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Social Media Use for Youth Empowerment by the Niger Delta Development Commission: The Configuration and Gratification

[1] Chimamkpam Wosu, [2] Prof. Godwin B. Okon, [3] Prof. R. N. Amadi, [4] Dr. Bigman Nwala

[1] Department of Mass Communication, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

[2] Department of Mass Communication, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

[3] Department of Mass Communication, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

[4] Department of Mass Communication, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

ABSTRACT

The increasing integration of social media into institutional communication has transformed the ways public development agencies disseminate information and interact with young people. This study examines the social media communication strategies employed by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in promoting awareness and participation in youth empowerment programmes. Drawing on qualitative interview data from staff involved in the Commission's communication activities, the study applies thematic content analysis to examine platform configuration, interaction, credibility, transparency and audience participation. The findings indicate that the NDDC adopts a multi-platform communication approach involving Facebook, X and other digital platforms, complemented by its official website. Social media is used for programme announcements, rapid information dissemination, audience interaction, clarification, feedback, live engagement and institutional transparency. Accessibility, speed, platform popularity and audience reach influence platform selection, while beneficiary testimonials, staff amplification and peer-to-peer sharing extend programme visibility. However, misinformation, scepticism and unofficial information remain important challenges. The study concludes that social media enhances institutional capacity to create awareness and facilitate interaction with young people, but visibility alone does not guarantee substantive participation. It recommends an integrated and responsive digital communication strategy combining verified information, timely feedback, platform-specific communication and clearer pathways from awareness to programme participation.

Keywords*: social media; institutional communication; youth empowerment; NDDC; youth participation; Niger Delta; digital communication*

Introduction

Social media has become an important communication environment through which public institutions disseminate information and interact with stakeholders. Unlike traditional media, which depend largely on one-directional message transmission, platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram and TikTok facilitate immediate dissemination, sharing, commenting, direct messaging and other forms of interaction. Their relevance is particularly pronounced among young people, who constitute a significant segment of social media users and increasingly depend on digital platforms for information, networking and opportunities.

In development communication, social media has created new possibilities for institutions seeking to communicate programmes to dispersed populations. Public development organisations can provide announcements in real time, clarify application requirements, direct audiences to relevant resources and receive immediate feedback. Social media can therefore serve simultaneously as an information channel, participatory environment and institutional relationship-management mechanism.

This development is particularly important in the Niger Delta, where youth unemployment, socio-economic marginalisation and demands for inclusion remain significant developmental concerns. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established as a federal intervention agency responsible for promoting sustainable development within the region. Youth-oriented interventions associated with the Commission include scholarship opportunities, internship schemes, entrepreneurship programmes, skills-acquisition initiatives and related empowerment programmes.

The effectiveness of these interventions partly depends on whether prospective beneficiaries are aware of available opportunities and have access to clear information concerning eligibility, application requirements and deadlines. This paper therefore focuses specifically on how NDDC configures its social media communication for awareness creation and participation in youth empowerment programmes.

Literature Review

Social Media and Institutional Communication

Social media refers to interactive digital platforms that enable organisations and individuals to produce, distribute and respond to networked content. Unlike traditional mass communication, contemporary social media environments enable audiences to participate directly in message circulation. For public institutions, these characteristics provide opportunities for stakeholder communication, transparency and accountability (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2015; Mergel, 2013). Institutional communication extends beyond message dissemination and involves stakeholder identification, message formulation, channel selection, feedback and relationship management (Cornelissen, 2017).

Social Media, Awareness and Participation

Awareness represents a preliminary stage in participation. Individuals cannot participate effectively in programmes they do not know exist or for which they lack sufficient information. Social media can expand awareness through speed, repetition, networked sharing and direct communication. Participation goes further than exposure and can include seeking additional information, commenting, sharing announcements, contacting programme administrators, registering for opportunities and eventually taking part in empowerment activities. Hai and Xiong (2025) show that information-seeking and social motivations can influence young people's willingness to share digital content.

Transparency, Credibility and Misinformation

Digital communication occurs in an environment in which institutional information competes with misinformation, unofficial accounts and fraudulent content. Metzger and Flanagin (2013) argue that credibility judgments are central to online information use. For empowerment communication, misinformation is especially consequential because false announcements may mislead unemployed or economically vulnerable young people. Official verified accounts and consistent communication can therefore perform an important verification function.

Youth Empowerment and Digital Communication

Youth empowerment encompasses processes through which young people acquire knowledge, opportunities, skills, confidence and resources enabling them to exercise greater control over their socio-economic circumstances. Zimmerman (2000) explains empowerment at individual, organisational and community levels. Information constitutes an enabling resource within the empowerment process; however, communication is only one stage in empowerment because actual outcomes depend on whether young people can access and benefit from the opportunities publicised.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is principally anchored on Media System Dependency Theory developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976). The theory holds that the influence of a media system increases when individuals depend on it for information required to understand their environment and make decisions. Media dependency becomes especially significant under conditions of uncertainty or when alternative information sources are inadequate. In youth empowerment contexts, young people may depend on official digital platforms for programme availability, eligibility, deadlines and application procedures. The theory identifies cognitive, affective and behavioural effects: knowledge and awareness; confidence and trust; and actions such as registration or programme participation. The framework is complemented by the dialogic perspective on institutional communication, which emphasises two-way communication, feedback and relationship building.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The empirical material reveals a multi-platform communication configuration. NDDC uses Facebook and X alongside other digital platforms, while its official website functions as a more detailed and formal information repository. Social media posts often generate initial awareness, after which users are directed to the website for application requirements, eligibility conditions and other detailed information. This configuration illustrates a complementary strategy in which social media provides speed and visibility while the website provides institutional depth and formal documentation.

Platform choice is influenced by reach, accessibility, speed and popularity among young people. Platform selection therefore appears to be audience-driven rather than technologically arbitrary. The findings also reveal interactive elements: youths use comments, direct messages, reposts, questions and live sessions to engage the Commission. Live interviews on X were identified as opportunities for direct interaction, moving institutional communication beyond simple broadcasting.

Misinformation emerged as a major issue. Respondents reported that some youths encounter and share unverified information about programmes,

recruitment and empowerment opportunities. This places official social media channels in the additional role of authenticating information and correcting false claims. From a media-dependency perspective, uncertainty can increase reliance on authoritative information sources, making verified institutional channels important orientation resources.

Live coverage also emerged as a communication mechanism. Respondents indicated that live digital coverage enables audiences to observe activities directly and can strengthen perceptions of openness. Social media was considered effective in awareness creation because of its capacity for rapid and secondary circulation: once NDDC publishes a programme announcement, users can share it with friends and colleagues, extending programme visibility beyond direct followers.

Beneficiary testimonials represent another strategic mechanism. Respondents considered testimonials capable of increasing credibility because prospective applicants can encounter accounts from previous beneficiaries. Testimonials can function as peer-based social proof and may reduce uncertainty surrounding government empowerment initiatives. Staff members also contribute to information amplification by sharing official content through personal and professional accounts.

Despite these benefits, wider communication reach does not eliminate scepticism, criticism or negative reactions. Social media broadens opportunities for awareness and interaction, but increased visibility does not automatically translate into trust or programme participation. Digital communication should therefore be understood as enabling rather than automatically persuasive.

Findings

• NDDC uses a complementary digital communication structure involving Facebook, X, other digital platforms and its official website.

• Platform selection is influenced by youth popularity, accessibility, speed, potential reach and the communication requirements of particular messages.

• Social media is used for programme announcements, awareness creation, information dissemination, feedback, clarification, live engagement and transparency.

• Comments, direct messages, live discussions and questions create opportunities for two-way communication.

• Official digital channels perform a verification function by helping prospective beneficiaries distinguish authentic information from misinformation and fraudulent announcements.

• Peer-to-peer sharing, staff amplification and beneficiary testimonials extend programme visibility and can strengthen confidence.

• Increased exposure and visibility do not automatically guarantee trust or actual participation in empowerment programmes.

Recommendations

1. NDDC should develop an integrated digital communication policy that defines the complementary roles of social media platforms and the official website.

2. Programme announcements should consistently include eligibility criteria, deadlines, application procedures, verification information and direct links to official sources.

3. The Commission should institutionalise regular interactive sessions, including live question-and-answer programmes.

4. Verified accounts should be clearly identified and consistently linked to the official website.

5. NDDC should develop a structured response system so that legitimate enquiries receive timely and authoritative clarification.

6. Beneficiary testimonials should be used systematically, provided they are authentic and verifiable.

7. Platform-specific content strategies should be developed rather than publishing identical content in the same format across every channel.

8. Communication evaluation should move beyond likes, impressions and shares to include registrations, applications, participation and programme completion attributable to digital campaigns.

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