	2.59	2.83	0.63	3.39	2
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1.38	1.63	1.77	1.77	0.31	0.96	1
Djibouti	1.75	1.88	1.31	0.83	0.66	2.10	1
Egypt	3.16	3.02	3.90	3.15	0.81	4.32	3
Equatorial Guinea	1.76	1.17	0.60	1.25	0.35	0.63	1
Eritrea	1.29	1.40	0.17	0.58	0.2	0.84	1
Eswatini	1.64	2.35	1.90	1.91	0.63	4.02	1
Ethiopia	1.36	2.07	3.46	1.98	0.49	3.21	2
Gabon	2.36	2.32	1.49	2.07	0.48	1.34	1

State	People	Connectivity	Government	Regulation	Economy	Digital Public Infra-structure	Overall
Gambia	1.66	1.85	1.46	2.47	2.14	1.98	2
Ghana	1.96	2.30	2.95	3.69	1.67	4.54	2
Guinea	0.87	1.70	1.20	2.34	0.44	1.34	1
Guinea-Bissau	0.94	1.70	0.88	1.71	0.69	2.78	1
Kenya	2.60	2.69	3.94	3.68	2.39	4.30	3
Lesotho	1.79	2.52	1.69	2.17	1.61	2.38	1
Liberia	1.10	1.33	2.10	2.41	0.28	2.00	1
Libya	2.53	1.93	0.45	0.59	0.17	1.11	1
Madagascar	1.30	1.51	1.44	2.49	0.56	1.68	1
Malawi	1.26	1.56	2.40	2.60	0.84	3.25	2
Mali	1.06	2.22	2.29	2.77	0.74	4.28	2
Mauritania	1.39	1.99	1.64	2.45	0.40	2.77	1
Mauritius	3.71	3.22	4.23	2.72	2.32	4.80	3
Morocco	3.21	2.70	3.40	3.15	0.59	4.16	2
Mozambique	0.98	1.30	2.34	1.91	0.49	3.75	1
Namibia	2.13	2.17	2.54	2.36	0.58	2.16	2
Niger	0.76	1.51	1.87	2.79	0.41	1.46	1
Nigeria	1.44	2.17	3.39	2.86	1.99	3.90	2
Rwanda	1.50	2.16	4.11	3.26	0.77	4.44	2
Sao Tome and Principe	2.18	1.18	1.39	2.21	0.34	1.34	1
Senegal	1.47	2.31	2.72	3.15	1.90	2.14	2
Seychelles	2.91	2.55	2.17	2.00	0.25	3.11	2
Sierra Leone	1.02	1.60	2.57	1.89	0.37	2.28	1
Somalia	0.40	1.72	1.39	1.53	0.23	2,50	1
South Africa	3.15	2.88	3.68	3.13	1.95	3.88	3
South Sudan	0.29	0.62	0.98	1.21	0.33	1.52	1

State	People	Connectivity	Government	Regulation	Economy	Digital Public Infra-structure	Overall
Sudan	1.46	1.70	1.69	3.29	0.37	1.94	1
Togo	1.53	1.84	3.23	2.85	0.58	3.76	2
Tunisia	3.40	2.70	3.65	2.72	0.85	4.21	2
Uganda	2.11	2.23	3.49	2.92	1.86	4.54	3
United Republic of Tanzania	2.16	2.15	4.16	2.94	0.53	4.40	2
Zambia	2.09	2.39	2.28	3.11	0.33	3.63	2
Zimbabwe	1.75	2.45	2.76	2.34	0.68	3.59	2
Africa: Average	1.8	2.0	2.3	2.4	0.8	2.9	1.6
EU: Average	4.2	3.7	4.3	3.8	1.8	4.3	3.2

Source: <https://www.digitaldevelopmentcompass.org>, 10.11.2024

Questions semi-structured interviews

EU's digital external policy towards Africa

Date:

Interviewee:

Name:

Position:

Contact details:

Perspective:

EU-insider

EU-outsider

Introduction:

Present myself & thank you

Is it okay if I record the interview?

Research ethics:

Based on official document of University of Vienna

Anonymisation:

I will not quote you by name, everything will be anonymised. I would very much appreciate it if you answered totally freely.

Start of the actual interview

Getting an idea what the information the interviewee gives is generally based on, (actual negotiations, lobbying conversations, expert interviews etc.)

- 1. EU/AU officers, other IO officers:** Could you describe your responsibilities and daily work, please.
Strategic work or actual carrying out of strategies in negotiations with African representatives? Which negotiations and meetings are you involved in (with AU, or rather internal meetings)?

Think tankers: Could you describe your responsibilities and daily work, please.

Further questions if necessary:

Are you in direct contact with EU officials? Are those expert interviews or what type of meetings are those?

Are you in direct contact with AU officials or other African public officials? Are those expert interviews or what type of meetings are those?

NGOs: Describe your responsibilities and daily work.

Are you in direct contact with EU officials? Are those lobbying meetings or what type of meetings or contacts are those?

Are you in direct contact with AU officials or other African public officials? Are those lobbying meetings or what type of meetings or contacts are those?

Journalists: Could you describe your daily work, please.

In how far are you in direct contact with EU officials/AU/Smart Africa/African officials?

2. Which goals does the EU pursue with relation to its external digital policy towards Africa.

If necessary:

Please mention goals and justifications of those goals that you came across in your daily work (meetings, negotiations, conversations with colleagues...) rather than focusing on what is written in official EU documents such as the Global Gateway, press releases after EU-AU summits)

Ask for back ground information:

In which context did you hear/read about those goals/reasons etc.?

Is it specific negotiations, conversations or a specific event?

Who should actually benefit if those objectives were achieved?

If necessary/helpful mention topic areas:

Digital industry, digital trade, cybersecurity, development cooperation in the digital realm, global governance in digital realm, society, (e.g. poverty reduction through digitalisation), environment, public administration (e.g. e-government)

3. China: If not mentioned by interviewee him/herself until now: In how far do considerations about China feed into the EU's external digital policy towards Africa?

Complementary versus conflicting goals

Complementary goals:

4. Concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa: Are there any goals the EU pursues that are in the interest of Africa, i.e. African citizens or African companies that at the same time also serve the EU's interests?

If necessary:

Could you give as many specific examples as possible, please?
In how far do those goals you mentioned complement each other?

Explicit links between values and interests:

(if not already answered in preceding question)

5. Concerning the EU's external digital policy towards Africa: Are there any goals the EU pursues in the interest of African governments and citizens (e.g. data protection for African citizens or support for development of African digital SMEs) and then explicitly links them to an interest of its own?

If necessary: Could you give as many specific examples as possible, please?

Conflicting goals:

6. Are there any goals the EU pursues in its digital external policy towards Africa that actually contradict each other? Have you already come across instances where there was a conflict of the EU's goals leading to trade offs (in its external digital policy towards the US)?

If necessary:

Could you give as many specific examples as possible, please?
In how far are those goals you mentioned conflicting?

Actual (hidden) goals and communicated goals in the EU's external digital policy towards Africa

7. **EU-outsiders:** Are there any goals you realised the EU has but does not mention at all or seldom in official communication because those goals would not put the EU in a positive light. **(in relation to the EU's external digital policy towards Africa)**

EU-insiders: Are there any goals the EU does not particularly like to mention although they are important goals, because they are in conflict with the human-centric and values-based approach? **(in relation to the EU's external digital policy towards Africa)**

8. Are there any goals the EU communicates a lot about, although they are actually not that important but are rather good for the EU's image in the world?
(in relation to the EU's external digital policy towards Africa)

Conflict between actual goals and communicated goals

(if not mentioned with relation to previous question)

9. Have you ever come across a (partial) conflict between the goals the EU communicated and what the EU then actually did. i.e. that the EU framed its policy in

a normative, value-based way but in the end followed its interests openly although this was in contradiction to what the EU communicated? (= a seemingly value based goal but in the end serving the EU's own interest)

(in relation to the EU's external digital policy towards Africa)

EU goals in conflict with African goals

10. Are there any goals the EU pursues in its external digital policy towards Africa that are in conflict with African goals in the digital arena?

if not mentioned:

Are there any interests of Africa that are in conflict with EU interests?

11. What are the differences in the EU's and the US' values concerning digital issues.

Plausibility Checks

See separate document with pieces of information that should be checked.

Further documents/interviewees/questions:

12. Show the interviewee a list of the documents I analysed (put list into chat) – Are there any important documents missing that should be added to the analysis?

13. Could you recommend any other interviewees that could help me with my research on the EU's external digital policy towards Africa?

14. May I contact you again in case there are further questions?

If not already explained earlier (and if time):

Background information on processes and responsibilities concerning International Organisations (IOs)

African Union

15. In how far and how does the EU work with the AU with relation to digital policy? Are there any specific committees or working groups that cooperate? Is there any other form of coordination or cooperation?

Smart Africa

16. In how far and how does the EU work with Smart Africa with relation to digital policy? Are there any specific committees or working groups that cooperate? Is there any other form of coordination or cooperation?

17. What role does the AU play in this regard? Where/what is the link to the AU?

ITU

18. Do EU representatives also work with African representatives (from specific African states or from the AU) within the ITU? If yes: how? E.g. In which committees or working groups?

19. Do you know if African countries for instance supported the Russian (Rashid Ismailov) or the US-American (Doreen Bogdan-Martin) candidate in the last secretary general election of the ITU?

Other IOs

20. Do EU representatives also work with African representatives (from specific African states or from the AU) within other IOs? UN? If yes: which IOs? How and which working groups committees?

Questions semi-structured interviews

EU's digital external policy towards the US

Date:

Interviewee:

Name:

Position:

Contact details:

Perspective:

EU-insider

EU-outsider

Introduction:

Present myself & thank you

Is it okay if I record the interview?

Research ethics:

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Anonymisation:

I will not quote you by name, everything will be anonymised. I would very much appreciate it if you answered totally freely.

Start of the actual interview

Getting an idea what the information the interviewee gives is generally based on, (actual negotiations, lobbying conversations, expert interviews etc.)

1. **EU/US officers, other IO officers:** Could you describe your responsibilities and daily work, please.

Strategic work or actual carrying out of strategies in negotiations with US/EU representatives? Do you prepare negotiations? Which negotiations and meetings are you involved in (with EU/US, or rather internal meetings)?

Think tankers: Could you describe your responsibilities and daily work, please.

Are you in direct contact with EU officials? Are those expert interviews or what type of meetings are those?

Are you in direct contact with US officials? Are those expert interviews or what type of meetings are those?

NGOs: Describe your responsibilities and daily work.

Are you in direct contact with EU officials? Are those lobbying meetings or what type of meetings or contacts are those?

Are you in direct contact with US officials? Are those lobbying meetings or what type of meetings or contacts are those?

Journalists: Could you describe your daily work please.

In how far are you in direct contact with EU officials/US officials?

2. **Which goals does the EU pursue with its external digital policy towards the US?**

If necessary:

Apart from those official goals as mentioned in press releases and official documents: in your daily work (meetings, negotiations, conversations with colleagues...) did you come across further goals not mentioned in official EU documents, such as press releases of the EU-US cyberdialogue, concerning DPF, TTC)

Ask for background information:

In which context did you hear/read about those goals/reasons etc.?

Is it specific negotiations, conversations or a specific event?

Who should actually benefit if those objectives were achieved?

If necessary/helpful mention topic areas/fora:

Digital industry, digital trade, cybersecurity, development cooperation in the digital realm, global governance in digital realm, society, (e.g. poverty reduction through digitalisation), environment, public administration (e.g. e-government)

Trade and Technology Council, Cyber Dialogue, Data Privacy Framework

3. **China:** If not mentioned by interviewee him/herself until now: In how far do considerations about China feed into the EU's external digital policy towards the US?

Complementary versus conflicting goals

Complementary goals:

4. Concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US: Are there any goals the EU pursues that serve the interest of the US and/or US citizens/US companies that at the same time serve the EU's interests?

If necessary:

Could you give as many specific examples as possible, please?

In how far do those goals you mentioned complement each other?

**Explicit links between values and interests:
(if not already answered in preceding question)**

5. Concerning the EU's external digital policy towards the US: Are there any goals the EU pursues in the interest of the US and its citizens and then explicitly links them to an interest of its own?

If necessary: Could you give as many specific examples as possible, please?

Conflicting goals:

6. Are there any goals the EU pursues in its digital external policy towards the US that actually contradict each other? Have you already come across instances where there was a conflict of the EU's goals leading to trade offs (in its external digital policy towards the US)?

If necessary:

Could you give as many specific examples as possible, please.

In how far are those goals you mentioned conflicting?

Actual (hidden) goals and communicated goals in the EU's external digital policy towards the US

7. **EU-outsiders:** Are there any goals you realised the EU has but does not mention at all or seldom in official communication because those goals would not put the EU in a positive light. **(in relation to the EU's external digital policy towards the US)**

EU-insiders: Are there any goals the EU does not particularly like to mention although they are important goals, because they are in conflict with the human-centric and values-based approach?

(in relation to the EU's external digital policy towards the US)

8. Are there any goals the EU communicates a lot about, although they are actually not that important but are rather good for the EU's image in the world?
(in relation to the EU's external digital policy towards the US)

**Conflict between actual goals and communicated goals
(if not mentioned with relation to previous question)**

9. Have you ever come across a (partial) conflict between the goals the EU communicated and what the EU then actually did. i.e. that the EU framed its policy in a normative, value-based way but in the end followed its interests openly although this was in contradiction to what the EU communicated? (= a seemingly value based goal but in the end serving the EU's own interest)
(in relation to the EU's external digital policy towards the US)

Explanation of keyterms:

(if not mentioned and explained yet)

10. The keywords economic security, digital sovereignty, open strategic autonomy are often mentioned when the EU's external digital policy towards the US is discussed. Can you explain the goals and the reasoning behind those abstract terms?

11. Relevance of Global South:

(if not mentioned and explained yet)

“In this context, the European Union and the United States seek broader cross-regional cooperation, including with states in Latin America, the Indo-Pacific, and Africa, to raise awareness and promote responsible state behaviour through diplomatic action and engagement.”

Taken from: 9th EU-US cyber dialogue, 7.12.2023

Question

Why does the EU seek cooperation with the Global South together with the US? Which goals should be reached by this? Why are those goals relevant?

If interviewee does not mention it him/her self, ask for relevance of China or other actors in this: In how far are China's action in the Global South relevant for the EU's and the US' goals? Or are any other global actors' action in Africa or the Global South relevant in this regard?

EU goals in conflict with US goals (like-minded partners?)

12. What are the US' goals in its digital external policy?
13. Are there any goals the EU pursues in its external digital policy towards the US that are in conflict with US goals in the digital arena?
14. What are the differences in the EU's and the US' values concerning digital issues.

Plausibility Checks

See separate document with pieces of information that should be checked.

Further documents/interviewees/questions:

15. Show the interviewee a list of the documents I analysed (put list into chat) – Are there any important documents missing that should be added to the analysis?
 16. Could you recommend any other interviewees (EU also other DGs or institutions e.g. parliament/commission/council, EEAS, or US, also think tanks, NGOs, journalists, IO)?
 17. May I contact you again in case there are any further questions?
-

If not already explained earlier (and if time):

Background information on processes and responsibilities concerning International Organisations (IOs)

International Telecommunications Union (ITU)

18. Do EU representatives also work with US representatives (from specific African states or from the AU) within the ITU? If yes: how? E.g. In which committees or working groups?
19. Do the EU and the US work in concert or are there any tensions?

Other IOs

20. Do EU representatives also work with US officials (within other IOs? UN? If yes: which IOs? How and which working groups committees?