

New Media as a Contemporary Tool towards Achieving Sustainable Development in Kenya in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Communication exists to necessitate development. Therefore, in line with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) globally, the sharing of ideas, expression of thoughts and conveying of feedback regarding growth is significantly integral. The SDGs' achievement is realized when communication is utilized in various channels; through for instance Public Relations, Content Creation and New Media. Public Relations (PR) is one strong pillar in communication that guarantees rapid, relevant and necessary feedback. With PR featuring constant transfer of information to the receiver of the information, it can only portray that PR is essential towards wholesome societal development. Content creation as a form of communication depicts innovation worth but not limited to informing and educating the receiver. Content creation furthermore aids the receiver in clearly understanding the issue at hand. Through its incorporation in achieving the SDGs, transformation within the society will be transparent. With the evolution of digitalization in communication, new media has emerged and continues to become demystified with each passing moment. New media mainly through social media platforms has been structured in a way that quick information relay is widely experienced and traditional media forms become synchronized into one. This means that PR as is traditionally, can be designed through content creation and relayed through new media. With this mechanism in place, SDGs are globally and massively realized.

Key Words: *New Media, Sustainable Development, SDGs, Content Creation*

1.0 Introduction

In the context of communication experts, a common cliché within that angle is that *'We cannot not communicate.'* In promoting development, communication is a necessary requirement in ensuring that the envisioned sustainability goals for development are considered as well as met.

In a general overview, communication is a means through which human beings relate. It is a medium utilized through a specific channel in order to exchange thoughts, share ideas and express feelings. This sharing of thoughts, and expressing of feelings and ideas can occur within

oneself or amongst a group of people. Without communication, therefore, there would be no development since ideas, thoughts and feelings lack an aspect of sharing as well as expression.

In a development approach and for global welfare, the United Nations (UN) in 2017 came up with a list of goals known as the ‘*Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*’ oriented towards advancing livelihoods prior to the year 2030. The SDGs; 17 in number, range from the following matters of global concern as indicated in the table below:

1. No Poverty	2. Zero Hunger
3. Good Health and Well-Being	4. Quality Education
5. Gender Equality	6. Clean Water and Sanitation
7. Affordable and Clean Energy	8. Decent Work and Economic Growth
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	10. Reduced Inequalities
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities	12. Responsible Consumption and Production
13. Climate Action	14. Life Below Water
15. Life on Land	16. Peace Justice and Strong Institutions
17. Partnership for the Goals	

Figure 1: UN SDGs

Kenya being a member nation of the UN, it is necessary that these SDGs become applicable to the native society. With an apparent vision, therefore, the employment of modern communication channels in the country further enhances the successful accomplishment of the goals.

With the presence of freedom of the Media and the advent of digitalization in Kenya, an endowment and charge with the capability of diversifying media content has been realized. In particular, social media in Kenya has been able to widen the scope through which information reaches the media audience through information awareness, education, persuasion and entertainment. With these characteristics in mind, a study in place seeks to explore the magnitude in which the Kenyan Media has been able to achieve the SDGs and identify the existing gaps.

2.0 Literature Review

Social Constructionism Theory used in this study stresses how social exchange and media influence enhances human perception of global issues. In this study, therefore, the media is a social construct agent since the media is building and developing human awareness and understanding over different development and sustainability issues. In this way, attitudes and behaviours towards these diverse concerns are generated.

Moreover, this theory fits well into this context owed to its attribution towards fostering sustainable communities and practices. Where the media has applied this theory in the past, there has been evident positivity for instance the *Africa Knowledge Zone*; a development communication oriented documentary and film production that has promoted sustainability in East Africa and beyond through diverse programs it produces.

Literacy forms and similar studies review

The different forms of similar existing data perused for the benefit of this study have proved to be resourceful. The sources of these forms and their characteristics are local therefore being suitable for ease in circumnavigating the purpose of this paper as well as complementing additional information in the paper.

Literacy Forms/Similar Studies	Significance to this paper
The Constitution of Kenya	Emphasis on media freedom persuading the media to continuously set development agendas for the audience
Kenya Vision 2030	Observing local media content for the benefit of addressing primary and basic sustainability issues
Digitalization and Integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) in Public Organizations in Kenya (Gedion Onyango,	Complimentary information on digitalization and new media towards achieving

Japheth Otieno Ondiek)	sustainability in Kenya.
Technological Advancement: New Frontiers for Kenya’s Media? (Grace Githaiga)	Complimentary information on traditional media evolution into digital media towards furthering the reach on sustainability to Kenyans.

3.0 Methodology

The research design used in this study was a correlation research design which was suitable in determining the level to which communication and development co-relate. In this research mechanism, communication characteristics were compared to those development characteristics in order to understand how communication influences development. The data analyzed was gauged for logic as well as timeliness. Even though some data was not dated, it proved to be timely. Samples were also taken through a simple random sampling technique. In this way, needed data was hived out from another group of huge pieces of information. Challenges experienced were limit to a comprehensive compilation of all required data hence the process was vigorous since many sources were visited in order to gather the research data needed. All in all, the process was a complete success without data loss or any useless information gathering. All aspects of my study were well exhausted.

4.0 Results and Discussions

At the advent of the 21st Century, there was already a myriad of national challenges inhibiting the positive development of the Kenyan community. Ranging from poor economy to other issues that have risen along the way for instance climatic changes, it is crystal clear that the Kenyan contemporary media has to intensify advocacy efforts towards eliminating setbacks limiting development in the country and promoting sustainability. After all, without the media’s efforts, the mass/audience/societal needs will not be well satisfied and addressed.

As of now, Kenyan Development and Sustainability issues are numerous and exhaust all SDGs guiding the UN’s operation. On the other hand, the media’s role in addressing such issues has been fairly encouraging. In this regard, the overview of the ratio portrays that the sustainability concerns/development issues ratio to that of the media’s effort is 5:1.

How Kenyan mainstream media is promoting sustainability awareness

Media Assessment in Kenya based on Development Communication awareness carried out in this paper illustrates this evidence. This is a cumulative sample consisting of the mainstream TV media stations:

Media Station	Content Examples	Scope of Sustainability Awareness (SDG addressed)
KBC	<i>Abled Differently</i> <i>Mkulima,</i>	Reduced Inequalities Good Health and Well-Being Zero Hunger Decent Work and Economic Growth
Citizen	<i>Shamba Shape-Up</i>	Zero Hunger Affordable and Clean Energy Climate Action
NTV	<i>News Court</i> <i>Chamaa</i>	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions Gender Equality Sustainable Cities and Communities Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
KTN	<i>The Entrepreneur</i>	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure Sustainable Cities and Communities Responsible Consumption and Production

Figure 2: Mainstream TV channels' efforts towards development

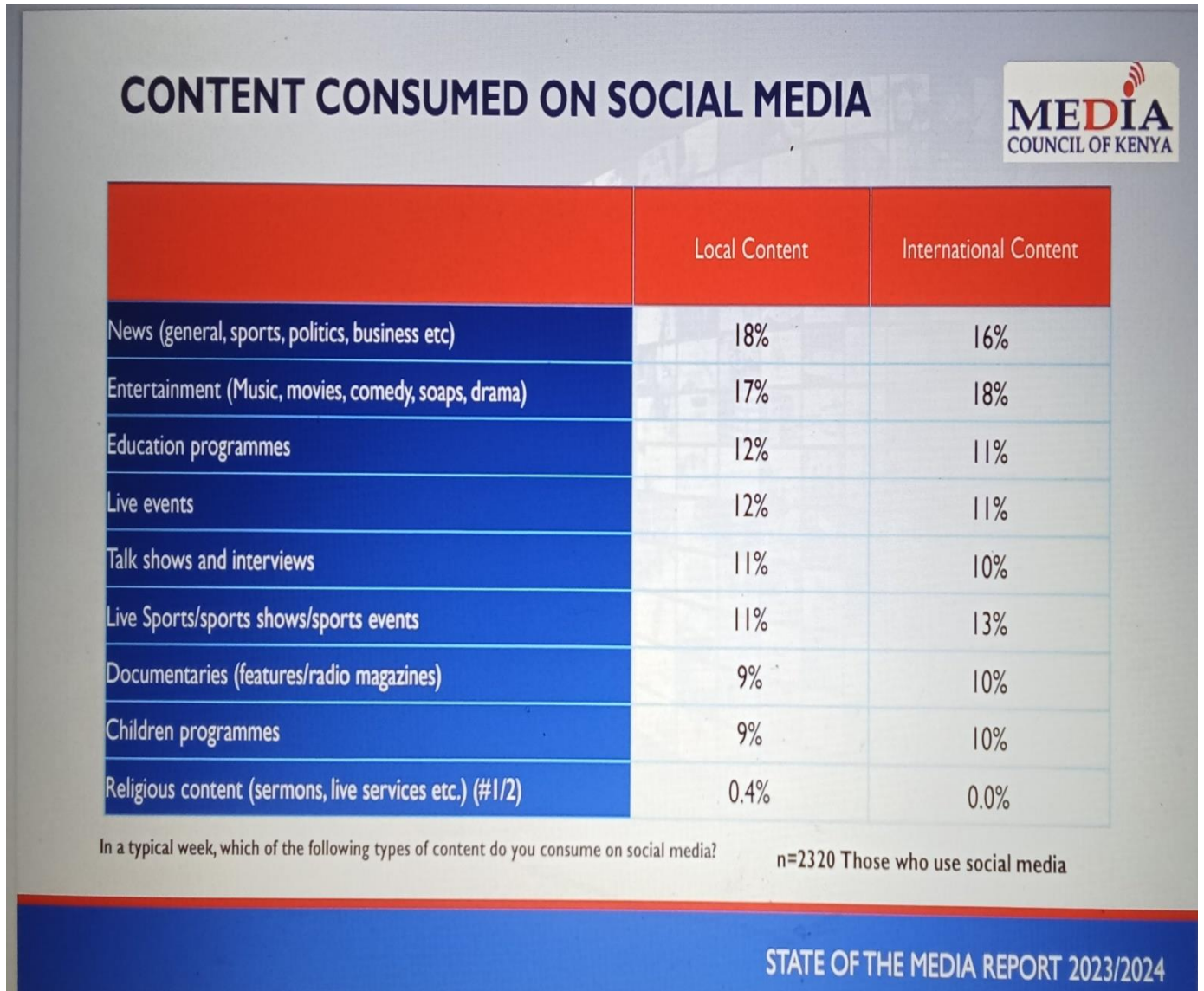
There are many other channels apart from the mainstream ones mentioned above and also through other media like radio and social media that have each in their own different styles and fashions necessitated the accomplishment of SDGs in Kenya. For instance, there are various radio stations that promote quality education for learners by presenting shows that are student-oriented on different subjects. Others also promote decent work and economic growth by producing shows that identify different skills and talents that are being used to earn income e.g. *Kazi na Burudani* on *KBC Radio Taifa*.

Ways in which social media is being used by media proponents

In some of the development and sustainability content mentioned above, the media channels try their level best to stream them live on their social media platforms. However, this is less than quarterly applied since not all content after being streamed is left for future review. This is a scenario that needs to change owing to the fact that 67% of Kenyans consume media content via traditional media while 33% consume it on social media (Media Council of Kenya Report, 2023/24)

With the coming of the New Constitution in 2010, the media was equally charged with the responsibility of informing citizens under utmost freedom from exploitation and government control in a way that both the traditional and new media operate without limitations (Article 34; Kenyan Constitution). Through this law, the media is safeguarded in operating freely and against any interference.

However, with all these in rigid record, the media stills struggles to reach its audience well as far as sustainability is concerned. This is proven through findings from the Media Council of Kenya Report; 2023/24:



Ways in which the social media is being used by non-media proponents.

The Constitution of Kenya (2010) has granted every single citizen the freedom to express themselves freely. This basically means that every individual has a right to pass thoughts, ideas and information through any form; traditional or new media. According to the Kenyan Vision, 2030, the usefulness of communication channels in the country has received attention in general. Attributing to it, media independence in conjunction with rapid digitalization has birthed ideologies and frameworks for diverse platforms championing for SDGs. With this reality in the

picture, abilities to bring societal development and transformation are now not limited to media house affiliation in order to reach a definite audience. Freelancing as well has enabled many individuals or group of individuals inspired by the media to go forth and generate sustainability content for their audiences in the various channels present. Many Kenyan citizens have emulated this move and a good number of them have content driven towards promoting sustainability.

There are different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that have identified the fruit of digitalization through the presence of social media and embraced it profitably. Organizations like the USAID have projects in Kenya that are sustainability-oriented for instance food security through fish farming. This project assists farmers in finding substitute earnings through fish-farming enterprises. In turn, the organization utilizes their various social media platforms to relay impact stories and documentaries on their achievements.

Such organizations also partner with various other similar stakeholders such as *UKAID, FAO, WFO, Kenyan Ministries of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, etc.* These partnerships utilize digital channels like *YouTube* and *Facebook* to produce content that is aimed at promoting development and addressing sustainability issues through accomplishing zero hunger, food security as well as job opportunities and economic upscale.

Comparison to Previous Studies

Attributing to a study done by Grace Githaiga on the transformation and advancement of the Kenyan media, she states that there has been progressive and tangible results attributed to media's influence on the Kenyan society. She however states that for the impact to continue being experienced, the media needs to evolve and acknowledge the presence of social media as a channel that synchronizes various media, reaches a wider audience and generates quick and resourceful feedback.

Another study by Gedion Onyango and Japeth Otieno (2021) suggests that new media/digitalization needs to be incorporated in achieving the SDGs in public organizations. Means to be employed have to be public policy, digital era governance, and open innovation systems. Further, through the study, Onyango and Otieno suggest that there is an acute lack of progress due to deficiency in Information Communication and Technological (ICT) mastery as well as poor management of communication channels leading to barriers that limit smooth encoding.

5.0 Conclusion

Through the data presented in the paper, there is enough proof to convey the idea that for development to progress and sustainability to prevail in the entire national jurisdiction, the media has to play its vital role in informing, educating and persuading its audience on the numerous goals (SDGs). In order to as well propel and guarantee this imminent success, the media can undertake the following mechanisms.

Intensify the embrace of new media/social platforms to attract worthwhile feedback. Through new media, the general society has become a global village. Moreover, since SDGs are aimed at benefiting the globe, the local media proponents can look into how their sustainability content can gain feedback through applause, criticism and further distribution to a meaningful multitude of *'netizens.'*

Maintain a clear and bright focus towards developing the nation. In Kenya today, political agendas dominate most of the media forms hence burning issues affecting the nation end up receiving little attention or even being ignored in totality. The media should therefore slightly ignore the Agenda-Setting Theory by shutting an eye to political censorship and control and giving space for audience prioritization (addressing factors that really affect the specific target audience).

Collaborate with different development experts drawn from all varieties and sectors. Without extra reinforcement, the media is highly vulnerable to getting facts wrong as well as relaying limited content. Therefore, such partnerships are of great importance in order to get the right, concise and convincing take over different subjects on sustainability.

The Kenyan media has all that it takes towards embracing the existence of digitalization in aiding the achievement of development and sustainability. With previous and progressive evidence and results, the impact can only become much brighter, for a much wealthier society.

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