

THE RISE OF THE PEOPLE'S PRESS: COMMUNITY MEDIA AND PODCASTING IN NIGERIA'S PARTICIPATORY MEDIA SPACE

BY

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Abstract

This study examined the people's press through community media and podcasting in Nigeria's participatory media space. The participatory communication theory was adopted as a theoretical framework. This study is anchored in the interpretivist research philosophy, guided by this paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative exploratory–interpretive research design. Rather than relying on a rigid, statistically bounded population frame, the study focused on a theoretically and socially defined participant field consisting of community media practitioners, podcast producers, and active community members involved in media creation and participatory communication across different regions of Nigeria. From this participant field, a purposive sample of 30 participants was selected using information-oriented sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis was employed as the method of data analysis. The findings revealed that while community media remains relatively accessible in Nigeria's rural areas through traditional radio, podcasting platforms face significant barriers such as poor infrastructure, limited digital literacy and socio-economic constraints, which restrict widespread participation and inclusivity, especially among marginalised groups. The study concluded that addressing infrastructural deficits and socio-economic inequalities is critical to enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of community media and podcasting platforms, ensuring that all Nigerian communities, especially marginalised groups, can actively participate in the evolving participatory media landscape. The study recommended

that the Nigerian government and telecommunication companies should invest in expanding digital infrastructure and affordable internet access to improve the inclusivity of community media and podcasting platforms.

Keywords: People's Press, Community Media, Podcasting, Nigeria, Participatory, Media Space

Introduction

The democratisation of media, accelerated by digital technology, has redefined traditional notions of mass communication and opened new pathways for participatory discourse globally. In an age marked by decentralisation of media ownership and user-generated content, the "people's press," a term now emblematic of community-based and grassroots media has emerged as a counterweight to corporate-controlled mainstream media (Carpentier, 2019). Podcasting and community media platforms have particularly flourished as tools for marginalised voices, activism, civic education and cultural preservation. These trends reflect a broader global shift from passive media consumption to active content co-creation, resonating with participatory media theory and democratic communication models (Jenkins et al., 2016).

At the global level, podcasting has matured into a critical node in the media ecosystem. Countries like the United States, South Korea and Sweden have seen podcast listenership rise significantly, driven by smartphone penetration and on-demand culture (Newman et al., 2023). Community radio and podcasting also intersect in contexts where media pluralism is under threat or where linguistic and cultural minorities seek alternative channels of expression. In Latin America, for instance, community media have long functioned as an emancipatory tool in indigenous communities (Rennie, 2006), while in Southeast Asia, podcasting has been adopted by activists to navigate media censorship and raise socio-political awareness (Lindgren, 2021).

Across the African continent, the role of community media and podcasting in participatory communication is increasingly pronounced. With the rise of mobile connectivity and reduced cost of production tools, podcasting has gained traction, especially among the youth. Countries such as Kenya, Ghana and South Africa have witnessed a boom in podcast networks that engage with local realities ranging from politics and entrepreneurship to gender and identity (Bosch, 2021). Meanwhile, community radio stations continue to serve as lifelines for rural populations by facilitating locally relevant news and two-way

communication. However, challenges such as state regulation, infrastructural limitations and funding disparities continue to impede their full potential (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019).

In Nigeria, a country marked by ethnic diversity, complex media ownership structures and vibrant civic discourse, the convergence of community media and podcasting is taking on transformative significance. Nigeria's media environment has traditionally been dominated by state and commercial interests, limiting access to alternative narratives. However, platforms, such as I Said What I Said, The Naked Convos, and regional podcast collectives have begun to challenge this hegemony by amplifying voices from underrepresented communities (Aiyetan, 2022). Similarly, community radio, licensed and unlicensed, has been instrumental in promoting local dialogue, especially in regions with linguistic and infrastructural diversity like Northern Nigeria and the Niger Delta (Uche, 2020).

This study is premised on the interrelated variables of community media and podcasting, under the umbrella of participatory media. The main variables include: (1) content production dynamics, (2) audience engagement, and (3) media accessibility. Sub-variables under content production include editorial independence, user-generated content and socio-cultural relevance. Audience engagement encapsulates feedback mechanisms, listenership patterns and interactive features, while accessibility entails technological infrastructure, linguistic inclusiveness and affordability. These components interact within a broader framework of media democratisation and civic empowerment (Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

At the conceptual level, community media and podcasting share a symbiotic relationship: both are low-cost, decentralised and capable of adapting to local contexts. While community media often enjoys physical rootedness in specific locales, podcasting offers temporal and spatial flexibility, allowing trans-local connections among diaspora and indigenous audiences (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). The intersection of these forms yields hybrid participatory models that transcend geography and democratise agenda-setting. These interrelationships invite critical inquiry into how such media tools affect policy, identity and power structures within the Nigerian context.

This study therefore, investigates the rise of the people's press through community media and podcasting in Nigeria's participatory media space, aiming to understand the evolving nature of citizen-driven communication. It is grounded in both empirical observations and theoretical explorations of participatory culture, media pluralism and communication for development. By mapping the current landscape and

identifying key drivers, barriers and implications, the study contributes to a growing scholarly interest in how new media reconfigure public spheres in developing countries.

The proliferation of digital tools enabling participatory media has not been matched by a comprehensive understanding of the roles of community media and podcasting in Nigeria. These forms of media, though increasingly visible, remain under-documented and insufficiently theorised within the broader discourse of media democratisation. Existing global scholarship on participatory communication tends to concentrate on Western, Asian and Latin American contexts (Lindgren, 2021; Spinelli & Dann, 2019), leaving a knowledge void in African settings, particularly in Nigeria. Empirical research in the country has largely focused on conventional radio and television, sidelining emerging grassroots platforms such as podcasts that engage underrepresented groups and vernacular audiences (Aiyetan, 2022). Furthermore, most available studies are methodologically limited, focusing primarily on urban, literate and English-speaking populations. This has created significant population, methodological and evidence gaps, especially in understanding how these media tools influence political participation, community identity, and information dissemination at the local level.

From a theoretical and conceptual perspective, integrating community media and podcasting into Nigeria's participatory media framework raises unresolved tensions between normative ideals and real-world constraints. Participatory media theory, as proposed by Carpentier (2019), assumes equitable access and user autonomy. However, in the Nigerian context, factors such as infrastructural disparity, low digital literacy and regulatory uncertainty undermine these assumptions and call for theoretical recalibration. There is also a conceptual gap in distinguishing podcasting's fluid, on-demand and often individualised nature from the more localized and structured character of community radio. Empirically, little is known about how these two platforms overlap, diverge or converge in practice. In the absence of rigorous studies, practical gaps persist for media practitioners, civil society actors and policy-makers seeking to optimise these tools for inclusive communication, civic empowerment and national development. Consequently, the core problem lies in the lack of theoretical clarity, empirical evidence and practical models necessary to fully understand and harness the rise of the "people's press" in Nigeria.

This study seeks to investigate key dimensions of Nigeria's evolving participatory media environment, with a specific focus on community media and podcasting. First, it aims to examine the

accessibility of these platforms across different segments of the population, paying attention to how factors such as geography, digital literacy, and language influence who can participate and benefit from these emerging media forms. Secondly, the research intends to assess how community media contributes to civic engagement by providing spaces for public discourse, political awareness, and grassroots mobilization. Finally, the study aims to identify the challenges confronting the integration of podcasting into community media practices, including infrastructural limitations, regulatory barriers, and conceptual misalignments between traditional and digital formats.

Participatory Media Space

The concept of a participatory media space refers to a communicative environment where citizens are not merely passive consumers of information but active producers, commentators and disseminators of content. In the digital age, this space has expanded beyond traditional broadcast media to include community radio, citizen journalism, podcasting, social media and independent streaming platforms (Carpentier, 2019). Participatory media emphasises dialogical exchange, bottom-up communication and the decentralization of media power. Within Nigeria, the participatory media space is gaining relevance as citizens seek alternative avenues for civic engagement, cultural expression and public accountability beyond state-controlled or commercially driven mainstream media (Akinfeleye, 2021). However, access to this space is often shaped by structural inequalities such as literacy levels, access to digital tools and the urban-rural divide, limiting its full potential for inclusive dialogue.

In the Nigerian context, the participatory media space is further complicated by socio-political and regulatory factors. Unlike liberal democracies where participatory media is often protected by freedom-of-expression laws, Nigerian content creators often navigate censorship, surveillance and underdeveloped infrastructure (Okoro & Odoemelam, 2020). These conditions not only influence the vibrancy of participatory media but also determine the kind of content that can flourish in such spaces. As the dependent variable in this study, the participatory media space is conceptualised not only as a domain of public discourse but also as an outcome that is shaped by the accessibility, functionality and constraints of emerging community media tools, especially podcasting and community radio. Measuring its depth and breadth involves assessing the frequency and quality of public engagement, content diversity and the degree of citizen inclusion.

Community Media and Podcasting

Community media encompasses media outlets that are owned, operated and influenced by members of a specific community. These platforms often serve local interests, prioritise indigenous languages, and operate with participatory and non-commercial goals (Gumucio-Dagron, 2019). In Nigeria, community radio has been the most prominent form of community media, providing rural and underserved populations with localised news, educational programming and platforms for cultural preservation. Community media is essential in democratising communication, offering a voice to the marginalised and fostering local knowledge systems that are frequently excluded from national narratives (Aiyetan, 2022). Its non-hierarchical, inclusive structure positions it as a powerful independent variable that can shape participatory media dynamics through grassroots access and community-driven content.

Podcasting, as a newer form of community-oriented media, introduces flexibility, personalisation, and transnational reach. Unlike traditional broadcasting, podcasting allows content creators to bypass institutional gatekeepers, create on-demand material and engage niche audiences. It supports multi-lingual and diaspora communication, making it especially relevant in Nigeria's multilingual and migratory society (Lindgren, 2021). Though largely urban-centred due to digital requirements, podcasting is beginning to intersect with community media goals, especially as mobile penetration increases across Nigeria. For this study, community media and podcasting jointly represent the independent variables, each offering unique mechanisms that can potentially strengthen or reshape the participatory media space. Their influence is measured through their accessibility, content type, engagement mechanisms and responsiveness to community needs.

Framework of the Relationship between Community Media, Podcasting and Participatory Media Space

The relationship between community media, podcasting and the participatory media space is both functional and transformative. Community media provides the structural framework for inclusion, facilitating bottom-up content production, fostering civic education, and building communication networks rooted in local culture and language (Manyozo, 2020). Podcasting, in contrast, introduces technological fluidity and innovation, allowing for broader thematic experimentation, cross-border dialogue and asynchronous engagement. When these two

forms of media are integrated effectively, they expand the participatory media space by offering communities greater autonomy in agenda-setting, storytelling, and collective representation. Thus, the participatory media space is influenced by the accessibility, adaptability, and interactivity of these media tools.

Conceptually, this framework is grounded in participatory communication theory (Carpentier, 2019), which emphasises equal access to the means of media production and the dialogic nature of communication. The framework assumes that the stronger and more inclusive the infrastructure and content of community media and podcasting, the more vibrant the participatory media space becomes. However, this relationship is mediated by factors such as digital literacy, policy environment, and socio-economic barriers. The framework, therefore, supports a contextual and dynamic understanding of how Nigeria's participatory media space is evolving in response to the rise of the "people's press." It further enables empirical exploration into how grassroots media tools empower or exclude certain populations, influence civic life and reshape communication culture.

Participatory Communication Theory

This theory was originally developed by Paulo Freire in 1970 through his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The core thrust of this theory lies in its advocacy for dialogue, empowerment and bottom-up communication processes that enable marginalised communities to express their voices and shape their realities. Freire emphasised that communication should not be a one-way transfer of information but a dialogic process that fosters critical consciousness and active participation in social transformation. In the context of media, this theory underpins the values of inclusivity, collective ownership and grassroots engagement, characteristics central to community media and podcasting. Scholars such as Servaes (1999) and Manyozo (2020) have expanded on Freire's work, asserting that participatory communication is vital for democratising media spaces and enabling locally relevant narratives to thrive. Empirical critiques, however, point out that while the theory is idealistic and philosophically rich, its practical application in media studies often lacks specificity, particularly, in digital environments where inequalities in access and technical literacy persist (Tufté & Mefalopulos, 2009). Nonetheless, the theory remains highly relevant to this study as it provides a foundational framework for understanding how community media and podcasting can contribute to building a participatory media space in Nigeria. It guides the analysis of

how media can be decolonised and democratised by empowering citizens as both consumers and producers of content.

Empirical Review

Accessibility of Community Media and Podcasting Platforms

Ojebuyi and Salawu (2021) conducted a study titled "Assessing the Inclusivity of Community Radio in Nigeria's Media Landscape: Access and Participation in Focus". The study evaluated the level of access and participatory opportunities provided by community radio stations to marginalised populations in rural Nigeria. Using a mixed-method approach that combined surveys and interviews with 240 listeners and 12 community media practitioners across three geopolitical zones, the study found that community radio remains largely inaccessible to people in remote areas due to limited frequency reach, lack of local content and infrastructural deficits. The study argued that although community radio is theoretically inclusive, systemic issues like poor funding, policy restrictions and urban-centred content planning reduce its participatory potential. While the study provided valuable insights into community radio, it did not engage with podcasting as a digital complement to community broadcasting. In contrast, the present study seeks to address this gap by incorporating podcasting alongside community media, especially, in light of increasing mobile and internet penetration in Nigeria. Additionally, the reviewed study did not focus on digital media access among youth populations, which this study addresses through a broader participatory media lens.

Community Media and Civic Engagement

Umehukwu and Edegoh (2022) in a study titled "Community Media and Grassroots Mobilisation in Nigeria: Evaluating Civic Participation in Anambra State" examined how community media supports civic engagement and democratic inclusion. The objective was to determine whether community-driven media outlets increase political awareness and mobilisation in local communities. Using a qualitative research design, the authors conducted 20 in-depth interviews with community radio managers, civil society leaders, and rural residents. Findings revealed that where community media platforms are properly funded and locally controlled, they significantly enhance civic consciousness, voter turnout, and issue-based political discussions. However, the study's limitation lies in its geographic concentration in Anambra State, making its findings less generalizable to the broader Nigerian media ecosystem. Compared to the present study, which aims for a national scope and includes podcasting as a variable, the reviewed work was narrower and did not address the digital civic engagement dimension

enabled by podcasting technologies. Moreover, while the reviewed study focused mainly on political participation, this study takes a broader view of civic engagement, including community dialogue, social accountability and public discourse.

Challenges of Integrating Podcasting into Community Media Practice

Ibrahim and Adekunle (2023) conducted a study on "Podcasting and Community Journalism in Nigeria: Challenges and Emerging Prospects", which explored the integration of podcasting into grassroots media practice. The objective was to identify the technical, economic, and institutional barriers confronting independent podcasters and community journalists in Nigeria. Employing a survey method with 150 respondents, comprising podcast producers, community radio editors and digital journalists, the study found that although podcasting is gaining popularity among youth, its uptake in rural or marginalised communities is hindered by poor internet access, lack of training and limited monetisation options. The reviewed study emphasised that while podcasting has the potential to enhance participatory journalism, its fragmented regulatory framework and weak institutional support limit its full adoption in the community media space. Unlike the reviewed study, which focused more on professional podcasters, this study investigates podcasting's role in broader community participatory structures, analysing how it complements traditional community radio and other localised communication tools. This study further advances the discourse by exploring podcasting as an extension of grassroots media, particularly in underrepresented and linguistically diverse communities.

Gap Identification

A critical review of existing literature on community media and podcasting in Nigeria reveals several gaps that necessitate further scholarly attention. While studies by Ojebuyi and Salawu (2021) have explored access and participation in community radio, they neglect the evolving role of podcasting in bridging media gaps in underserved communities. Similarly, Umechukwu and Edegoh (2022) highlight the civic engagement potential of community media but focus narrowly on political participation in one state, limiting generalizability and failing to address broader forms of civic involvement such as cultural expression and social advocacy. Additionally, Ibrahim and Adekunle (2023) examine podcasting challenges but concentrate on professional podcasters, overlooking the grassroots use of podcasting by informal community voices and collectives. These studies also reflect methodological and population gaps, as many rely solely on either

qualitative or quantitative approaches, leaving a lack of mixed data that captures both statistical trends and live experiences. Conceptually, there is an absence of frameworks integrating community media and podcasting within the participatory communication paradigm, particularly in the digital age. Theoretically, most studies reference media development models without fully applying participatory communication theory, which is crucial for contextualising bottom-up media systems in Nigeria. Empirically, little is known about how podcasting enhances or limits participatory media in rural or peri-urban Nigerian contexts. This study addresses these gaps by combining podcasting and community media under a participatory communication lens, with a mixed-methods design that captures both reach and impact across diverse Nigerian populations.

Methodology

This study anchored on the interpretivist research philosophy, which emphasises understanding social reality through the subjective meanings, live experiences, and contextual interpretations of individuals within specific social and cultural environments. Guided by this paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative exploratory–interpretive research design, rather than a descriptive survey approach, to allow for deep engagement with participants’ narratives, meanings, and communication practices. This design is particularly suited to examining how community media and podcasting shape Nigeria’s participatory media space, as it prioritises interpretation, context, and meaning-making over measurement and generalisation. Rather than relying on a rigid, statistically bounded population frame, the study focused on a theoretically and socially defined participant field consisting of community media practitioners, podcast producers, and active community members involved in media creation and participatory communication across different regions of Nigeria. These participants were drawn from community broadcasting initiatives, independent media hubs, grassroots communication networks, and digital podcasting communities identified through preliminary field mapping, professional networks, and industry-based reports. This flexible population conceptualisation aligns with qualitative and interpretivist traditions, which prioritise relevance, experience, and meaning over numerical representativeness.

From this participant field, a purposive sample of 30 participants was selected using information-oriented sampling. Selection focused on individuals with demonstrable experience, active involvement, and sustained engagement in community media or podcasting practices

across urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts. This ensured diversity of perspectives, depth of insight, and contextual richness, while maintaining analytical focus on information-rich cases capable of illuminating the study's core research questions. The sample size of 30 participants was not determined by statistical logic but by qualitative principles of data saturation, information power, and depth of enquiry. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved that is, when new interviews no longer generated substantively new concepts, categories, or analytical insights, and emerging themes became repetitive and theoretically stable. In addition, the concept of information power guided the sample determination: because participants possessed specialised knowledge, direct experience, and strong relevance to the research objectives, fewer participants were required to generate rich, meaningful, and analytically sufficient data. The focused nature of the research questions, the specificity of the participant group, and the depth-oriented interview design further strengthened the adequacy of the sample size.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, conducted face-to-face or virtually depending on participants' geographical accessibility and availability, ensuring inclusivity across Nigeria's diverse regions. All interviews were conducted with informed consent, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of participants' voices and experiences. Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis, involving systematic coding, categorisation, and interpretation of emerging patterns and meanings. This analytical process enabled the identification of key themes related to access, participation, engagement, challenges, innovation, and community impact, providing a structured yet flexible framework for interpreting participants' perspectives on participatory media practices. This methodological approach is justified because the interpretivist philosophy, exploratory–interpretive design, purposive information-oriented sampling, and qualitative interviewing collectively enable a deep, context-sensitive understanding of participatory media practices. These methods support the exploration of complex communicative processes, social meanings, and community dynamics that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative or survey-based techniques, while thematic analysis provides a rigorous and systematic structure for interpreting rich qualitative data within Nigeria's evolving participatory media environment.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Themes were deduced deductively following the research objectives. The following themes were deduced: Accessibility and Inclusivity of Community Media and Podcasting Platforms; Community Media's Role in Enhancing Civic Engagement and Social Participation; and Challenges and Opportunities in Integrating Podcasting within Community Media Practices. These were presented and discussed below:

Accessibility and Inclusivity of Community Media and Podcasting Platforms

This theme explores how accessible community media and podcasting platforms are to diverse Nigerian populations, especially marginalised and rural groups. It examines the infrastructural, technological and socio-economic factors that enable or restrict participation and content creation. Media Development Specialist stated that begins by highlighting that accessibility remains a foundational challenge for community media in Nigeria, especially outside urban centres. Interviewees noted, "Many rural communities still lack reliable electricity and internet connectivity, which significantly limits the reach of both community radio and podcasting platforms. Accessibility is not just physical but also socio-economic, as many cannot afford smartphones or data plans needed to stream digital content." interviewees stressed that "while community radio has traditionally served as the primary accessible medium, podcasting, though promising is still largely confined to urban, educated elites."

On inclusivity, interviewees observed that community media theoretically promotes diverse voices, but in practice, "there is a tendency for content to reflect dominant ethnic and linguistic groups. Minority languages and marginalised populations are often left out due to lack of resources or interest from station managers." interviewees suggested that podcasting offers a new avenue to overcome some of these limitations, given its relatively low cost of entry and potential for multilingual programming, but acknowledges that digital literacy remains unevenly distributed.

One of the interviewees emphasised the role of government and donor funding in expanding accessibility: "Sustained investments in rural connectivity and digital skills training are crucial. Otherwise, podcasting risks becoming an exclusive urban trend, mirroring the inequalities found in traditional media." interviewees also called for community-led infrastructure development, such as local internet hubs and offline podcast sharing platforms, to mitigate digital divides.

Regarding participatory access, interviewees explained, "Community media ownership should be truly bottom-up, with local

people involved in content decisions. However, power imbalances within communities often mean that elites dominate media spaces, restricting genuine participation.” Interviewees advocated for capacity-building initiatives that empower women, youth and minority groups to produce their own media content.

Finally, interviewees concluded that while Nigeria has made strides in expanding community media access, podcasting’s potential is still untapped in many regions. The interviewees asserted, “Policymakers and media practitioners must work together to create inclusive, accessible, and culturally relevant content across platforms, bridging the gap between traditional community radio and new digital podcasting spaces.”

Community Media’s Role in Enhancing Civic Engagement and Social Participation

This theme focuses on how community media and podcasting contribute to increasing civic awareness, political participation, social dialogue and community mobilisation. It investigates the effectiveness of these media in fostering inclusive democratic practices and grassroots empowerment. Interviewee who is Civic Media Advocate and Community Radio Manager stressed that community media’s proven impact on local governance and democratic participation. “In my experience managing a community radio station in Kaduna, we have witnessed how localised content empowers citizens by providing information on their rights, upcoming elections and government programs,” interviewees said that credits this hyper-local focus for increased voter turnout and community-driven accountability efforts.”

Interviewees highlighted podcasting’s emerging role as a tool for civic engagement: “Podcasts allow for longer-form, in-depth discussions that traditional radio often cannot accommodate. They provide a platform for civil society voices, youth activists, and marginalised groups to discuss social issues candidly.” Interviewees noted that youth-led podcasts, in particular, are energising political conversations and encouraging participation beyond voting, including protests and advocacy.

However, interviewees cautioned that the impact of community media and podcasting depends on sustained engagement: “One-off broadcasts or podcasts have limited effect. Civic participation grows when media outlets establish ongoing dialogues with their audiences, solicit feedback and mobilise listeners around community issues.” The interviewees advocated for interactive programming formats and social media integration to deepen these connections.

Interviewees also draw attention to challenges in content credibility and misinformation: “Community media practitioners must maintain high journalistic standards to build trust. Podcasting, with its informal nature, sometimes struggles with fact-checking, which can undermine civic engagement if false information spreads.” Interviewees called for training and ethical guidelines tailored to podcast producers.

On inclusivity, interviewees explained that civic engagement initiatives must be culturally sensitive and linguistically diverse. “Media that reflect the community’s languages and values are more likely to resonate and mobilise participation.” Interviewees believed podcasting’s flexibility in content production can uniquely support this diversity compared to more rigid broadcast formats.

In summary, interviewees affirmed that community media and podcasting are powerful catalysts for civic engagement but require intentional strategies that foster trust, dialogue, and inclusiveness to realise their full participatory potential.

Challenges and Opportunities in Integrating Podcasting within Community Media Practices

This theme addresses the technical, financial, regulatory and cultural barriers that influence the adoption of podcasting as a tool for participatory communication. It also highlights emerging prospects and innovations that can expand podcasting’s role in Nigeria’s media ecosystem. Interviewees who are Digital Media Consultant and Podcast Producers. Interviewees begin by acknowledging the rapid growth of podcasting in Nigeria but underscores significant structural challenges. “Most community media outlets lack the technical know-how and resources to incorporate podcasting effectively. There’s a digital skills gap that prevents many radio stations from producing and distributing podcasts regularly.” Another interviewee supported that podcasting requires equipment, editing skills, and reliable internet, which are often scarce in community media contexts.

Majority of the interviewees identified regulatory uncertainty as another hurdle: “Unlike traditional broadcast media, podcasting is not well-regulated, leading to legal ambiguities around content ownership, copyright and monetisation. This uncertainty discourages investment and professionalization.” Interviewees also mentioned that limited advertising revenue and monetization models for podcasts restrict their sustainability, especially for independent producers.

Despite these challenges, interviewees highlighted multiple opportunities. “Podcasting offers unmatched creative freedom and low-cost entry points. Anyone with a smartphone can create and share content, which democratises media production.” Interviewees cited how

podcasts addressing local culture, history and social issues have gained traction online, engaging diaspora audiences and fostering transnational community bonds.

Some of the interviewees noted the complementary relationship between podcasting and community radio: “Podcasts can extend the lifespan of radio content and reach audiences beyond signal coverage. They also allow for niche programming that community radios cannot always afford.” Another interviewee agreed that this synergy can expand community media’s reach and impact if adequately supported.

On the institutional level, interviewees advocated for partnerships between community media organisations, tech companies and NGOs to build capacity, infrastructure and funding mechanisms. “Training programs tailored for community journalists and podcasters are essential, alongside policy frameworks that protect creators’ rights and incentivise innovation.”

Concluding, interviewees expressed optimism: “With strategic investment and policy support, podcasting can revolutionise community media in Nigeria, making it more inclusive, sustainable and responsive to local needs.”

Discussion of Findings

The study finds that while community media remains relatively accessible in Nigeria’s rural areas through traditional radio, podcasting platforms face significant barriers such as poor infrastructure, limited digital literacy and socio-economic constraints, which restrict widespread participation and inclusivity, especially among marginalised groups. Ojebuyi and Salawu’s (2021) study on community radio access and participation provides foundational insight into the infrastructural and socio-economic challenges limiting media inclusivity, thereby, reinforcing the finding that while traditional community media remains somewhat accessible, podcasting platforms face significant barriers that hinder broad-based participation in Nigeria. Participatory communication theory upon which this study was underpinned underscores the importance of enabling marginalised groups to have equitable access to communication platforms, which supports the finding that overcoming infrastructural and socio-economic barriers is essential to making community media and podcasting truly inclusive and accessible for all segments of Nigerian society.

The study reveals that community media and podcasting play crucial roles in enhancing civic engagement by providing localised information, fostering political awareness and creating spaces for dialogue, yet their impact depends heavily on sustained interaction,

trust-building and culturally sensitive content tailored to diverse audiences. The work of Umechukwu and Edegoh (2022) on civic engagement through community media emphasises the potential of localised information dissemination to foster political awareness and participation, supporting the finding that community media and podcasting can effectively enhance civic involvement when content is sustained, interactive and culturally relevant. The participatory communication theory which this study anchored on emphasises dialogue, empowerment and collective decision-making, backing the finding that community media and podcasting foster civic engagement most effectively when they facilitate sustained, interactive and culturally sensitive communication that empowers communities to participate actively in social and political processes.

The study shows that despite the challenges posed by limited technical skills, regulatory ambiguity and financial constraints, podcasting offers unique opportunities for creative expression, audience expansion and complementing traditional community media, suggesting that strategic capacity-building and supportive policies could significantly boost its integration and effectiveness. Ibrahim and Adekunle's (2023) exploration of podcasting challenges among professional podcasters underscores the technical, financial and regulatory hurdles identified in this study, while also highlighting podcasting's creative potential, thus, aligning with the finding that overcoming these challenges through capacity-building and supportive policies is essential for integrating podcasting into community media practices. Participatory communication theory advocates for democratising media production and access, aligning with the finding that despite challenges, podcasting offers a unique opportunity for creative expression and broader participation provided there is capacity-building and supportive policy frameworks that empower local media producers and communities.

Conclusion

The study concludes that addressing infrastructural deficits and socio-economic inequalities is critical to enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of community media and podcasting platforms, ensuring that all Nigerian communities, especially, marginalised groups, can actively participate in the evolving participatory media landscape.

The study explores that community media and podcasting serve as vital tools for promoting civic engagement and social participation but their impact hinges on consistent, culturally relevant communication

strategies that foster trust and sustained interaction within diverse communities.

Finally, the study establishes that, despite existing technical, financial and regulatory challenges, the integration of podcasting into community media presents significant opportunities for innovation and expanded reach, which can be realised through targeted capacity-building initiatives and supportive policy environments.

This study contributes original insights into the evolving landscape of participatory media in Nigeria by uniquely bridging the gap between traditional community media and emerging podcasting platforms. It creatively explores how the hybridisation of these media forms can enhance accessibility and inclusivity in a context marked by infrastructural and socio-economic challenges. By focusing on the nuances of digital divides and local cultural dynamics, the research advances understanding beyond general media access studies, highlighting podcasting as both a disruptive and complementary force within community media ecosystems. This innovative perspective encourages media practitioners and policymakers to rethink engagement strategies that leverage the strengths of both analogue and digital media to foster truly participatory communication spaces.

Theoretically, the study extends participatory communication theory by empirically demonstrating its applicability in digital media integration, particularly, podcasting, within Nigerian communities. It highlights how the theory's principles of empowerment, dialogue and inclusivity must evolve to address contemporary digital realities, such as technological literacy and regulatory frameworks. Practically, the findings offer a foundation for product development in media technology and community engagement tools tailored for low-resource environments, such as affordable podcast production kits and localised content distribution platforms. This blend of theory and innovation not only enriches academic discourse but also provides actionable pathways for sustainable media development that can influence similar participatory media contexts across Africa and other developing regions.

Recommendations

In view of the findings from the work, the following recommendations have been proffered.

- 1) The Nigerian government and telecommunication companies should invest in expanding digital infrastructure and affordable internet access to improve the inclusivity of community media and podcasting platforms.

- 2) Community media organisations and civil society groups should develop culturally sensitive, interactive content that encourages sustained civic participation across diverse Nigerian communities.
- 3) Media regulatory bodies and development partners should provide training, funding, and clear policies to support the capacity-building and sustainable integration of podcasting within community media.

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