



#speakup BAROMETER

GHANA

ASSESSING DIGITAL PARTICIPATION

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#speakup barometer

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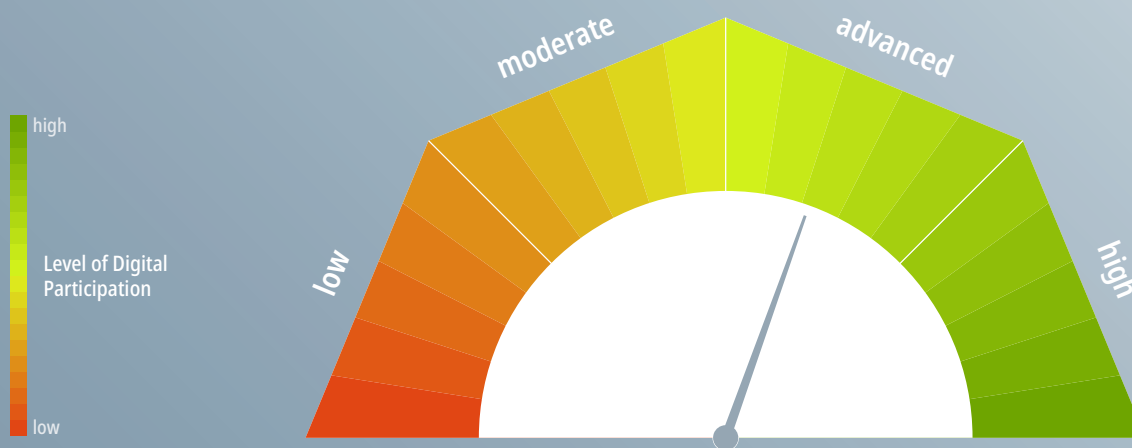
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Ghana



The overall results of the #speakup barometer research suggest that the level of digital participation among the population in Ghana is at an advanced level, as the needle is pointing to the green section of the barometer. Digitization in Ghana comes with opportunities and threats. Whether in the media, politics, the economy or education - nearly every facet of society faces its own challenges.

Key Findings

Ghana is on its way to becoming a society that is able to harness the opportunities of digitalization; opportunities that also open up more options for digital participation. The country has some of the conditions to realize this ambition, and Ghana's young population is emerging as the driving force of digitalization. An innovation scene is starting to flourish, and both traditional media houses and media start-ups and bloggers are beginning to form a new digital media landscape. Access and cost are the main reasons why many people are still unable to participate and have their own voice on the Internet. Efforts are also needed to protect freedom of expression in Ghana.



ACCESS

Ghana's government and telecommunication companies are on a mission to improve access to the Internet. Patchy coverage and high costs are holding back digital participation.



DIGITAL RIGHTS

Digital rights are largely guaranteed in Ghana, but growing anger over fake news and sensationalism threatens to end that. As battle lines are drawn in the fight over regulation, the media is facing pressure to change.



MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

Ghana's media landscape is shaping up for the future. Though digitalization presents an existential threat to publishing houses, increased audience interaction is opening up a new chapter in digital participation.



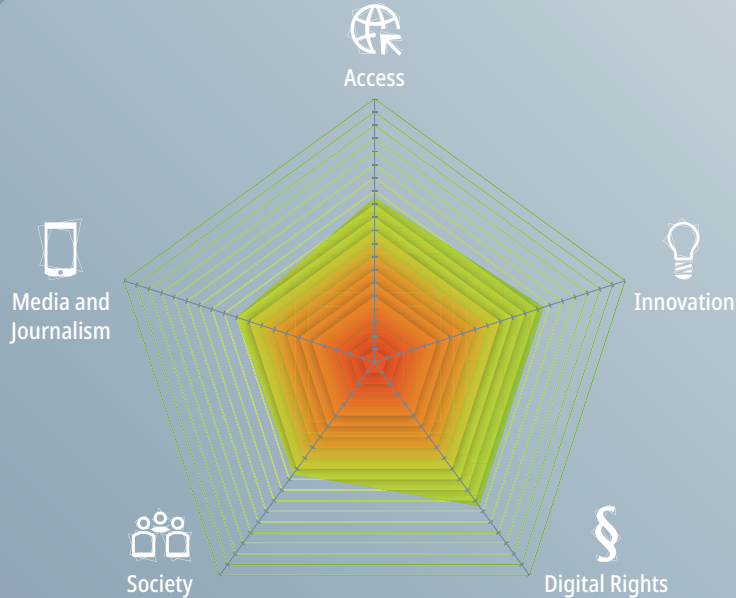
SOCIETY

The Internet is shaking up traditional structures in Ghana. Women and other marginalized groups are developing new ways to participate in society. But hate speech, misinformation, and cybercrime are becoming major problems.



INNOVATION

Ghana is home to a burgeoning innovation scene, complete with research institutions, hubs and initiatives to support women. But poor infrastructure, access to capital, and bureaucracy remain hurdles for entrepreneurs.



Specific results for various factors influencing digital participation in Ghana. The better the results in a specific cluster, the more the color field extends to the greener, outer edge of the web. While restricted access in some parts of the country and high costs negatively impacted results in the field of access, positive conditions for freedom of expression have resulted in a higher level of digital participation.



Access: Despite Ghana's commitment to Internet expansion, problems persist

Ghana's government and telecommunication companies are on a mission to improve access to the Internet. Patchy coverage and high costs are holding back digital participation.

Summary

- Internet service in Ghana is among the best in Africa
- Ghana's government is working to expand Internet access and digital skills
- Rural communities still lack access to the Internet
- High costs are holding back digital participation

Access

low
moderate
advanced
high



The overall Level of Digital Participation for Access: **advanced**

Ghana was one of the first African countries to liberalize its telecommunications market (Oxford Business Group 2018). In 1992, the first mobile network went into operation and within two years, the country was connected to the World Wide Web (AFEX and MFWA 2017). Today, the numbers on Internet access speak to the country's rapid transformation. Ghana has close to 19 million unique mobile subscribers – equivalent to 67 percent of the population, well above the average of 44 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa. Access to the Internet via mobile has increased from 2 percent in 2005 to 45 percent of the population today (GSMA 2017).

International mobile phone providers and Internet companies such as Google are getting involved in the expansion of digital infrastructure through their own projects, such as CSquared. CSquared aims to bring high-speed Internet to Africa. The project has seen more than 840km of fiber optic cable laid in the Ghanaian cities of Accra, Tema, and Kumasi (Croak, Marian 2017). International aid organizations, such as the Danish DANIDA, are also contributing funds to the Internet expansion effort (Ghana Business News 2018).

Policy makers pushing for digitalization

For years now, policy makers have been pushing for economic progress through digitalization. Successive governments have initiated a number of projects aimed at connecting more people to the Internet. In 2004, Ghana finalized and legally adopted its ICT Policy for Accelerated Development (ICT4AD), which outlined its vision for the information age. However – and this is the flip side of the coin – digital improvements are predominantly benefiting high earners in urban areas or companies based along the fiber optic infrastructure. Even in the capital, Accra, coverage is still fragmented, and, especially for start-ups, far too expensive, as William Will Senyo, co-founder and CEO of ImpactHub Accra explains: "There is high speed Internet, but it costs an arm and a leg. It costs you \$15 to \$100,000 dollars a year to have somewhere between 50 and 100 mbps stable high-speed fiber Internet. So how many companies can afford that? Very few."

Even for people with a regular income, access to the Internet – and with it the opportunities for digital participation – is associ-

ated with high costs. That's despite Ghana's leadership among its neighbors. The price for 1GB of mobile data volume is just over 2 percent of an average monthly income. In an international comparison by the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI), Ghana ranks 20th out of 60 countries surveyed. The A4AI Affordability Drivers Index summarizes several factors relevant to access.

Regina Honu, CEO of Soronko Academy, which runs the Tech Needs Girls mentorship program where they teach primarily women and girls to code and work with technology, also remarks that digital participation in Ghana remains difficult because "the cost is prohibitive." She hopes that "government initiatives that use the internet to train more people in different places and get more organizations to come in" will drive down the cost.

For its part, the government is aware of the problem of cost. Ghana was the second nation to endorse the "1 for 2" Internet affordability target. In 2017, Communications Minister Ursula Owusu-Ekuful announced Ghana's intention to start working toward "1 for 2," meaning, 1GB of mobile broadband for 2 percent or less of an average monthly income.

“If you don't have the ICT skills, how do you participate in the digital economy? You can't! That's why it is important to provide training in basic ICT skills.

Victor Asante, GIFEC

Inadequate infrastructure in rural areas remains a key issue

When it comes to access, the biggest problem in Ghana is the inadequate infrastructure in rural areas. In order to boost coverage, the government is primarily reliant on the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFEC), set up to address the gap between commercially viable areas of the country and underserved, rural parts. Kwaku Oforu-Adarkwa, national coordinator for A4AI-Ghana, welcomes the government's efforts. "I will say that as far as we are concerned, GIFEC has a strong strategy and so we see them as collaborators to impact on the way they work."

GIFEC is funded by contributions from licensed telecommunications operators. The money supports connectivity and training programs in rural regions. Community Information Centers, for example, are designed to give people in villages access to the Internet. The target is to reach a mobile phone coverage rate of 95 percent by 2019. Wireless Ghana is heading in the same direction. The non-profit project builds and maintains wireless infrastructure for rural communities. The network currently has over 20 nodes and extends out over a 10 to 15 km range, offering connectivity to Koforidua Technical University,

secondary schools, churches, non-profit organizations, businesses and community activity centers across six towns in the mountainous region.

Recommendations

Increase access

Although the government has a broad digital strategy, the lack of access in rural areas remains the most pressing issue. Since Internet use in Ghana is predominantly via mobile, broadband wireless access is the area that requires the most attention, both at a domestic and a commercial level. In a recent study (UNICEF 2017), UNICEF said that young people in particular often have no opportunity to use the Internet. However, companies and startups also need a reliable and fast fixed connection.

Foster media literacy; support girls and women

Alongside better access, experts stress the need to increase media literacy, since access is only the first step for digital participation. In order to be able to confidently and independently use the Internet, it's vital to know the opportunities and risks. "Young people need guidance," says the UNICEF study. A recent study by the Media Foundation for West Africa highlighted the acute need to support girls and women. There is a gender gap in Ghana in the use of mobile money services, with an even higher gap in Internet usage, with 2.5 million fewer women online than men. Mobile operators are working to tackle this through programs such as the GSMA Connected Women Commitment Initiative, while governments can take steps to address this issue by integrating gender equality targets and key performance indicators into strategies, policies, plans and budgets, involving women and local communities.

Work towards an affordable Internet

Access must also be affordable. Although the government is pursuing the "2-for-1" goal, there is also the threat of additional taxation which will make Internet access even more expensive – thereby restricting the possibilities for digital participation. The Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) wants to see free public Internet access alongside guidelines to encourage and incentivize infrastructure sharing.



Digital Rights: Digital backlash threatens media freedom in Ghana

Digital rights are largely guaranteed in Ghana, but growing anger over fake news and sensationalism threatens to end that. As battle lines are drawn in the fight over regulation, the media is facing pressure to change.

Summary

- Freedom of expression is protected by the constitution
- A Right to Information Bill has so far failed to pass parliament
- Public confidence in the media is deteriorating, quality is criticized
- Social media is seen as a threat, triggering calls for regulation
- The media itself bears responsibility for protecting free speech

Digital Rights

low
moderate
advanced
high



The overall Level of Digital Participation for Digital Rights: **advanced**

Popular support for a free media has dropped sharply in Ghana, according to a survey by the non-partisan research group, Afrobarometer (Afrobarometer 2018). Some 57% of citizens now say the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things it considers harmful to society. Free speech in Ghana is in a precarious place. On the one hand, many studies confirm that the country has a particularly high degree of press freedom; on the other hand, growing numbers of Ghanaians think the media and Internet culture pose a threat to society. These developments are connected.

Over the years, stable, democratic Ghana has built a reputation as one of the most media-friendly countries – not just in Africa, but the world. It has risen steadily on the World Press Freedom Index from 67th place in 2002 to 23rd in 2018, and from 19th among African countries to first place (Freedom House 2017). As well as freedoms, rights such as data protection and privacy are enshrined in law. Ghana is one of only 10 countries to sign up to the African Union Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection. It's the first pan-African instrument on privacy and data protection. A 2018 report by the Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) on the state of Internet freedom in Africa gives Ghana a positive evaluation. "The constitution protects freedom of expression. The media enjoys a relatively high degree of freedom, as private press and broadcasters operate without significant restrictions," the report concluded (CIPESA 2018).

Citizens and journalists alike are calling for tighter regulation of digital media

It is a view shared among journalists on the frontline – for bet-

ter or worse. "I must say that in Ghana we have been fortunate in terms of freedom of the press. There is so much freedom here, which is why you hear a lot of 'nonsense' on the airwaves. People have the freedom, even to the extent of insulting the president. Nobody really cares about what you say because we believe in democracy," explains Kent Mensah, a reporter from Accra.

But now, the very freedom to say anything is threatening the right to free expression. Citizens and journalists alike are calling for tighter regulation of digital media. Ghanaians are starting to doubt whether the press should be left to safeguard the country's democracy. A study by Reporters Without Borders found that the repeal of the criminal libel law opened the floodgates for irresponsibility on the part of journalists (Owusu, William YAW 2011/2012). The situation is worsened by mounting concern over the corrosive culture of discussion on the Internet. "Any space that is not properly regulated leaves room for abuses. If there isn't regulation then other pieces of legislation will be used to prosecute people in ways that might be excessive," said Vivian Affoah of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA). She fears that such interventions could curb civil liberties.

Those whose livelihoods depend on a thriving digital media space recognize the need to address these anxieties. "I want the space that I work in to be respected and not just a place for fake news. I'm for regulation that stops defamation, as long as it doesn't control what people can say," said blogger Ameyaw Debrah. Women in particular are turned off by the rude tone on social media, said Affoah. "There are a lot of issues with digital

rights for women. The issue of cyberbullying against women is very high – an offline problem that is manifesting online," she said. If the trend continues, the government may one day feel emboldened to impose restrictions on free speech, not least because significant numbers of citizens and journalists want it themselves.

During the national elections in 2016, the president resisted calls to impose a temporary Internet shutdown. Penplusbytes claims to have helped influence the government's decision with their Social Media Tracking Center. The tool identified thousands of cases of incendiary posts or fake news on the Internet, flagging them for users and, in some cases, the relevant authorities. Its founder, Jerry Sam, warns against calling on the government to regulate the network. "Once you allow government to regulate the Internet – and you have examples from other countries – then you will end up with that government telling you how to use the Internet," he said.

“There are a lot of issues with women’s rights online. I think that in some ways the situation is improving, but it is a problem that started offline. If we could solve it offline, the impact would be seen online.

Vivian Affoah, Media Foundation for West Africa

Politicians are well versed in social media

Politicians and political parties are now among those with the largest number of followers online. Often they are well versed in social media and managing their interests in the press. Despite Ghana's democratic credentials, a sizeable portion of its politicians double as media owners. The Media Ownership Monitor from Reporters without Borders (Reporter without Borders 2018) reveals that a third of media outlets are either state-owned or have shareholders with political affiliations, among them high-level politicians. Journalist Kent believes that this encroaches on journalistic freedom. "I must say that that there is some kind of censorship, because many of the media houses in Ghana are owned by politicians," he said. The press freedom report (Freedom House 2017) underlines the problem: "Political parties attempt to influence coverage. Private media face editorial pressure from their owners, particularly those with political connections."

For years, Ghana's political class has worked hard to protect itself against further scrutiny, fighting efforts to introduce a public right to information bill (RTI) that could invite investigations. Since 2010, an RTI bill has been floated in parliament but has failed to gather enough support. It was postponed again in autumn 2018. "We have promises about promises but there is no serious political will for it," said Vivian Affoah. The MFWA

sees this as a setback in the fight against corruption and, together with other organizations in the RTI Coalition, continues to advocate for the law.

Kent wants the authorities to get a grip on the digital age: "There are a lot of spoofs and other dangerous websites here. And it is damaging our reputations. The problem we have in this country is that those who have the eyes to check the media at the media commission, they themselves do not understand how the digital space works. All they are interested in are the newspapers, radio stations and TV."

Recommendations

Use the right to freedom of expression responsibly

Journalists and Internet users must use their right to freedom of expression in a responsible manner. Failure to do so could strengthen calls for intervention. Journalist Kent Mensah appeals to his colleagues to uphold the highest standards in quality. "If you want to have a thriving democracy, then it is about empowering the media to make sure that they have the power to give the voice to the people to express their opinion. We have to make sure that the ethics of journalism are being respected."

Any Internet or social media regulations must respect human rights

"A regulation of social media should only be based on human rights principles; it must be appropriate and proportionate," says Affoah. Anything more would result in an unacceptable curb on freedom of expression on the Internet. The same applies to the planned Cyber Security Policy, through which the government wants to combat escalating cybercrime. "We have to make sure the policy is human rights based and the implementation is done in a way that rights are not infringed."

Empowerment to help generate a positive discussion culture on the Internet

Many people do not understand the potential of the Internet, or how it influences their lives. "Are they using it responsibly? Are they attuned to the dangers on the Internet? Are they aware of the many opportunities? Do they know how to protect their data?" Affoah believes such questions deserve a clear-eyed response, so as to educate Ghanaians about the Internet as a tool for change. "It is really about digital literacy," she said.



Media and Journalism: Ghana's media in race to keep up with the times

Ghana's media landscape is shaping up for the future. Although digitalization presents an existential threat to publishing houses, increased audience interaction is opening up a new chapter in digital participation.

Summary

- Traditional media houses are under pressure to adapt to digitalization
- Poor pay is driving down the quality of journalism
- Media start-ups are pioneering new forms of digital journalism
- Rural voices are underrepresented in digital media
- User interaction offers high potential for digital participation

Media and Journalism

low
moderate
advanced
high



The overall Level of Digital Participation for Media and Journalism: **advanced**

The first thing to hit you as you enter the offices at Joy.fm is the sense of purpose. The reception area at the Accra radio station is a hive of activity. Reporters, photographers, and camera operators are constantly coming and going. The door barely has time to shut. Since the Internet arrived, the pace of their work, which has always been driven by current events, has sped up yet again. The Internet has become the ultimate news accelerator. "We have this culture of 'I was first to break the story!'," says Tommy Annon-Forson, program director, RABODEF Radio Academy.

Social media with strong impact on traditional media houses

But for every professional, there is an upstart: the bloggers, social media entrepreneurs (see article) and ordinary users, who have a more casual attitude toward fact checking. Often they prefer not to wait until a story has been verified before sharing it via Twitter, Facebook or, as is increasingly the case, WhatsApp. Such practices are turning the industry on its head. "Social media is dictating the kind of information that people should consume," explains Kent Mensah, journalist from Accra. In the past, newspapers editors determined what was discussed on the radio – Ghana's most popular medium until now. Today, journalists follow whatever is trending on the Internet. "We see a lot of websites popping up in the name of providing news. It is good for the public in a way, because they have a variety of avenues to consume news, but at the end of the day, credibility is at stake," says Mensah.

In this environment, traditional media organizations such as Joy.fm are under enormous pressure to adapt. "In the beginning it

was very rough. We did not know how to adapt to a system that the traditional media people were very skeptical about," says Raymond Acquah, program coordinator at MyJoyOnline. Now they have grasped the importance of the Internet, investing in training and equipment, and building a social media team with 15 people. "You need to understand what is relevant for your next generation to work on," says Acquah.

“ Five or 10 years back we used to have the traditional media which was so powerful – especially the newspapers – dictating what should be discussed in the radio discussion programs and TV. But now with the advent of the Internet, online space is driving the agenda.

Kent Mensah, journalist from Accra

Fierce competition for digital ad revenue

According to Acquah, media producers are facing the economic headwinds brought on by competition with bloggers for advertising revenue. Legacy media houses have to fight for the same digital ad space on the Internet, but with higher production costs and values. Journalists in Ghana feel the pressure to adapt in three main ways: competition from new online news providers, an expectation to learn digital skills quickly, and a financial hit. That's because the digital transformation is eating away at salaries. The latter, in particular, accounts for the culture of brown envelope journalism, known locally as "soli."

In a research study carried out by DW Akademie, most of the journalists interviewed saw no problem with accepting *solli* (DW Akademie 2018). Some 66% viewed it as a token of appreciation for the work they do, while just 14% understood the offer of money from a stakeholder as a form of bribery intended to influence their reporting.

But it's not just Joy.fm that has had some digital catching-up to do. Bloggers such as Ameyaw Debrah from Accra, who boast huge followings on social media, and start-ups such as OMG digital or pulse.fm are seeking to gain an advantage from digitalization. Free from the constraints of the analog era, they can tailor their programs to the wishes of young media consumers, maintain a presence on all social media platforms, and develop suitable business models. Despite the stubbornly high costs for data usage, video consumption is particularly popular among young people, explains Ibukun Onitiju, director of Digital for Ringier Africa Digital Publishing and product lead at pulse.fm. He also sees great potential in the interaction with users. "Ghana is emotionally driven. The comment section becomes a different content hub on its own," he says. Despite all the adaptation difficulties, Onitiju says Ghana's media market is now entering the next phase. "The question for me is: Is everything else catching up with the speed with which digital is taking over?"

Recommendations

The quality of journalism needs to improve; journalists should adhere to quality standards

The quality of media coverage in Ghana is often perceived by users as poor. "Only a very small number of media outlets provide good news coverage. A third of the media are owned by the state or by businessmen linked to the government," says the Media Ownership Monitor of Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Without Borders 2017). Qualifications and quality improvement are the top priorities in Ghana. "I believe at the end of the day what keeps a media house going is credibility. It is about building trust, and being a source where people can come to validate the news," says Kent Mensah, journalist from Accra.

Media houses and journalists should pursue constructive journalism

Students at the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) see their future role in the checking and contextualization of content on social media platforms. In a group discussion, they expressed difficulty understanding journalists who confined themselves to simply picking up and passing on news and rumors from the Internet. Instead, journalists should proactively report on people's concerns, in the sense of constructive journalism.

Media houses and journalists should interact with users

For Kingsley Obeng-Kyereh, executive coordinator of Curious Minds, interaction with users is an opportunity that should also be seized by traditional media – such as radio stations: "The Internet gives young people a voice," says Obeng-Kyereh. "And it is a strong voice that cannot be easily dismissed. They are so excited to be heard, giving their input on what affects them directly."

Rural radio stations should take advantage of digitalization

Digitalization is still largely restricted to the conurbations around Accra and Kumasi. As such, many of the topics picked up by the media originate there, while the concerns of the population in rural regions are often ignored. "The rural-urban divide in terms of access to digital media is so big," says Obeng-Kyereh. His hope is for rural voices to become louder and more influential in the future. Radio stations, in particular, should strive to interact with their listeners via digital channels.



Society: Digital is transforming society in Ghana

The Internet is rearranging Ghana's social fabric in new ways, with both positive and negative outcomes.

Summary

- The Internet is shaking up traditional structures in Ghana
- Women and other marginalized groups are developing new ways to participate in society
- Online media is changing social discourse
- Hate speech, misinformation, and cybercrime are becoming major problems
- Education and access are the most important requirements for digital participation

Society

low
moderate
advanced
high



The overall Level of Digital Participation for Society: **advanced**

"Digital media is rewriting Ghana's society. It is rewriting how we understand the world to be." That's how, in just a few words, pulse.fm product lead Ibukun Onitiju sums up how the Internet is influencing Ghana. It's beginning to rearrange the social fabric, with many positive but also some negative effects. "The kind of content you are seeing and consuming on the Internet is directing how you perceive things," said Onitiju. On the one hand, digital media is helping to enlighten and educate people when it comes to outdated traditions. "Before we had old traditional customs that included female genital circumcision, for example," he explains. "Digital has broken that barrier and furthered the education, which is making huge positive impacts in our society."

The Internet is opening up new spaces for dialogue for the people of Ghana, giving a voice to social groups that have struggled to be heard. Curious Minds, for example, works with radio stations to advocate for the interests of young people. Today, digital content plays an increasingly important role in the organization's work. "A very good thing about social media is that it doesn't expire. Radio is transient; it goes away immediately as it is broadcast, but the discussions continue online. That is the good thing about it. Teachers, parents, and even politicians have realized that it is no longer easy to ignore youth issues," said Kingsley Obeng-Kyereh, head of Curious Minds.

Digital participation is a challenge to Ghana's deep-rooted patriarchy

Another group of people that have been frequently overlooked in society are also harnessing social media platforms to spread their message: Ghanaian women. Growing numbers of them are going online to share concerns and organize themselves, according to Vivian Affoah of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA). "I see a lot of female entrepreneurs using social media and the Internet to promote their work and engage in activism as well," she said. Digital participation is a challenge to Ghana's

deep-rooted patriarchy, shaping attitudes to gender equality. "Now there is exposure and women are saying: 'No, we also have issues to speak about.' So I think there are improvements in the way women are participating in discussions, especially online," said Vanessa Otchere, a 24-year-old student from Accra.

“I believe that women have the same potential as men. I think we should all be given equal opportunities to try it out. And if you think it is not for you then you are free to back out, but if you find something you like then you can stay and make your own way.

Vanessa Otchere, journalism student Accra

The Internet is disruptive in other ways as well. Old customs are making way for new ones, and hierarchical barriers to communication are being torn down. For Raymond Acquah, a journalist and program coordinator at MyJoyOnline, this also has its downsides. "It's increasingly eroding what we have held onto for a very long time," he says. In the past, for example, it was off-limits to address a traditional chief directly or even to call him. Then one day Raymond contacted a chief on Facebook – and he answered. "I was shocked at first. I bypassed the entire procedure to seek an audience on this matter – hundreds of years of tradition." But despite such progress, he fears for the cohesion of society.

The volume of misinformation and hate speech has reached worrying levels

The experts are particularly concerned about the culture of conversation on the Internet. The volume of misinformation

and hate speech has reached worrying levels, says journalist Kent Mensah. The problem, he argues, is that the Internet has become the preferred news source for many citizens. "People are really going on social media for the news feast before they consume it in the mainstream media, and if this trend continues, there will be an information disaster in this country," he said. Increasingly, this misinformation is disseminated via closed messenger groups, which aggravates the situation even more, because false messages can circulate in this manner for a long time in secret and influence the attitudes of people without ever coming under public scrutiny.

Another problem is that online discussion topics are mainly determined by people living in the cities. Those who are not online are thus cut out of the conversation – a problem for Ghana's rural population (see article on Access). It is often particularly difficult for women to afford their own Internet access or the necessary equipment, explains Vivian Affoah. "But the rural areas too, are different in terms of how both men and women operate," she said. "Women are really not educated on the use of the Internet. Often women are not able to be online to the extent that they would like, because Internet access is expensive. Most of the women in rural areas really don't have access to the Internet."

The government is working to balance the opportunities for men and women through its own programs. The Ministry of Communications organized the 2018 Girls in ICT initiative, with training activities in rural districts (Ministry of Communications, Ghana, 2018). More than 500 young girls from deprived schools in the Ashanti region benefitted from the training. The project was started to introduce the girls to ICT and shatter the myths surrounding the use of ICT by girls in the country.

Recommendations

Promote learning and retraining

Digitalization in Ghana requires a willingness to learn across all levels of society, because business models are shifting and social structures are changing due to digital disruption. Opportunities are arising in many fields, as pulse.fm product lead Ibukun Onitiju explains: "I think in terms of job creation across society – from education, from policies, from capacity development – there are so many ways that introducing digital platforms, digital as a whole, is radically changing what we know. People can now innovate with problems and solve problems which could not be solved before."

Strengthen digital education

"What I would like are efforts or intervention towards digital literacy," said Vivian Affoah. To realize these opportunities, more education is required. The chances for personal development and participation in social processes need to be publicized more.

Target media education at parents, too

"Even young people are telling adults to learn so they can teach their children to see the potentials and dangers," said Kingsley Obeng-Kyereh, who is calling on parents to contribute to their children's media education. But to do so, first they must fully understand how the Internet works themselves.

Close the digital divide

There is still the problem of a digital divide forming between people in metropolitan areas, who benefit from the possibilities of the Internet, and those in rural areas, who are cut off. To close the gap, resources need to be channeled to remote areas.



Innovation: Ghana: Innovation is the key to digital participation

Ghana is home to a burgeoning innovation scene, complete with research institutions, hubs and initiatives to support women. But poor infrastructure, access to capital, and bureaucracy remain hurdles for entrepreneurs.

Summary

- Ghana is seen as a stable environment for innovators and investors
- A vibrant tech scene underpins a new industry with access to international markets
- The Internet is opening up new employment opportunities
- The government offers some funding opportunities
- Poor infrastructure and bureaucracy place barriers on innovation
- Access to capital remains difficult for founders

Society

low
moderate
advanced
high



The overall Level of Digital Participation for Innovation: **advanced**

Digital participation and innovation are interdependent – that’s the conclusion of Ashwin Ravichandran, CEO of the Accra-based Mest Incubator. "The more you innovate, the more access you produce. The more access someone produces, the more society uplifts," he said. The incubator in Ghana’s capital is part of the Meltwater Entrepreneurial School of Technology, which coaches young entrepreneurs and supports them with seed capital. Ravichandran is full of praise for the location. The West African country’s mix of political and economic stability, combined with the fact that it is English-speaking, make it an attractive proposition for outside investors. "Ghana is going to become the media hub for West Africa soon," Ravichandran said with confidence. It’s a view shared by international tech companies such as IBM and Google. The latter’s decision to open a research center for artificial intelligence in Accra in 2018 made headlines around the world (CNN 2018).

In recent years, Ghana has developed a well-networked scene of more than 24 active TechHubs that have joined forces in the Ghana Tech and Business Hubs Network (TBHNG). The goal is to create thriving innovation clusters across the country. Numerous conferences and hackathons provide additional opportunities for meet-ups. It’s where collaborators come together to work on their latest business ideas. Not even the sky is the limit, given that one recent event challenged participants to develop solutions for problems arising in outer space.

FinTech is one of the main fields for digital innovation

But the overwhelming focus of Ghana’s innovators is on Earth. Most digital start-ups have settled in the agricultural and Fin-

Tech sectors. Agrocenta, Asoriba, ExpressPay, Farmerline, Kudobuzz are just a few examples. But there are also successful projects in the media sector, most notably OMG Digital, a exclusively digital media company that follows the example set by BuzzFeed. The MEST Incubator-sponsored start-up AF Radio, on the other hand, wants to help local radio stations open up digital channels. AF Radio is a consumer app through which people can listen to their favorite live radio shows and play back the ones they missed as podcasts, while enabling radio stations to increase their revenue through dynamic ad placements.

The support infrastructure also includes a number of initiatives to train girls and young women for jobs in the digital economy. Vanessa Otchere is active in several of them. "I am part of Unlocking Women and Technology (UWAT) which is a flagship program by iSpace foundation where they teach women how to code," said the 24-year-old. "I’m also part of ‘developers in vogue’ where they teach you coding skills and after that they connect you to jobs related to the training." With this support, she is already working on her own business idea: TicketEx, an online ticket platform for public transport in Ghana.

Lack of access a problem for innovation

The Impact Hub in the Osu district of Accra is a kind of flagship innovation center. Foreign dignitaries and high-ranking state officials almost always pay a visit when they’re in town. Most recently in 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel stopped by. For William Senyo, the co-founder and CEO, such visits represent both praise and an incentive to do more. While heartened by the recognition, he

sees an urgent need to catch up. In large parts of the country, infrastructure is still inadequate and unreliable, and rural areas are completely left behind. He's concerned that too few people have access to the tools that enable them to innovate. "Even we as an institution, I worry that we are slightly elitist. I don't know what a solution could be except to commoditize the Internet almost like it is a basic human right," said Senyo. He wants Africa to emancipate itself from the West in terms of progress: "We are big consumers of technology and we adapt technology to local use and we call that innovation. That is incremental innovation at best. The reality is, we are not creating enough to actually shape the future of digital society."

Jemila Abdulai, a blogger, digital marketing expert and founder of Circumspecte.com underlines the positive aspects of digitization for progress: "Just like the mobile phone enabled a lot of Africans to skip over a lot of things that the West had to do, digital platforms and social media will allow a lot of young Africans to connect with each other and extend their boundaries."

“For me, having access to infrastructure is the most important thing when it comes to digital inclusion.

Ashwin Ravichandran, MEST Incubator Accra

The government is also straining to keep up with the ever-changing cycle of innovation. Getting face time with successful Internet entrepreneurs such as China's Jack Ma and executives in Silicon Valley is part of their efforts to stay ahead. To tackle the funding deficit and reduce youth unemployment, the government has launched a \$10 million initiative called the National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Plan (NEIP). NEIP is now the government's primary vehicle for providing support to start-ups and small businesses.

However, digital technologies offer a greater potential than just economic development. They are particularly suited to widening social participation. With the e-transform project (Ministry of Communications, Ghana 2018) the government is trying to digitize administrative processes. Jerry Sam of Penplusbytes sees more opportunities, especially in the fight against corruption. "We need data to inform citizens. We need to involve state institutions that are fighting corruption," Sam said. The "Red Flag Movement" is one example (Pen Plus Bytes 2018). The project allows reports of corruption on social media to be tracked down, evaluated, and passed on to the investigating authorities.

Recommendations

Greater effort to create a secure, affordable, and nationwide digital infrastructure is necessary

Secure, affordable, and nationwide digital infrastructure is the key to further innovation in Ghana, which would benefit from more training and less red tape.

Youth education is key to paving the way for innovation

Impact Hub CEO Senyo believes that the younger population must be introduced to the opportunities offered by digitalization. "We have to develop a critical mass of young people who will eventually shape the dynamics of digital society to our advantage. The disadvantage of being here is that policy is not catching up as quickly as innovation is developing." Nevertheless, he is optimistic and refuses to be slowed down by the government: "I think there has never been a better time to be young, black and African. And I think there is a lot of untapped energy here in terms of both economic gain and empowering people to flip the African narrative."

Ghana must create conditions to make the country attractive for global investors

Experts agree that Ghana must create conditions that make the country attractive for investors from around the world. One of those conditions is greater self-confidence. "I think the first thing we need to do is stop applying traditional western definitions to African markets. Digital inclusion is driven by need. If that need grows, companies and start-ups are going to figure it out and build products for it," said Ravichandran.

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