Communication, Youth Empowerment And Development

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Abstract

This article is an analytical look at the issue of the empowerment of the Ivorian youth. It is a part of the logic of self-care for the development of young people by means of communication tools they use daily, in abundance. It is concerned in the long term with qualitative change and therefore, with development that results from it.

The advent of digital technology has indeed sparked the emergence of new communication parameters in Côte d'Ivoire, in terms of social media, applications and "smart" tools. Passionate about this new configuration of the communication landscape, young people are now hyperactive on networks and exchange platforms. They are thus involved in the "excessive screen consumption", a new predilection in contemporary society. This new paradigm is certainly an asset for young people to educate themselves about responsibility and build their empowerment that can lead to their development.

Keywords: Communication, digital media, empowerment, youth, development.

1. Introduction

Youth is a guarantee of sustainable development in all the parts of the world. The Ivorian youth is at the heart of the country's development programs. It constitutes the largest segment of the population in terms of number. It is also the most active segment of digital media users. According to several observers, using social media is one of the most common activities among young people today. For others still, "the use of social media is increasingly a part of the communication habit of young people in Côte d'Ivoire" (Kouakou A., 2019, p. 65). Generally abusive, this use is often for malicious purposes, with the many recorded cases of cyber scams of various kinds.

Is it then possible for Ivorian youth to use the new media benevolently and use them for the benefit of their empowerment? How can modern modes and tools of communication support youth empowerment and how does this empowerment imply development?

This contribution is based on these different concerns. From the starting hypothesis that communication is a central pillar in the empowerment of Ivorian youth, it carries on dialectic, resorting to two main theories: the theory of innovations diffusion (Rogers EM, 2003) and that of the direct effects of communication and media with Lasswell H. (1973). Ultimately, it leads to the thesis that with the advent of digital technology and of Internet, communication is an essential support for the empowerment of youth through the provision of a range of new media and opportunities.

At the structural level, it revolves around three major points: youth in the Ivorian society, young people and communication in Côte d'Ivoire and finally, communication, youth empowerment and development.

2. Youth in the Ivorian society

The issue of youth empowerment raises questions related to the Ivorian society: what is its general psychology and what are its existential realities? But first, what are its main characteristics?

2.1. Major features

The Ivorian youth is like those in developing countries. It faces many challenges related to education, health, employment issues and the central question of its social integration. It has several specific features. First, "the Ivorian youth constitutes a large segment of the country's population" (Somian I., para. 1).

The concept of youth refers in fact to the middle age group between childhood and adulthood. For Du Guard (1929, p. 1356) for example, youth is the "period of life between childhood and middle age in man". It is also the "period from adolescence to middle age, according to the encyclopedia of sociology.

In addition to being the largest proportion, the Ivorian youth is also scholastic. It attends school: the rate of the young school population rose from 73% in 2013 to 91% in 2019 according to government authorities. It is also vulnerable to a certain extent because it is in a situation of seeking employment. As such, it is concerned with the issue of social inclusion and empowerment. It is also partly out dropped or out of school. It is finally a city dweller and lives in the city or else, it is a rural youth because it lives in the countryside.

Whatever its characteristics, the Ivorian youth is faced with the main challenge of its empowerment and development. What are its social realities?

2.2. Existential realities

Young people in Côte d'Ivoire live the realities of the Ivorian society. Citizens of a poor country where the welfare state no longer exists for a long time, most of them face multiple challenges. Today, it is obvious that no young person can succeed in a project without difficulty. Juvenile schooling is expensive, contrary to the realities prevailing a decade ago. Success in a competition has become an obstacle course for young people, if not rare or even impossible. The same is true for entrepreneurship, which requires a minimum of technical and financial support. Setting up an income-generating activity is no longer within the reach of all young people. It follows that Ivorian youth are disoriented. So, left to their own devices, many young people engage in cyber scam activities, for example. Development projects proposed by the authorities through the youth employment program are a breath of fresh air for them. They are also a cause for hope. It goes without saying that Ivorian youth find themselves over the days in a state of general awareness and hope.

2.3. Awareness and Hope

Today, young people are increasingly aware of their objective realities, both at the level of the respective families and at the national level. Their sense of commitment and their involvement in their socio-economic care is confirmed. In this logic, many young people and girls fight for their empowerment. Whether they are in cities or in the countryside, in school or out of school, a simple observation makes it possible to note this effort for its integration and for its independence.

Indeed, a craze of young graduates for the offers made by the Ministry of the Civil Service is observable. Also, their rush for these opportunities is recorded by the departments in charge of the organization. For the year 2020 for example, nearly 60,000 young Ivorians applied for the primary school teacher competition, for only 5,000 places offered.

To this end, and "according to the information from the Ministry of National Education, 59,624 candidates take part in the competition. Five thousand (5000) positions are planned for the admitted " (Kautcha, para. 2).

The drop out or out-of-school people are rather interested in entrepreneurship. They target support programs offered by institutions. In order to raise awareness of their empowerment and hope, they grant credit to the Government's Social Program (PSG), piloted by the Youth Employment Agency. Thus, "to translate their wish

to embark on entrepreneurship into action, the government has disbursed more than 512 million FCFA (...)" (Agence Emploi Jeunes / PSG, para. 2).

This youth support operation is extending to a significant number of young people. According to the Ivorian Ministry for the Promotion of Youth and Youth Employment, "112,000 young people will benefit from financial support from the State in 2020, which will bring to 131,500 the number of young Ivorians whose projects will have been funded (…) ”(Agence Emploi Jeunes / PSG, para. 4). As we can see, the Ivorian youth is concerned about its socio-economic well-being. It is concerned about its empowerment and has hope for the future.

What sociological relationship is it developing with digital media and social networks?

3. Ivorian youth and communication

At this stage of our reflection, the concern is at the level of the reaction of young people, to this era of communication and technological innovation. It is also at the level of the use of digital media and the issue of media education for the benefit of young people.

3.1. Young people and the age of communication

The contemporary era is one of communication and digital technology. It is also the age of technological innovation. Innovation according to Rogers E. M. (2003, p.12) is "any practical idea or object perceived as new by an individual or by any other unit of adoption". As for Ryan and Gross (1943), they argue that "the notion of innovation implies the advent of technology, in this case, that related to media and ICT (Information and Communication Technologies)".

Social media are, to a certain extent, a new reality in the communication praxis of the Ivorian youth. But unlike the classic pattern with traditional media (radio, TV, print media) and certainly because of the access conditions, young people have appropriated digital media and are rather hyperactive in it. This new mode involves everyone's participation in the management (research, collection, processing, dissemination, reception, use) of information. It also involves interactivity with the possibility of content sharing. It is the communication democratization.

The "communicational democracy" in favor of the era of communication and technological innovation induces the offer of opportunities to young people. In education and relationships as well as in business, the Ivorian youth makes extensive use of communication parameters. This is the case with digital media, mainly. What uses does it make of these media?

3.2. Social media and uses

The Ivorian youth is passionate about digital social media. Schoolchildren, dropouts, city dwellers or villagers, the vast majority now has an electronic terminal in the form of a smartphone, tablet or computer with which they telecommunicate. This distance communication relies mainly on internet. It also uses media and social networks such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, etc. It also uses apps for specific remote activities. These electronic media are used for different purposes. These can be categorized according to usage, which runs in two generic directions: positive and negative. Positive uses do not offend societal ethics while negative ones offend morals.

The following table provides a panoramic presentation of the uses of social media, according to the criterion of positivity or negativity.

**Table n ° 1: Distribution of uses of social media by the Ivorian youth
according to criteria of positivity or negativity**

Uses criteria	Uses
Positive	- Classic communication (news exchange) - Meet /dating - e. teaching /e.learning - Online business (sale / purchase) - Online advertising / propaganda - Electronic marketing - E. banking (online banking) - Militant journalism (denouncing injustices, defects, etc.)
Negative	-Cybercrime (scam) - Cheating (at school for example) - Online prostitution - Disinformation (dissemination of false information) - Spread of rumor - Solicitation - Sale of dangerous products to health - Drug sale

From this table, it can be remembered that young people use digital media in two ways, for good and for misuse. This raises the question of media literacy.

3.3. Young people, digital media and the issue of education

The misuse of digital media by young people consequently calls for media education. In reality, rules of ethics and professional conduct govern the information professions. But, in general, they are ignored and then violated when it comes to social media, mainly social networks.

In an another sense, digital media are themselves an instrument for training young people. They are not only an open space for promoting the education of young people in the proper use of digital media, but also a benchmark for access to training modules. Thus, they are likely to provide young people with the possibility of self-training in social media and mastery of the use of these new communication tools.

How could communication and digital media therefore constitute a driving force for the empowerment of the Ivorian youth so for its development?

4. Communication, youth empowerment and development

The concern here is to know how communication can support young people in their need to take care of themselves, by themselves. That is to say, how, through the offers made to young people, digital media resulting from technological innovation support their empowerment and development?

4.1. Young people and technological innovation

Resorting to digital technology is an essential alternative in terms of communication practice in Côte d'Ivoire today. It is more with young people. The technological innovation from which this digital technology stems has made it the driving force behind a change in the communication habits. This change of pattern facilitates the communication needs of the youth. For example, communications based on data intelligence make many online services operational, for the benefit of young people. This is the case, for example, with e-commerce or distance education. These new types of services, supported by digital tools, allow young people to be effective. The question of costs, but also that of distance, is thus overcome and all the actors exchange ideas in the small "global village", in the sense of Mc Luhan M. (1977).

Obviously, therefore, technological innovation, the mother of digital and digital media, supports young people face to the communication challenges in terms of social change and improvement of daily life. One is tempted to ask what offers are made to the Ivorian youth, with the advent of digital media.

4.2. Digital media and new offers for young people

Many communication professions have emerged with the advent of digital technology and social media. For example, "business professions revolve around the function of communication (…): the web project manager, the web developer, the integrator, the web designer" (Libaert T. et al, 2012, pp. 20-21). In addition to these opportunities in terms of new professions, digital technology also offers skills building to young people who are increasingly specializing in the field of computer science and media. They therefore take advantage of training and internship opportunities. For example, to search for a job, they can use settings like LinkedIn, Job-Hunt and many more. To learn for free, they can go to Coursera or Open Culture Online Courses and to learn Excel, they can contact Microsoft Excel Help Center or Excel Easy. Thus, digital media offer young people a range of new opportunities that allow them to integrate into society and ensure their autonomy, by relying on modern communication tools. How could we speak of development resulting from this autonomy?

4.3. Communication, empowerment and development

Development refers to the threefold notions of transformation, evolution and progress. It is conceived more in terms of socio-economic changes. Thus, development is "a process of change (…) leading to individual and collective well-being" (UNUAA, 2002, p. 2).

Development activities in several business sectors in Côte d'Ivoire are now based on technological innovation and new communication tools. The change is measured through one indicator, which is the Internet usage. This use involves resorting to digital media, social networks and applications that facilitate the production and sharing of content or data. This is an edifying proof that social changes and development are supported in this country by communication.

According to Sager M., "development depends on communication (…)" (Jenatsch T. & Bauer R., 2016, p.7). In addition, media such as radio and television were seen by specialists as effective means of influencing the masses. Their effects on populations raised fears of alienation. We are here in the theory of the powerful effects of communication. Lasswell H. (1973) has indeed mentioned in his works the "power of the media over individuals". He talks about the power of communication and of media in the processes of social change and development. Thus and according to him, "media have a massive and immediate effect on the population (...)".

Contemporary societies call for more social responsibility and commitment. As a result, the Ivorian youth is subject to more challenges for its societal integration. It therefore finds its place in the introduction of digital economy in the development objectives of the Ivorian society. This new form of economy represents an opportunity for young people because it provides them with the possibility of becoming agents of change in their living conditions.

The digital economy actually refers to all economic activities that create value and jobs that use digital media. It generates economic activities at a distance, through the use of digital means of communication. It therefore includes several sectors of activity such as mobile and telecommunications, audiovisual, networks and computer equipment and many others such as online services which are generally sectors of predilection for young people. According to the Ivorian authorities, the digital economy aimed to create "at least 150,000 jobs (...) through new

professions made possible by ICT (...)". (Koné, B., 2016, para. 2). Young people are in the front line of the beneficiaries of these new professions.

Other circumstances show that the empowerment of the Ivorian youth is supported by communication and its digital tools. So,

> "A program to support the creation of jobs and digital-related sources of income for 200,000 young people in Côte d'Ivoire was launched on Thursday, January 07, 2021 in Abidjan, by the Ministry for the Promotion of Youth and Youth Employment ”(Kautcha, para.1).

Initiated to support job creation and skills building for young people, this digital skills training program is spread throughout the country. It is mostly for the benefit of young people, exclusively.

It should also be noted that "social networks democratize the formation of opinion, they promote emancipation" (Jenatsch T. and Bauer R., 2016, p.30). Therefore, a development strategy making use of communication techniques and instruments is likely to facilitate the understanding of the issues for young people. It is likely to support it in adapting to these challenges and then in acquiring the necessary expertise to deal with them.

In addition, through new digital modes and means, young people express themselves and affirm their commitment. That is a substantial step in the process of social change and development. We therefore agree with Mc Call E. (2011, p.1) arguing: "the role that communication plays in access to autonomy makes it an essential element (…) for the achievement of development objectives".

In consideration of all the above, it can be argued that with digital and the rapid development of technology, communication, through the possibilities offered to the Ivorian youth, effectively supports its empowerment and development. It first allows it to establish the necessary social debate in the logic of a social change. It moreover allows the expression and engagement of youth. Finally, it allows to offer training, support, supervision and employment opportunities to young people. All this range of possibilities helps to ensure that the Ivoirian young people are taken care of by themselves. This self-care takes them to the heart of a social change which ultimately leads to their personal development, with general development implications.

5. Conclusion.

Côte d'Ivoire has a large population of young people. It is essential capital. The promotion of development for, but above all, with and by young people is a relevant vision that is more than judicious. However, development actors are often confronted with an essential concern: how to involve young people in development programs, and especially in daily activities that can lead to their empowerment?

The advent of digital media, while facilitating communication on the existential situation of young people, allows them to offer them a multitude of educational, training and awareness-raising opportunities with a view to their social integration. In addition, the digitization of communication methods and tools has given rise to new professions linked to the telecommunications, mobile, computer engineering or software sectors. All these communication opportunities are open to young people and ensure their socio-professional integration and their autonomy.

This paper, which is a reflection on the issue of Ivorian youth empowerment and communication-assisted development, has focused on these different aspects. From the initial hypothesis that communication is at the heart of the empowerment of the Ivorian youth, it led the cogitation by referring to the theory of technological innovations of Rogers EM (2003) and to that of the direct effects of communication and the media with Lasswell H. (1973). In doing so, and contrary to the idea that "the uses of social media have a (...) harmful

purpose" (Kouakou, A., 2019, p.67), this contribution comes to the conclusion that communication offers today to the Ivorian youth, a range of opportunities for their empowerment and development through digital means and tools resulting from the advent of digital technology. It goes without saying that in reality, our contemporary society is fundamentally dependent on technology, to the point of making it a source of creation of new professions for the great benefit of young people. It can therefore be concluded that "communication is at the heart of sustainable development" (Jenatsch T. & Bauer R., 2016, p.77).

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