

Digital Media and the Participation of Udu Community in Politics

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Abstract

This paper examined the extent to which digital media through conventional media platforms, interactive media (social media), films, animations, and digital graphics, have enhanced democracy and encouraged the rural dwellers of Udu Local Government Area of Delta State to participate in politics at all levels. The choice of Udu was informed by its mono-linguistic nature, hence considered as a composite whole. The survey research design method was adopted, with the use of questionnaire as instrument of data collection, while Structural Approach Theory formed its theoretical underpinnings. Findings revealed that the digital media have increased awareness and participation for the rural people of Udu on political events in their state and localities significantly. Based on the findings, we conclude that the Udu dwellers have found digital media very useful and reliable as they engage in their regular political activities. It is therefore recommended that digital media platforms should be adequately put to use by the government and non-governmental organisations, the civil society, and human right groups for increased political participation and mobilisation of the people not only for political development, but for the acceptance of government policies and programmes.

Keywords: Digital Media, Democracy, Participation, Udu Dwellers, Politics

Introduction

Grassroots participation in the democratic and political spectrum of any society gives credence to how the democracy in such society is rated or legitimised. As revealed by Horrigan (2017), anticipation of rural dwellers in politics has been identified as one major factor that could be used to promote the democratic advancement of Nigeria's polity. It is a common knowledge that ill practices and activities that negate development have been perpetrated in governance, public and private places because

the rural dwellers have not been included in the scheme of things. Thus, widespread grassroots participation in politics and the democratic process can put a halt to the situation where government officials are involved in looting public funds with impunity and flaunt their wealth with reckless abandon.

It is also disheartening to note that the corruption canon has been steady at an alarming rate and has become institutionalised in this part of the clime. Lack of grassroots participation in politics and not-participation in the very critical role in the democratic process can weaken institutions, discourage investments and retard economic advancement not only in the rural areas but also in the urban capitals of any nation or society.

The concern of this study, therefore, is to determine whether grassroots participation in Nigeria political landscape has been enhanced by the evolution of the digital media around the world; whether digital media have chanted political, social and economic progress for the rural dwellers in Udu Area of Delta State and elsewhere in Nigeria. It suffices to say here that the Udu area is unique in terms of people, language, geography and economic significance to the Delta and the Nigerian State as a whole due to their contributions to petroleum drilling for over 30 years, boasting 18 oil wells in the community (*Vanguard Online News*, 2019).

Digital media comprise any communication based on digital data represented as sequences of the symbols 0 and 1. Example of digital media include software, digital imageries, digital video, video game, web pages and websites and also including the social media, data and databases, digital audio, such as MP3 and electronic books. Combined with the internet and personal computing, digital media have caused disruptive innovation in publishing, journalism, public relations, entertainment, education, commerce and politics; an advancement in development communication which has led to robust community awareness in several issues concerning the people of the Udu area of Delta State. This study therefore intends to investigate how digital media have aided democracy and political participation in Nigeria with reference to Udu Local Government Area of Delta State.

Statement of the Problem

One of the major beauties of known democratic societies is the principle of popular participation in politics. In developing countries like Nigeria, democratic participation especially in the rural areas like the Udu community in Delta state is a doubt and therefore needs to be evaluated. This is because the people in the rural area still constitute the majority in Nigeria and digital media have become the communication channels for political participation in most societies. It could therefore become a problem when a rural community and her people are not able to deploy digital media especially in the democratic process and general participation in politics.

In essence, how much of digital media deployment is taking place in Udu community? Are the people of Udu community exposed to digital media tools and do these tools help them participate better in the political process? These posers and the attempt to answer them form the major problem which this particular study hopes to investigate.

Objective of the Study

This study generally aims to investigate if digital media is in any way influencing Udu community members participation in politics. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. ascertain if the Udu dwellers use digital media in their political activities;
2. find out the digital media that are mostly used in the political and democratic events in the Udu Area;
3. determine the extent to which the Udu community in Delta State, Nigeria have applied digital media in their political and democratic events; and
4. find out ways in which the Udu dwellers have used the digital media to participate in the democratic issues.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to guide the study:

1. Do Udu dwellers use the digital media in their political activities?
2. What are the digital media that are mostly used in the political and democratic events in the Udu Area?
3. To what extent have Udu community in Delta State applied digital media in their political and democratic events?
4. How has the Udu dwellers used the digital media to participate in their democratic and political issues?

Conceptual and Literature Review

The digital media encompass computers and digital video that are based on a binary code that uses the either/or, on/off values of 0's and 1 s to interpret the world. The binary digit, or bit, acts like a light switch: it is either on or off. If it is on, it is assigned a 1; if it is off, it is assigned a 0 (Zettl, 2009). "At first glance this either/or system of binary digits may seem clumsy. For example, the simple elegant decimal number 17 translates into the cumbersome 00010001 in binary code. The binary system uses the base-2 numbering system" (Zettl, 2009. p. 62).

The overwhelming advantages of the binary system are that it has great resistance to data distortion and error. In binary code, a light is either on or off. If the light flickers or burns at only half intensity, the digital system simply ignores such

aberrations and react only if the switch triggers the expected on/off actions. It also permits any number of combinations and shuffling around - an extremely important feature when manipulating pictures and sound. It suffices to say that a system subsists before digital, and that is the analogue system. In distinguishing between analogue and digital, Mamer explains thus:

The analogue signal is like a ramp that leads continuously from one elevation to another. When walking up this ramp, it matters little whether you use small or big steps; the ramp gradually and inevitably leads you to the desired elevation. In the digital domain you would have to use steps to get to the same elevation. This is much more an either/or proposition. The elevation has now been quantized (divided) into a number of discrete units - the steps. You either get to the next step or you don't. There is no such thing as standing on a half or quarter step. The analogue system processes and records a continuous signal that fluctuates exactly like the original signal (the line of the ramp). Digital processing, however, changes the ramp into discrete values. This process is called digitization. In the digital process, the analogue signal is continuously sampled at fixed intervals, the samples are then quantized (assigned a concrete value) and coded into 0's and 1's (Mamer, 2009. p. 121).

The digitisation of an analogue signal which involves a four-step process: anti-aliasing, sampling, quantizing, and coding or encoding has brought a lot of benefits to the communication or media industry.

The digital arrangement has major recompenses over the analogue in quality, computer compatibility and flexibility, signal transport, and compression.

On the issue of quality, long before the advent of digital video and audio systems, picture and sound quality have been a major concern of equipment manufacturers and production personnel. Such high-resolution picture quality is especially important for extensive postproduction activities. Mamer attests to the strength in digital media, and that cheap camcorders can deliver high-quality pictures and sound without a loss in audio or pictorial quality, and what is very interesting is that digitization even enhances the quality better than the original (Mamer, 2009. p. 122).

The picture and sound qualities explain the acceptance of digital media in the rural communities as in the urban. There is a transaction, however. High-fidelity video is often criticised for its sharpness and "in-your-face" quality by film people, who lament the lack of the softer "film look". Similarly, digital music recordings sometimes sound so crisp and clean that they lack the warmth and the texture of the original piece. You may remember the monotone sounds of synthesised computer speech; it was missing all the complexity and subtleties (overtones) of actual speech. Audio professionals are using higher sampling rates and more-complex digital signal combinations to make up for this deficiency. Paradoxically, video filters are available

to make HDTV pictures less high-definition, and in digital audio a certain amount of noise is reintroduced to contribute to the “warmth” of sound (Ume-Nwagbo, 1995, p.71).

Another big advantage of digital television is that its signals can be transferred directly from the camera to the computer without the need for digitization. The elimination of this step is especially welcome to news departments, whose members work under tight deadlines. It is also a great relief to postproduction editors, who can now devote more time to the art of editing rather than sitting idle during the digitizing process (Sharma, 2005. p.57).

The flexibility of the digital signal is especially important for creating special effects and computer-generated images that now appeal to rural dwellers. Even a simple weathercast or a five-minute newscast features a dazzling display of digital effects that was all but impossible with analogue equipment. The opening animated title, the scene that expands full-screen from the box over the newscaster's shoulder, and the graphical transition from one story to the next where one picture peels off to reveal another underneath—all show the variety and the flexibility of digital effects. The multiple screens-within-the-screen-and the various lines of text that run along the bottom, sides, or top of the main television screen are possible only through digital video effects (DVE). Computer software that allows the alteration or even the synthetic creation of audio and video images has become an essential digital production tool (Eastman and Furguson, 2009, p. 142).

Digital signals could also be distributed through a variety of wires (coaxial and fibre-optic cables) or wirelessly (through a broadband router or via wireless fidelity, or Wi-Fi). If you get impatient while waiting for a large computer file to up-or download, think about the incredible amount of data that needs to be pushed through the conduit you are using. A download speed of only 1 megabyte per second (MPs) means the computer is processing well over 8 million on/off choices (8, 388, 608 bits) per second (Sharma, 2005. p.57).

There is often a confusion about the difference between downloading and data streaming. When you are downloading, you are receiving data that are sent in packets. Because these data packets are usually sent out of order to make full use of the available transmission line, you cannot call up the entire file until the downloading process is complete.

With streaming, you receive digital audio and/or video data as a continuous data flow. Because the data stream is continuous and not converted into out-of-order packets, you can listen to the music or watch the initial video frames while the files for the subsequent frames are still being transferred. But even broadband (multichannel) and Ethernet (single-channel) coaxial conduits lack the capacity to stream fast enough the huge amount of data of high-definition television, and, even more so, interactive digital television (Sharma, 2005. p.58), and this is where compression comes in.

Compression is the temporary rearrangement or elimination of redundant information for easier storage and signal transmission. Cutting each picture (frame) into two incomplete halves (fields) is done because half of a picture can be transported more easily than a whole one. Technically, a field takes up less bandwidth (data transmission capacity) than a frame. This is a crude but ingenious way of compressing an otherwise untouchable analogue signal for quicker transport.

Fortunately, digital signals are much more flexible in this respect and can be compressed in many different ways, called codecs (an acronym of compression/decompression). One such system does it by regrouping the original data without throwing any away. Once at the destination, the data can be restored to their original positions - a process called decoding - for an output that is identical to the original input. We do this frequently when „zipping“ (on a Windows PC) or „stuffing“ (on a Mac) large computer texts for storage and transmission and then “unzipping” them when opening the file. Or you can simply delete all data that are redundant.

Compression that results from rearranging or repackaging data is called lossless- the regenerated image has the same number of pixels and values as the original. When some pixels are eliminated in some frames because they are redundant or beyond our ordinary perception, the compression is called lossy. The obvious advantage of lossless compression is that the original image is returned without diminished quality. The disadvantage is that it takes more storage space and usually takes more time to transport and bring back from storage (Zettl, 2009. p. 63).

One of the most widely used digital compression standards for still images is JPEG (“jay-peg”), named for the organization that developed the system – the joint Photographic Experts Group; motion-JPEG is for moving computer images. Although a lossless JPEG technique exists, to save storage space most JPEG compressions are lossy. Another compression standard for high-quality video is MPEG-2 (“em-peg two”), named and developed by the moving picture Experts Group. MPEG-2 is also a lossy compression technique, based on the elimination of redundant information. MPEG-4 and MPEG-7 differ from MPEG-2 in that they are intended more as standardized systems for streaming data (Godigar & Garrison, 2006. p.146).

Zara (2012) identified several types of digital media to include: Audio such as a music file or streaming music service; Video that is recorded, stored and transmitted in a digital format; Digital publishing, which involves publishing such as books, magazines and newspapers that are distributed in electronic formats such as eBooks, mobile apps and web sites; Digital photos that are captured, stored and shared in a digital format; Social media that constitute online communities that allow people to post and comment on media; and the Interactive media that allows users to take part and sometimes allow the audiences to navigate the story in dynamic ways (Zara, 2012. p. 36).

Other types of digital media as identified by Zara (2012) are: Digital advertising that is commonly bought and sold on digital exchanges for placement into digital

media such as billboards, mobile apps and web sites; Broadcast media such as television and radio that is delivered with digital technologies such as streaming media; Immersive experiences that surround an individual to make them feel a part of it. For example, a museum exhibit that simulates walking on the surface of an alien planet using digital technologies; Virtual reality, which is an exportable environment that is digitally generated such as a game or simulation; and Augmented reality, which is the integration of virtual and real world environments. For example, a meeting that uses a digital twin of a jet engine to discuss an engineering design problem (Zara, 2012. p. 36).

Having identified the various types of digital media, it is important we examine their usefulness to political and democratic participation in the rural area, particularly the Udu dwellers. With digital radio stations, posters, and the social media, diversity and opinions are created.

Through its openness to participation to all sectors and people, community broadcasting in Udu can and has created diversity of voices and opinions on the air. Some discords are present in every society or community; even in the Udu community. Udu people are not the peaceful, harmonious groupings that outsiders may idealistically imagine; they also have their moments of discord, which may be caused by differing interests, differing political affiliation, or religious backgrounds, or even by some ancient feud. The acknowledgment of conflict is necessary for democracy and for democratic communities. Through an understanding of why conflict exists, communities can understand themselves better and pave the way to resolve the conflicts. A function of the broadcast digital media is to try to air all sides of a discussion objectively, without taking sides.

The principle of freedom of expression, among other things, implies the freedom to impart information freely (Alumuku, 2013, p. 41). This freedom requires governments to ensure opportunity for citizens to express their opinions without hindrance. Digital media derive partial justification on this principle, which in turn involves the concept of pluralism. Safeguarding pluralism implies that prevailing as well as opposing views and opinions can be heard. Digital media are important media for this purpose precisely because they can contribute to a communication system that promotes a variety of viewpoint (Pavlik and McIntosh, 2014, p.12).

In principle, this is what digital media can do. It is therefore, the concern of this study to ascertain the actual impact of the digital media through their contents on the democratic and political processes of the Udu dwellers. Digital media have continued to encourage open dialogues and the democratic process among rural dwellers.

The core of the democratic process is the ability of people to hear and make themselves heard and there are several digital media platforms that can provide the forum for that to happen. The ancient Greeks, who invented democracy, conducted their political debate in public. All those who wished could be present at the meetings to listen and voice their views. Sheer numbers of people make this direct democracy

impossible today in the modern nation-state, and for this reason, democratic process has become distant from ordinary citizens (Alumuku, 2013, p. 62). Typically, once politicians are elected, their contact with their electorate is limited, and they go about their tasks without much further consultation or debate with them. Again, following the major planks of the democratic participant theory, such media would be in tandem with democratic ethics or principles that place interest of the majority in the forefront of every issue presented.

It is a function of the managers of digital media to provide an independent platform for interactive discussion about matters and decisions of importance to its audiences. This is in keeping with the decentralisation processes now being implemented in many countries; a purpose of which is to bring democratic decision-making closer to the people concerned. Again, digital media have encouraged the participation of all social and cultural groups. Participation is a key word in democratic circles. When people communicate about their situation and about options for improving it, they are in effect participating, and they are also laying the foundation for collective action in which they participate (Moemeka, 2009. p. 112).

Digital media contents encourage participation by providing a platform for debate, analysis, and the exchange of ideas and opinions. In addition, they allow for the sharing of information and innovation. Digital media generally aspire to give voice to the people who in overall have no access or are denied access. In many societies, women, youth, ethnic and linguistic minorities are virtually ignored in community affairs, but no society can change and develop equitably and satisfactorily without the active and informed participation of its women, youth, and other minority groups. This, however, can only be achieved now by the kind of digital media contents we have, and the current application of all the canons of broadcast programming.

Therefore, the new media applications give voice to the voiceless in the society, particularly the Udu dwellers. The most significant achievement of any democratic and political system is to promote development and social change. People in poor rural communities tend to be fatalistic about their situation. They will all have individual perceptions, but development cannot take place on the basis of these. According to Nwodu (2009, p. 192),

What is needed is a collective perception of the local reality of the options for improving it. This can only be achieved through internal discussions within the community about its situation, the cause, and possible actions for improvement. The media can get real closer to the rural people to provide the perfect platform for these internal discussions and for reaching a collective perception of the situation. Specific problems can be analysed, remedies discussed, and those most affected – or who can help with the solution-mobilized for collective action. Anti-social behaviour by minorities in a community can also be modified by exerting pressure from the majority through community broadcast programmes.

Again, this cannot be limited to the rural communities alone as stated by Nwodu (2009). For social and economic progress to take place, democratic processes cannot start and finish in the community. They must reach the government and private institutions, as well as to policy makers and authorities at the local, regional, and even national level. The public debates aired by the community media will certainly be heard by locally based staff of government and private institutions, and the radio or television viewing centres content should be relayed by them to their superiors. While other digital media platforms do the same.

Specialists in various fields could make useful contributions to the various issues arising from societal debate. Their theoretical knowledge and practical know-how can always be useful in the quest for development. Their participation in discussions needs to be encouraged. The managers of the digital media can deliberately map out plans to invite such persons to post contributions when necessary. In some cases, there are development officers who have a wealth of experience in dealing, with community problems and who know the community's situation, as well as that of specialists in the various sectors of the society, could be invaluable.

Digital media provide information about public affairs and legislative measures. The media must endeavour to play a non-partisan role, their operations as already enshrined in countries constitutions under freedom of communication. This is the only way that they can provide information and education on civic duties of citizens, underlining their rights and responsibilities as well as the duty of the government to care and protect them. It can also raise issues, which are deemed necessary for the legislature to consider in the due process of law-making.

Theoretical Framework

The structural approach to development and communication examines the infrastructure of the world of communication system to determine whether it impedes or promotes development on all levels. It covers the traditional political economy approach to communication as well as works dealing with the social and cultural dimensions of communication systems, both at national and international levels.

Grounded in economics, political science and sociology, contributors in this area come from a variety of epistemological and methodological schools. Examples of research and writings in this area include Dellas Smythe's (1981) work on Communication, Capitalism and Dependence; Herbert Schiller's (1970) critical examination of the structure of the American communication system from political and economic perspective; Armand Matellart's research on the role of transnational actors and culture industries (1979 and 1983); Hamid Mowlana's (1985 and 1985) analysis of the international flow of information and his integrative approach to communication and developmental process; Cees Hamelink's (1983) writings on self-reliance, cultural autonomy and national and international policies; Luis Ramiro Beltran and Elizabeth

Fox's (1979 and 1989) structural perspectives on communication and development in Latin America (All references are from Moemeka, 2009. p.27) and Ekeanyanwu's (2009) revisit of indigenous cultures the in era of globalisation to make a case against the so-called Cultural Imperialism Theory.

The structural approach rejects the argument of the communication and development paradigm that communication brings about structural change by first creating socio-demographic conditions or by changing individual psychological characteristics. Acknowledging the importance of the individual level of communication and change, it takes the position that structural change is a precondition for any successful development objectives, hence, its relevance to this study, where digital media and accessibility facilitate individuals to be part of overall communication strategy designed to create positive change in the area under study.

Methodology

This study is a survey that involves the use of questionnaire as instrument for quantitative data collection. The Udu Kingdom covers 32 communities with a total population of eight hundred and ninety-three thousand (893,000). A total of five hundred and seventy-six (576) copies of questionnaire were administered by hand in the 32 communities, with each community allocated 18 copies. The purposive and availability sampling techniques were used at the different stages of the instrument administration. From this figure, a total of 564 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved while in the course of analysis, 550 copies were found useful, which became the data for further analysis. These 550 copies of the questionnaire represent 95.48 per cent of total questionnaire distributed and as such, the success rate is 95.48 per cent. The Taro Yamani formula was used to determine the sample size. The findings were presented in tables and were analysed using frequency tables and simple percentages.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Udu dwellers identified elections, youth activities, hosting of Government and Oil company representatives as some of the activities that take place within their community that could be enhanced with digital media application. These activities are sometimes frequent because of the strategic location of the community as a major oil and gas producing Local Government. As such, there are also several oil and gas multinational companies engaging host communities regularly in meetings for homage, explorations, development and for corporate social responsibility activities. As a local council also, electoral related events are bound to happen, whether elections into council, state or federal positions, and all of these comprises democratic or political and socio-cultural events that can be hugely facilitated by digital media of most kinds.

Digital media are used in all the events mentioned above and have greatly enhanced the way events of almost all kinds are coordinated. These data are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Use of Digital Media by Udu dwellers for Political Activities

Responses	Freq.	%
Yes	460	83.62
No	90	16.38
Total	550	100

Table 2: The Media That Are Mostly Used in the Political and Democratic Events in the Udu Area

Responses	Freq	%
Posters, hand bills and Pictures	150	22.27
Television, Radio, Satellite, Cable TVs and Videos	145	26.36
Social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter)	170	31.00
Physical Meetings/Door to door campaigns	85	15.45
Total	550	100

Table 3: The Democratic or Political Events That Take Place in Udu

Responses	Freq	%
Elections in Government Offices	250	45.45
Youths election into different youth bodies	150	22.27
Hosting of Government officials and Oil Company representatives	140	25.45
Others	10	2
Total	550	100

Table 1 has revealed that the Udu dwellers use digital media for their political activities. From Table 1 above, about 83% of the respondents affirm to that fact. The implication of this finding shall be discussed in due course under discussion of result and how it formed the subject of research question one.

Digital media used in Udu community as shown in Table 2 above include the print and electronics, the social media as well as the smart media comprising smart phones, smart television and tablets. These media provide the ease for political,

economic, social and cultural information dissemination. Notices of meetings are sent through the social media platforms. Television and radio (especially community sensitive radio stations) broadcast the issues to the people in this area as applicable elsewhere, regularly not only to keep the people abreast with the events happening around the local government area, but to patronise the media also for their products which could be for publicity, change or development or even the sale of goods and services as commercials. The same is applicable to the print media which are now digitally printed. Digitalisation has greatly improved the speed and quality of printing. The quality now whets the appetite of people to read newspapers (including community newspapers), hand bills and posters.

There are several political events that occur in the Udu area including elections, youth activities amongst others. This is the provisions of Table 3 above. The area is a major oil and gas producing Local Government, as such, there are also several oil and gas multinational companies engaging host communities regularly in meetings for homage, explorations, development and for corporate social responsibility activities. As a local council also, electoral related events are bound to happen, whether elections into council, state or federal positions, and all of these comprise democratic or political and socio-cultural events that can be hugely facilitated by digital media of most kinds. In essence, digital media are used in all the events mentioned in Table 3 above and have greatly enhanced the way the events are coordinated.

Table 4: Responses On the Extent of Access to Political Information Through Digital Media

Responses	Freq	%
Very High	270	49.10
High	130	23.63
Can't Tell	90	16.36
Low	40	7.27
Very low	20	3.70
Total	550	100

It can be deduced from Table 4 above that majority of the Udu people have access to political information through various digital media. Out of 550 respondents, a whooping number of 460 are exposed to political information through the various media. Obviously, any person with a smart phone has access to digital media, let alone with television or radio sets which are now features of major mobile media devices. Most television and radio stations now broadcast from digital media platforms which can boost coverage, fidelity and signals. This also increases accessibility to remote places tremendously, thus, promoting political participation of such rural communities.

Table 5: Responses On Access to Information Promoting Political Participation Amongst Residents Via Digital Media

Responses	Freq	%
Strongly Agree	235	50
Agree	175	30
Undecided	85	15
Disagree	45	5
Strongly Disagree	20	3.64
Total	550	100

Political participation can take place in several forms from a mere phone-in-programme on radio to demand for the appropriate venue to pick up a PVC (Personal Voters Card) to keeping time with a television programme to see a documentary, feature on a voting process. It could be responding to a tweet, or WhatsApp message that a political aspirant is visiting the locality for a campaign to solicit votes, and which the recipient of such message sees as an ample opportunity to ask the politician some questions, and so on. In a nutshell, digital media have promoted political participation to a great extent as people are now more aware about the political events happening not only around their locality - the Udu area. As presented in Table 5 above, the positive outnumbers the negative responses, with a tilt of 430 over 65 respondents that disagreed, leaving 85 as indifferent.

Table 6: Responses as to the Extent to which Digital Media has Promoted Political Participation among the Udu Community

Responses	Freq	%
Very high	228	41.45
High	158	28.72
Can't tell	87	15
Low	43	7.81
Very low	34	6
Total	550	100

Table 6 above shows that about 70% of the respondents think digital media have promoted political participation in Udu community at a very high or high levels. This is a further support to the analysis on Table 5 above.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: Do Udu Dwellers use the Digital Media in their Political Activities?

Data presented in Table 1 above show that the Udu dwellers in the Udu area use digital media such as digital television, digital community radio, digital newspapers and the smart media in their political activities. This result does not only provide the solution to research question one, it however, negates the outcome of Asemah (2016), who did a similar study in a similar oil community in Delta state and found a near absence of digital application in the political process. The finding also suggests a kind of digital media assimilation in rural communities as against the extant literature on the subject that shows poor deployment and lack of use because of the general level of literacy (See Ekeanyanwu and Ajakaiye, 2016; Bala and Asemah, 2013, Kediehor, 2014).

Research Question Two: What Are the Digital Media That Are Mostly Used in the Political and Democratic Events in the Udu Area?

The implication of the data in Table two is that digital media are mostly used in the Niger Delta area of Udu. Such media as television, radio, newspapers and the smartphones applications are all digital media in characteristics and in operations and formed the major channels or media of communication in Udu. Thus, this study strengthened the works of Alumuku (2013); Moemeka (1999); Okpoku-Mensah (2005); and Kediehor (2019) who posit that the media can be deliberately and strategically used in the rural areas to promote democracy, equality, health, agriculture and development in all its ramifications. Digital community radio stations have the potential to significantly advance political and democratic events in the rural areas, Udu in particular. The data provided a positive insight to the second objective of this study that seeks to know if the kind of media mostly used in the Udu area.

However, the survey indicates that the people may not understand all the media they identified to be in use in this area are digital media, whether they are handbills, posters, pictures, television, radio, satellite cable and videos, even the social media. Even through the other forms of communication channels adopted like face-to-face interpersonal communication and town hall meetings have the applications of digital media encoded in them, for instance, WhatsApp messages sent to members to notify them of meetings and digital recording systems, such as videos and pictures emanating from such meetings are always part of that interpersonal communication process.

These digital media are practically in use in the area of study and elsewhere among rural dwellers. It is therefore a confirmation of the results presented in Tables 2 and 3 which indicate that the Udu dwellers to a substantial extent frequently use digital media for their democratic and political events, thus negating the claims of Craft (2011) that digital media only have the potential to cater for the information needs of the metropolitan cities alone.

Research Question Three: To What Extent Have Udu Community in Delta State Applied Digital Media in Their Political and Democratic Events?

Generally, the political or democratic events that take place in a typical community in Nigeria and the Udu dwellers in particular include general elections into different public offices at the local, state and Federal levels. Since the general elections are national events, the area in focus as part of the Nigerian state is included, more so when there are several elections especially at the youth level into different youth groups. These democratic and political processes are prevalence in the Udu Area according to the findings of the study. These two categories recorded majority of the respondents implying that a great deal of political events occur in the area of study frequently.

Besides, there are other sub-political events such as visits of political aspirants, oil and gas companies' representatives and development authorities coming to fulfil the mandate of the people. To this end, democratic and political events are frequently recurring in the Udu Area. The outcome of this result is in tandem with the literature of Ndemele and Innocent (2009) which states that the media whether analogue or digital have the key responsibility to cover or report major events in the society.

To answer Research Question 3, the community members agreed that that all the political/democratic events listed above have benefitted from digital media application. The respondents were also of the view that digital media technologies have promoted the participation of the Udu community members in the political process be it at the local, state and federal levels. These conclusions were inferred from the data presented in Tables 4, 5 and 6.

Research Question Four: What is the Extent of Access to Political Information Through Digital Media?

Meaningfully, the data gathered, analysed and presented in Tables 4, 5 and 6 have shown that the people of Udu community in Delta State, Nigeria have access to digital media and also apply them to improve their political participation to a great degree. This is the crux of the study and a reflection of the theoretical foundation of this research that applies the Structural Approach Theory. The structural approach to development and communication examines the infrastructure of the world of communication system to determine whether it impedes or promotes development at all levels (see Dominick, 2009; Baran, 2004; and McQuail, 2000). Thus, this study aligns itself with aspects of the theory or school of thought that says media systems or facilities have amazingly improved or facilitated political participation among the rural communities including the people of Udu Local Government area of Delta State.

Concluding Statements

Digitisation has come to stay with a lot of benefits which they have brought to the media industry and telecommunication in general. With the advent of portable digital

equipment for communication; interaction channels are now digitally induced and susceptible to them in all communication channels including the mainstream media, computers and mobile phones and other electronic gadgets or devices. This is also applicable to the social media, which include the internet and the numerous social networking applications such as the Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp etc. As technologically involved as it is, the Udu community members have found digital media very useful and reliable as these new media technologies help promote a culture of active participation in the political process.

In conclusion, Udu community members have access to digital media technologies and apply same to play a better part in the political process of the community. Most importantly, digital media technologies have promoted a culture of active participation in the democratic and national development of the community, the State and the nation in general, hence the call for government at all levels to continue to deploy such media technologies in their interaction with the community. This also presupposes that Government must make effort to ensure continues access is not inhibited by cost or poor or inadequate power supplies (Ekeanyanwu, 2015).

Recommendations

To conclude this study, we recommend that the digital media platforms should be properly put to use by the Nigerian government at all levels and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and human rights groups for increased political participation and mobilisation of the rural people not only for political development, but for the acceptance of government policies and programmes.

Second, the national orientation agencies and statutory information institutions at both the state and federal levels of government should sensitise the rural people further, particularly those that are indifferent, on the amazing benefits of the digital media in the promotion of a culture of active engagement and participation in the democratic and developmental efforts in their community, state, and country.

Finally, we think corporate media organisations in the Udu area and elsewhere in Nigeria should adopt a more conscious effort to use the enormous advantages of their digital media platforms to involve the people more in political participation as well as in every other developmental projects of government.

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