Chapter 11
Participatory Communication and Digital Media in Africa:
A New Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

Digital media has had an unquestionable impact on participatory communication. The use of digital media has become a part of the community development framework for inclusive participation. Premised on the foregoing, this chapter sought to examine how digital media, an emerging development in Africa, has changed the status of participatory communication across the continent. Furthermore, it reviewed how this new phenomenon has paved the way for empowerment journalism and digital participation, thereby making participatory communication a community development tool in the 21st century that heightens collaborations. The study was anchored on theories of new media and development communication. The methodology employed a desk review. Findings showed that aside from vitalizing participatory communication for rural development, community journalists needed to be conscious that they create a new twist that clashes with what the mainstream media professionals do from a community's viewpoint, which can impede participation.

INTRODUCTION

Community Participation in Primary Health Care, Community Participation in Tourism Planning and Development, infrastructure development, education and agriculture have been sustainable development strategies between development agencies and the government intended for the government and the community especially in low-income countries. There is, however, evidence about the nature of some

partnerships that lacks the perspective of community members. Through participatory communication, communities experience development because community member who are involved in problem-solving and decision-making not only improve the community but also gain new skills, change behaviour, and adopt change.

What Africa has been long subjected to have been the rise of a small number of persons tagged as key stakeholders deciding for the entire local government area, state, regions, province, or nation. For example, the Nigerian Constitution enacted in 1999 starts with a phrase

We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Having firmly and solemnly resolve, to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God, dedicated to the promotion of inter-African solidarity, world peace, international co-operation and understanding And to provide for a Constitution for the purpose of promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country, on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people Do hereby make, enact and give to ourselves the following Constitution- (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

Indeed, the question an individual will be asking will be "when was I even consulted for this? How? Even after being enacted, except in some formal education settings where the Nigerian constitution is taught as part of a topic in subjects such as – civic education, government, and history or then in the university for Political Science, Mass Communication and International Relations Students, the researcher is not aware of any other system that has been deliberately employed to breakdown or dissect the sections in the constitution to the citizens. What we have proliferating the internet are fragments and misinterpretations of the constitution on social media which has significantly turned sour in the mouths of Nigerians for example.

According to a World Bank and African Development Bank (AFDB) estimate from 2013, Africa had 650 million mobile users, far more than the United States or Europe. Africa had 507.9 million Internet users in 2021, accounting for 10.9 percent of web users globally at the time of this study. West Africa is one of the three leading regions with the highest Internet penetration rate, at 42 percent. In terms of social media, Africa accounts for 6.6 percent of the world's active users, or over 277 million across 200 miles on the continent. Digital media have had an unquestionable impact on participatory communication: from the community town hall meetings to community radio, participatory documentary, and social media platforms. The use of digital media has become a part of the community development framework for inclusive participation. A small group meeting that could only host 50 community members with a projector slammed on a wall has translated to use of transferrable message platforms where a whole community can be connected with live from a remote location via the internet.

Premised on the foregoing, this paper reviewed how this new phenomenon has paved the way for digital participation thereby making digital media a community development tool in the 21st century that is not only increasing participation but also promoting mass literacy and awareness.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To examine how digital media has changed the status for participatory communication in Africa.
2. To highlight the use of digital media in participatory communication in selected African Countries.

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