

INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MEDIA ON EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN COUNTY ASSEMBLIES IN CENTRAL REGION OF KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication is critical in any organization and digitalized channels ensure work processes and time spent on repetitive task is minimized resulting to increased productivity. Although digitalization of Hansard production has advantages, there is low uptake of digitalization in the County Assemblies in Central Region of Kenya on Hansard Production to enable effective communication. The main objective of this study was to establish the influence of digital media on effective communication in County Assemblies in Central Region of Kenya. The study was anchored on Uses and Gratification theory (U&G) and Media System Dependency Theory. The study adopted a mixed research design to facilitate a qualitative and quantitative exploration of the research objectives. The target population of the study was 497 County Assembly's leadership and staff consisting of clerks, speakers, majority leaders, chief whips and members of staff. A sample size of 149 respondents was picked using purposive and stratified sampling methods. The study collected primary data using a structured questionnaire and key informant interview guide. The research instruments were validated using a pilot study. Quantitative data was analyzed using the statistical package for social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 computer package while qualitative data was analyzed using thematic data analysis. Quantitative data was presented in tables, figures and pie charts while qualitative data was presented in narrative form. The study established that digital media platforms, including social media, played a significant role in information dissemination but faced challenges like data security and misinformation. The study recommended that comprehensive strategies for digital media integration were essential to address data security, misinformation and content accessibility through content moderation and digital literacy programs.

Keywords: Digital media; Effective communication; Hansard production; County Assemblies.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

For effective communication to take place, accuracy is imperative as the impact can be massive either positively or negatively. Accurate communication can be enabled by digitalization of the existing processes in any organization as it increases productivity and efficiency while reducing costs (Gupta, 2020). With the advent of digitalization, legislatures have not been left behind. Digitalization in Hansard production plays a critical role in communication and this study

investigates the influence of digital media on effective communication in County Assemblies in Central region of Kenya.

According to Rahm (2018), everyday use of digital platforms and infrastructures is often portrayed as an autonomous technical development, guided by clever and independent innovations that inspire parliaments support and governance. According to National Assembly (2017), Hansard is the name given throughout the commonwealth Countries to the daily printed record of the debates of Parliament. The parliamentary processes and procedures are almost similar but there could be a little variation although they do not affect the 'macro process' of Hansard production. According to Australian Parliament (2020), the Hansard contents include all the information presented in the legislature such as communications, messages, statements, bills and budget making processes amongst others.

Although digitalization has many advantages such as accessibility to information, easy and immediate communication and ability to share information, it is prone to some challenges such as opening up to digital crimes like hacking, technical failures, high internet cost as well as connection problems (Bourke, 2021). According to World e-Parliament Report (2022), parliaments all over the world are focused not just on managing and preparing information for their own use but on ensuring that it can be openly published and shared with a wider public audience. In World e-Parliament Reports (2022), parliaments identified web-based publishing, audio and video capture of proceedings, and the use of social media as the top three digital tools.

Statement of the Problem

Digitalization involves applying digital-based tools and technologies to parliamentary processes and culture. It happens as part of the wider drive to modernize and improve parliaments, making them more efficient and effective (Penelope & Williamson, 2023). Digitalization of Hansard has many advantages such as improvement of communication, dissemination of information, greater efficiency, openness and transparency (Inter parliamentary Union, 2014). However, it comes with risks and challenges that need to be addressed. There are difficulties experienced by some County Assemblies to effectively digitalize Hansard to improve communication.

This study addresses ineffective communication in County Assemblies in Central Region of Kenya due to lack or inadequate digitization. According to information available, Nyandarua County in Central Kenya region is the only one that has made significant strides in adopting digitalization (Nyandarua County Assembly website). Lack of proper communication and interactive tools between County Assemblies and their audiences affect the citizens ability to provide feedback and make inputs in the decision-making process (Tyumere, 2018). Unlike other communication channels, legislative contents are usually contained in Hansard. Digitalization can help increase efficiency by automating processes and making them more streamlined and efficient. This can decrease costs and increase productivity (Penelope & Williamson, 2023). Due to cost implication coupled with low budget allocations for complex technological devices across many parliaments, many legislatures are unable to digitalize. Infrastructure involves a sophisticated array of hard and

software which are expensive (Global center survey, 2019). The traditional method of communication by County Assemblies has led to inaccessible parliaments where the public cannot access information hence the public cannot put the elected members on scrutiny (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2006). Manual production has resulted to long production hours and delayed updates in Legislative websites. This is evidenced by the huge backlogs, delayed production, outsourced services and lack of archived and retrievable Hansard reports which has denied the public the much needed legislative Information (Owino, 2019).

A Study by Khaunga et al., (2015) on devolved governance established that, Counties have been faced with myriads of challenges that stand on the way to realizing achievements. Such challenges include devolved establishments such as County Assemblies, their functions and allocation of resources. To implement digitalization, “several problems remain to be solved such as capacities of the County staffs” (Thomas, 2018). A significant number of County Assemblies have not developed capabilities and are struggling to produce accurate records within the 48-hour acceptable timeframe (Standing Orders, 2019). A study by Ahmed (2012) on the role of ICT in Democratizing public information access in Kenya Parliament established digital technologies options for capturing, recording, storage and retrieval of parliamentary proceedings in the National Parliament and Senate in Kenya were used to a moderate extent. The study however, focused on the two National Parliaments with no reference to the County Assemblies, as they were not constituted then hence creating a research gap. The influence of digitalization of Hansard production on effective communication in County Assemblies in Central region of Kenya cannot be emphasized. By solving the problem of ineffective communication through digitalization, County Assemblies can be interactive, open and transparent for healthy parliamentary democracies. It is in this regard that, this study was undertaken to establish the influence of digital media on effective Communication in County Assemblies in Central Region of Kenya.

Objective of the study

To establish the influence of digital media on effective communication in County Assemblies in Central Region of Kenya.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Media on effective communication

Digital media hold the promise of the future. Therefore, developing countries should adopt digital technologies while continuing to diversify their production bases by mastering existing technologies to benefit from the window of opportunity they offer (United Nations, 2021). World e-Parliament Report (2018) indicate that timely public availability of legislative records is a key ingredient for an open, transparent and accountable legislature, and therefore a cornerstone of healthy parliamentary democracies.

According to Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, (2018), the use of digital media has dramatically changed the parameters and the dynamics involved in documenting the parliamentary process and production of verbatim record of debates, votes and other activities that occur during a session. This has often resulted in greater efficiencies, lower costs, faster and wider distribution and access of information for both members and the public; it has significantly increased the openness and transparency of the process and therefore imbued it with greater legitimacy. According to (Global

Centre for ICT in parliament, 2018) digital media ensures a readily accessible record and archive of correspondence. It allows different parties to develop and access information much easier such as development of softcopy information, enables people to spread information faster and beyond international borders much more efficiently and easily as opposed to analogue media (Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, 2018).

A survey by Global Center (2019) on adoption of digital media in Parliaments shows that low usage of digital media is largely due to cost implications and low budget allocations for technological devices across many parliaments. According to a survey done by Inter-parliamentary union, (2020) Parliaments often struggle with innovation largely due to lack of innovative culture which stems from the deep historical roots that are particular to parliaments as well as the controls that are common in many public agencies. Little attention has been paid to the adoption of digital media to enhance communicative relationship between representatives and citizens in relation to Hansard production which is the main channel of communication in any legislature (Hansard, 2019). This situation has led to lack of understanding of the parliament processes as a corporate entity and how the parliamentarians exercise their legal mandates.

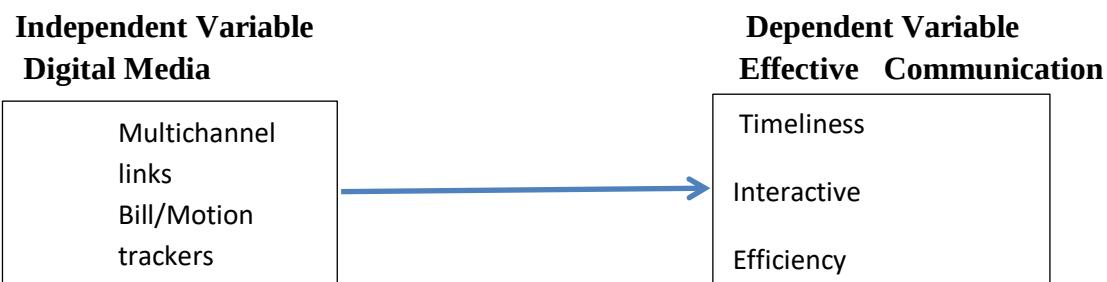
A digital medium enables content to be distributed easily and has had an influence and transformation behind scenes, as it is effective in more visible areas in most parliaments and legislative process in the world (United Nations & Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018). Digital media have become essential in supporting the work of legislative bodies throughout the world. In that respect, the legislative process requires communication and cooperation from different parts of the legislative body to achieve effective results. (Griffith, 2017). Through the use of digital media, parliaments can develop and implement formal engagement forum of staff members to accelerate the opening of parliament to citizens (Kabuya, .et al, 2022). The effectiveness of Parliament is best judged not in terms of its ability to initiate or shape policies and laws, but as a forum in which public aspirations, anxieties and complaints can be aired and addressed, and the public voice can be heard in all of its pluralistic diversity (Coleman, 2015).

The advent of the digital media such as Multichannel links, software, digital video, Bill/Motion tracker or even social media has increased the demand for access to the records of parliamentary proceedings in text, audio and video formats Griffith, (2017). The availability and access to information by a greater number of citizens is a sign of functioning democracy and a Country's development (Githaiga, Minnie, & Bussiek, 2011). There is evidence of demand for tools to better link parliaments and citizens in Sub-Saharan Africa. An Inter-Parliamentary Union Hansard report (2020) noted that East African respondents to a survey, when asked what digital tools they would like to see Member of Parliament use to improve communication, requested digital tools that would facilitate direct engagement and communication between parliamentarians and citizens, and that represented a move away from traditional, centralized 'broadcasting' of information from the Centre out (Robert & Namusonge, 2015). At present, parliamentary websites in the region remain at the 'information broadcasting' Stage (Oni et al, 2016). While use of digital tools and social networking platforms by parliamentarians has been shown to be patchy, there is a clear demand from citizens for their representatives to be accessible through these channels (Font, Wojcieszak & Navarro, 2015).

According to World e-Parliament survey (2019), showed an increase in the breadth of digital media tools, services and platforms used by parliaments. The top three improvements were increases in the publication, dissemination and accessibility of information and documents, for the benefit of staff members and the public. The rise of open access and publishing methods contributed to those improvements, relating to the timely and efficient publication of data. As part of Legislatures Information access strategy, they can create an open and accessible parliament, by introducing media accounts linked to websites. This aspect of these services may address the risk of a public perception of a lack of accountability for parliament and parliamentarians. Social media has also become a channel for the distribution of parliamentary information with large audiences (Parliamentarian, 2020).

The use of digital media, due to their multichannel link has aided the parliamentarians in sharing the parliamentary contents to its audience since it ensures other digital assets are visible and easy to access. For example, the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, a country with some of the highest levels of smartphone penetration, has developed mobile applications to provide citizens with access to information on the Assembly (Inter parliamentary Union, 2013). Parliaments can effortlessly take advantage of the network effect of social media by making it easy for people to cross-link, re-post and share Legislative material directly from Hansard. The Mexican Senate provides a good example of integrating social media links and content directly onto the front page of a parliamentary website, where it incorporates with internal content and information derived from Hansard such as Bill/Motion Trackers.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Conceptual framework

Source: Author, 2024

4. METHODOLOGY

The study used mixed methods research design. This approach uses both qualitative and quantitative methods into a single study in order to provide broader and more complete vision of a problem (Almeida, 2017). The study's population consisted of 497 County Assembly's members of staff of various cadres such as Audio/Visual technicians, Camera Operators, Parliamentary reporters, Editors, Information, Communication and Technology officers (ICT), Members of County Assemblies and Leadership who comprised of Speakers, Clerks, Majority leaders and Chief whips in County Assemblies in Central region of Kenya.

The sample size was 149 respondents. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected using a structured questionnaire and interviews. A pilot study was undertaken in County Assembly of Embu on 15 respondents that represented 10% of the study population to test the reliability and validity of the testing instruments. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The researcher obtained permission from the National Council of Science and Technology (NACOSTI), Karatina University, School of Business and Clerks of the County Assemblies that were involved in the study. The respondents' consent was sought beforehand as they were informed of the aims and objectives of the study which enabled them to participate willingly.

Data analysis and discussion

The response rate was 85.9%, demonstrating a generally high level of participation and engagement from the respondents. Majority of respondents (41.9%) were found to be holders of bachelor's degrees. Further, 56.4% of respondents had worked in their organizations for less than five years. The majority of respondents, constituting 69.2% of the total sample, had worked with ICT for a period ranging from 6 to 10 years. Understanding the duration of respondents' experience with ICT was essential for assessing their level of proficiency, technological literacy, and adaptability to digital tools and platforms.

Descriptive and Regression analysis Results.

Influence of Digital Media on Communication

Table 1 presents descriptive findings regarding the utilization of digital media within County Assemblies, focusing on multimedia channel links, bill/motion trackers, and the use of Facebook. The responses are categorized based on levels of agreement, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Table 1: Descriptive Findings for Digital Media

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
a) Multimedia channel links	3.4	7.7	12.8	41.9	34.2	3.957	1.045
b) Bill/Motion Trackers	2.6	7.7	14.5	39.3	35.9	3.983	1.025
c) Facebook	2.6	4.3	13.7	39.3	40.2	4.103	0.968
Average	2.9	6.6	13.7	40.2	36.8	4.014	1.013

Across all three statements, respondents generally expressed positive perceptions towards the effectiveness of digital media in enhancing communication processes within County Assemblies. Specifically, multimedia channel links, bill/motion trackers, and Facebook garnered mean scores of 4 and above 4.0, indicating a strong agreement with their utility in facilitating communication. These findings suggest that County Assemblies are leveraging various digital media platforms to disseminate information, track legislative processes, and engage with stakeholders, reflecting a broader trend towards digital transformation in governance and communication practices (UNDP, 2020).

The standard deviations accompanying the mean scores suggest relatively low levels of dispersion in respondents' perceptions, indicating a high degree of agreement across the sample. This consistency underscores the widespread recognition of digital media as valuable tools for promoting transparency, accountability, and public participation within County Assemblies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, the high mean scores reflect the growing importance of digital platforms such as Facebook in fostering civic engagement and communication between elected representatives and constituents, highlighting the potential of digital media to strengthen democratic processes at the local level (Norris, 2001).

Influence of Digital Media on Effective Communication in County Assemblies

The study sought to establish the influence of digital media on effective communication within County Assemblies in Central Region, Kenya. Digital media, with its diverse platforms and tools, has become integral to organizational communication strategies. Linear regression analysis was used.

Table 2: R² for Relationship between Digital Media and Effective Communication

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
.700a	0.489	0.485	0.579	1.599
a Predictors: (Constant), Digital Media				
b Dependent Variable: Effective Communication				

Table 2 provides insights through the coefficient of determination (R-squared) and other relevant statistics. The R-squared value of 0.489 suggests that approximately 48.9% of the variance in effective communication was explained by the adoption of digital media. This indicates a substantial association between the use of digital media tools and the enhancement of communication effectiveness. Additionally, the Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.599 suggests no significant autocorrelation was present in the regression residuals, ensuring the robustness of the analysis.

Table 3 ANOVA for Relationship between Digital Media and Effective Communication

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	36.942	1	36.942	110.236	.000b
Residual	38.538	115	0.335		
Total	75.480	116			

a Dependent Variable: Effective Communication

b Predictors: (Constant), Digital Media

The ANOVA results presented in Table 3 indicate the significance of the relationship between digital media utilization and effective communication within County Assemblies. The regression model's high F-value of 110.236, coupled with a statistically significant p-value of .000, underscores the influence of digital media on communication effectiveness. This indicates that the variance in effective communication attributed to digital media usage is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Thus, the findings provide robust evidence supporting the positive influence of digital media tools in fostering enhanced communication practices within County Assemblies.

Table 4: Model Coefficients for Relationship between Digital Media and Effective Communication

	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients Std. Error Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.426	0.235	6.057	0.000
Digital Media	0.600	0.057	0.700	10.499

a Dependent Variable: Effective Communication

The model coefficients presented in Table 4 delineate the quantitative relationship between digital media usage and effective communication within County Assemblies. The coefficient for digital media ($\beta = 0.600$, $p < 0.001$) indicates a statistically significant positive association with effective communication. This implies that for each unit increase in the utilization of digital media tools, there is a corresponding increase of 0.600 units in effective communication, holding other variables constant. The robustness of this relationship is underscored by the high t-value of 10.499, reinforcing the significance of digital media in facilitating improved communication practices within County Assemblies.

5. DISCUSSION

The study established that County Assemblies utilize a range of multi-channel links for information access, including official websites, intranet portals, and online databases. These platforms serve as repositories for parliamentary documents, research reports, and other relevant

information. While some interviewees perceive these multi-channel links as effective tools for accessing information, others highlighted challenges such as outdated content, navigation difficulties, and limited accessibility for remote users. Social media platforms play a significant role in information dissemination within County Assemblies. Interviewees reported using platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn to share updates, engage with constituents, and promote transparency. However, concerns were raised regarding the appropriateness of social media tools for official communication, particularly in terms of data security, misinformation, and privacy issues.

County Assemblies employ various methods to share Hansard information with the public, including official websites, social media channels, and email newsletters. These platforms enable constituents to access parliamentary proceedings, legislative documents, and other relevant information. However, interviewees emphasized the need for standardized practices and guidelines to ensure consistency, accuracy, and transparency in Hansard information sharing.

In the context of County Assemblies in the Central Region of Kenya, interviewees asserted that digital media plays a pivotal role in shaping communication practices and facilitating information dissemination among stakeholders. The analysis aimed to elucidate the multifaceted influence of digital media on effective communication within these legislative bodies.

Digital media encompasses a diverse array of platforms and tools, including multimedia channel links, bill/motion trackers, and social media platforms like Facebook. These digital resources serve as conduits for the transmission of legislative information, enabling County Assemblies to reach a wider audience and engage with constituents in real-time. Through multimedia channel links and bill/motion trackers, stakeholders gain access to up-to-date information on legislative proceedings, enabling them to track the progress of bills, motions, and other legislative initiatives.

Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, emerged as instrumental tools for County Assemblies to engage with the public and foster interactive communication channels. By leveraging social media, County Assemblies can disseminate information, solicit feedback, and promote civic participation among citizens. Moreover, the interactive nature of social media platforms facilitates two-way communication, allowing constituents to voice their concerns, provide input on legislative matters, and interact directly with elected representatives.

The analysis revealed that digital media significantly enhances effective communication within County Assemblies by democratizing access to information and promoting transparency in governance processes. Through digital platforms, County Assemblies can overcome geographical barriers and engage with constituents from diverse backgrounds, fostering inclusivity and representation in decision-making processes. Additionally, digital media empowers citizens to hold elected officials accountable by providing mechanisms for oversight and scrutiny of legislative activities.

However, challenges related to digital literacy, internet connectivity, and cybersecurity were identified as potential barriers to maximizing the benefits of digital media in County Assemblies. Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts to bridge the digital divide, enhance

digital literacy programs, and strengthen cybersecurity protocols to safeguard sensitive legislative information.

In summary, digital media serves as a transformative force in shaping communication dynamics within County Assemblies, enabling greater transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. By harnessing the potential of digital platforms, County Assemblies can cultivate an environment of open dialogue, collaborative governance, and informed decision-making, ultimately strengthening democratic processes at the local level.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study shed light on the intricate relationship between technological advancements and effective communication within County Assemblies in the Central Region of Kenya. The study established a statistically significant relationship between digital media and effective communication. Social media channels and multi-channel links serve as valuable tools for engaging constituents, sharing parliamentary information, and promoting transparency. However, challenges such as data security, misinformation, and content accessibility underscore the importance of robust governance frameworks and digital literacy initiatives.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

To optimize the use of digital media for effective communication, County Assemblies should develop comprehensive strategies for digital media integration. This involves leveraging social media channels, multimedia links, and online platforms to disseminate parliamentary information and engage with constituents. Moreover, County Assemblies should implement measures to address challenges related to data security, misinformation, and content accessibility, including the establishment of content moderation mechanisms and digital literacy programs for both staff and constituents.

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