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## **Overview of Digital Communication and Governance in Africa**

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## CHAPTER 1



# Overview of Digital Communication and Governance in Africa



*Rotimi OLATUNJI*



**T**he digital revolution is reshaping governance and communication across the African continent, ushering new paradigms of interaction between governments and citizens. Countries like Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, and Côte d'Ivoire have emerged as key players in what Eric Osiakwan (2017) describes as the "KINGS of Africa's Digital Economy." Their leadership highlights Africa's growing digital footprint, especially in governance, where digital tools are transforming administrative processes, citizen engagement, and the delivery of public services.

The acronym “KINGS”, referring to the initial letter of five of the sub-Saharan countries of Kenya, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa, encapsulate the phenomena digital revolution on the African continent, although the order of arrangement of the suzerainty of each of these digital pentagons may not reflect the current reality of the level of development of digitisation and technology in Africa.

About a decade ago, a technology media company called Tech Crunch noted that the future of digital technology “is African”, particularly because the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been christened as “the African century”, in the works of Osiakwan (2017, p.55). While the several traditions of media effects theories draw our attention to the weighty issue of what the media are doing to us (media effects), the uses and gratification theory extends the debate to the realm of issues dealing with what audiences are doing with the media and why the audiences engage with the media. *Digital Communication and Governance in Africa* not only encapsulates treatises on what digitisation is doing to Africa, but also explores the broader issue of what Africa is doing with digitisation. Thus this book explores critical issues around the effects, uses and gratification of digitisation in governance on the African continent

At this stage, there is the need for us to capture the historical evolution of digitisation in the sub-Saharan Africa. Here, we resort to a verbatim excerpt from Osiakwan (2017, pp.55-56) as follows:

The digital economy in Africa started in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1995, when Mark Shuttleworth built Thawte, a leading certificate authority, and sold it to Verisign when Vodacom championed prepaid airtime. The wave then moved to Ghana in 2001, when, together with Mark Davies and other, BusyInternet was built... The tech wave..., moving through Kenya has produced some of the country's leading tech innovations- for example, Erik Hersman's iHub and Safaricom's M-PESA.... The wave is now making its way to Lagos, Nigeria, and Abidjan, Ivory Coast”

From the above narrative, it appears that South Africa served as the first port where the ship of the digital revolution docked on the African continent, before it subsequently sailed through Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria, before birthing in Ivory Coast. Fast forward to the year 2025, the entire African continent seems now to have been submerged under the torrent of digitisation. But more importantly, the current rate of adoption and utilisation of digitisation in Africa, although breathtaking, is un-equal and combined, to take a cue from the legendary scholar, Walter Rodney (1972), who in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, alluded to the law of uneven and combined development. In other words, the growth, development and adoption of digitisation on the African continent may not be even, but holistically, the adoption of digitisation has heralded a sort of combined developmental impact on Governance in Africa.

In a research article, Olatunji (2017, pp. 127-143) seems to have captured the picture of the unevenness of the growth and development of digitisation across the African continent. Using a 2014 dataset, Olatunji (2017, p. 137) recorded the heaviest social media and mobile telecommunications users on the African continent as follows: Nigeria (12 million), South Africa (10.2 million), Kenya (3.8 million), Ghana (2.4 million), Angola (1.3 million), Senegal (1.0 million), Uganda (1.18 million) and Tanzania (1.34 million). Today, the figures have quadrupled, but the leadership of the KINGS is unassailable, but Nigeria remains atop in the digital KINGS' category. A recent data show that as of December 2014, there are 164.9 million mobile phone users in Nigeria; followed by 120 million users in Egypt; 116.8 million in South Africa, 86.8 million in Tanzania; and 85.4 million users in Ethiopia. The remaining countries among the top-10 leading telephone users on the African continent are Kenya (71.4 Million), Democratic Republic of Congo (63.9 million), Ivory Coast (58.7 million), Morocco, ( 58.3 million) and Algeria (54.05 million)

The number of telephone subscription per country should however not be mistaken for the level of development of digitisation of each of the African countries. A Google search for the top-10 digitally developed countries in Africa shows that Libya occupies the topmost

position with ICT Development Index of 88.1, followed by Morocco (86.8); Seychelles, (84.7), Mauritius (84.2); South Africa (83.61), Algeria (80.9), Botswana (78.7), Tunisia (77.2), Egypt (76.8), and Gabon (74.7). The foregoing has prompted Olatunji (2017, p.137) to reference the claim made by Balancing Act, (2014, p.5) that the “sub-Saharan Africa is the cockpit of change in terms of the global digital divide and changing media use”. This again confirms our earlier thesis on the applicability of the law of uneven and combined development of digitisation on the African continent. This chapter therefore provides an overview of the evolution, present realities, and future trajectories of digital communication and governance in Africa. It sets the thematic and conceptual foundation for the more focused analyses presented in the subsequent chapters of this volume on *Digital Communication and Governance in Africa*.

Setting the stage, the contribution of Adesina and Ogunrinde represents an analysis of how artificial intelligence (AI) remains compatible with peculiar practices in Nigeria media. It reflects on the Nigeria environment, culture, labour, ownership, and political landscape that have shaped the emergence and identity of the Nigeria media in historical and contemporary sense as technology interact with long age tradition of media in Nigeria. The chapter unpacked the concept of AI which has become a generic synonym for robotics in journalism. It then evaluates AI at various levels of implementation to resolve its inappropriate conflation with robot journalism. It further explores the idea of technological domestication, challenges of reach, preferring an adoption of AI in a way digestible to culture, environment and political landscape unique to Nigeria. The chapter establishes that domesticating AI involves developing language models and algorithms that cater to Nigeria's diverse linguistic landscape and can be used in specific contexts that strengthens media-audience relationship rather than disruption and alienation. Situating Nigeria media in this global technology advancement reflects on the triangulation of factors such as cost, knowledge, awareness, and practice, as well as traditionalisation of the tools. The chapter concludes that by domesticating AI in Nigeria, there is an opportunity to leverage technology in addressing specific challenges, empower local

journalists, and enhance the quality and accessibility of content across the country. Adesina & Ogunrinde posited that the advocated approach not only ensures the effective integration of AI, but also contributes to the development of a sustainable and culturally sensitive media ecosystem in Nigeria.

The evolution of digital technologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has drastically transformed how governments and societies interact which has affected how both democratic processes and the citizens engage especially in developing countries in Africa. Indeed, e-Governance (adoption of digitisation into governance) has enabled governments to improve how they deliver public service, as communication technologies have made it easier for citizens to mobilize politically. Africa remains at the vortex of global development, not just because of the immensity of her natural material and manpower resources, but equally because of the its digital actualities and potentialities. It is for this reason that Jolaoso, Adeniyi and Soyinka, took a bold look at the imperatives of digital communication for good governance in Africa. The chapter recommends the need for Nigeria and other sub-Saharan countries to redouble their commitment to digitisation in such a way that it will percolate to the grassroots in their quest for good governance.

Digital public relations is an emerging area of specialisation in the field of public relations. Emmanuel , Falobi and Aondover take a cursory look at the challenges and prospects arising from the deployment of digital public relations in governance in Nigeria. The authors posit that the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in governance and public relations in Nigeria presents a mix of opportunities and threats. The chapter concludes by advocating the development of a robust regulatory frameworks, along with stakeholders hugely investing in infrastructure and education, as well as ensuring that ethical considerations are mainstreamed at the heart of AI deployment

In a related development, Onyejelem, Aondover and Ezeonyejiaku take a cursory look at Photojournalism and Public Relations practice in the era of digital complexities. The objectives of the chapter are

to: examine photojournalist and the practice of public relations in the era of digital media, interrogate the practice of public relations in the era of digital media in Nigeria. In awareness of the power of tech, the authors observe that photojournalists have the potentials to creating well-informed plans for the efficient use of AI-powered generative media tools and gain deeper insights of their associated problems that will significantly impact public relations strategies and communication efforts. The researchers employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in analysing how photojournalists create images that influence public perception, organisational communication, and media narratives. There is no doubt that the chapter contributes significantly to the existing literature on the intersection of digital technologies, photojournalism and public relations practices in Nigeria media ecosystem.

Deepfake technology, a significant advancement in artificial intelligence and machine learning, has profoundly impacted the way people perceive reality, posing serious threats to journalistic ethics and the value of truth. Against this background, Fati Aliyu-Ohiare and Shaibu Mohammed advanced their view regarding the weighty issue of deepfake and ethical concerns in Journalism Practice in Nigeria. In their view, Deepfake involves generating highly realistic fake audio and video files, leading to the proliferation of fake news and misinformation. They stated further that the manipulation capabilities of deepfake technology, particularly in creating deceptive visual content, raise ethical and legal concerns, especially regarding minors' protection. The global community must recognise the potential dangers and implement measures to control the misuse of deepfake technology to preserve the integrity of information and protect vulnerable populations. The authors recommend that, creators of deepfake videos must publicize their work. This will encourage critical thinking and open discussion of verification systems and security protocols, as well as ethical concerns

Research is fundamental to good governance. In awareness of the rapidity with which AI tools are proliferating virtually all spheres

of human endeavours, as well as their crucial roles in education, Usman and Siraj discussed the imperatives of AI in communication research, including emerging ethical concerns. The authors submitted that the deployment of AI models in communication research is growing rapidly and gaining an increasing influence, with teachers, researchers, and students exploiting the technologies in research data gathering, literature sourcing and review, data mining and analysis, and generating ideas. In spite of the fact that AI technologies are redefining and easing communication research processes, the authors posited that the tools pose a plethora of ethical challenges, including lack of research originality, the potential falsification of research results, and lack of transparency, among other complications. This raises concerns on the credibility of research outcomes and the image of the researchers. The authors also submitted that the lack of commensurate policy for AI deployment in most educational institutions threatens the credibility of research outcomes and the image of the researchers. The chapter concludes by pointing attention to the need for scholars and policy makers to adopt best ethical practices in the engagement of AI in researches.

The citizens' quest for political information is always at its peak in a democratic system. Hence, Nwantah and Owolabi explored the relationships between Online citizens engagement platforms, democratic consolidation and governance in Africa. The various news media, especially the online media has been endued with tremendous responsibility and power to echo people's voice within any democratic setting. Against the above background, the chapter explores the potentials of online citizen engagement platforms in promoting good governance and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. The authors reasoned that online platforms have the potential to foster good governance and democratic consolidation by increasing citizen engagement, improving transparency, and holding government officials accountable yet escape censorship. However, challenges such as digital inequality, inadequate infrastructure, less credibility of news contents and lack of government commitment are recognised as hindrances to the maximisation of online engagement in the drive towards

governance in Africa. The authors then advocated increased investment in digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy, and ensuring government responsiveness to citizen inputs to harness the full potential of online citizen engagement platforms. The chapter therefore contributes to the understanding of e-participation in Nigeria and highlights the importance of online citizen engagement platforms in deepening democratic governance.

On her part, Jane Adama interrogated issues around coverage of Cybersecurity in select Online platforms. This is in awareness of the fact that Cyberspace innovations have completely changed how information is gathered, processed, and shared through the Internet although cybersecurity provides the understanding into how the media contributes to the eradication of cybercrimes. The chapter explores the scope of cybercrimes being perpetuated through online journalism. Adopting a content analysis method, the chapter analysed data collected from two select online news platforms: (a) *The Nation Newspaper Online* and (b) Linda Ikeji's Blog ([lindaikejisblog.com](http://lindaikejisblog.com)). The results showed that there was little news coverage on cybercrime. It also showed that attention to issues around cybercrime were sparsely reported, prompting the author to come up with recommendations aimed at sanitising the online platform, against the backdrop of the extant Nigeria Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention etc.) Act, 2015.

This 14 chapter book also features insightful discussion by Dare Ogunyombo (Chapter 12) on Public Relations Education in the digital era; Yusuf Mu'azu and his research associates who in chapter 13 explored strategies for harnessing AI for governance in Nigeria, and Dapo Olorunyomi who dilated on "Emerging Africa's Newsroom". Olorunyomi sums up the diverse arguments as follows: The survival of Africa's media is not merely a journalistic concern - it is a democratic imperative".

Evidently, digital communication and governance are fundamentally altering how African governments interact with their citizens, delivering services, and maintaining accountability. While the path is fraught with infrastructural and ethical challenges, it also holds

immense promise for fostering democratic governance, inclusion, and socio-economic development. The digital age has drastically altered the landscape in which indigenous languages exist, creating a new realm of possibilities and challenges for their preservation and promotion. The advent of digital technologies has introduced innovative methods for language documentation, educational dissemination, and global outreach. This may have begun with the integration of indigenous languages in Africa into the Internet ecology. Against this backdrop, Nurat Tosin and her colleagues explored influences of digital communication on indigenous languages in Africa. Digital spheres of influences, the chapter submits, are concerns in the area of digital divides, cultural appropriation, threat to dilution of linguistic purity, and inadvertent marginalisation of indigenous languages through skewed algorithmic design.

Digital communication and governance are redefining the relationships between African governments and their citizens. While the journey is marked by both remarkable achievements and formidable challenges, the trajectory is clear: digital technologies are central to Africa's pursuit of efficient, transparent, and inclusive governance. As the continent continues to innovate and adapt, the lessons learned will not only shape its own future but also offer valuable insights for the global community. This chapter therefore lays the foundation for the discussions that follow, delving into the nuances of media nativity, AI integration, ethical considerations, and the impact of digital communication on language, political engagement, and public service delivery across Africa.

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