

THE APPLIED communicator

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INSIDE





ABOUT JADE COMMUNICATIONS

Centre for Applied Human Communication

Jade Communications Ltd is a leading resource centre for Applied Human Communication, headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya. Since 2004, we have worked with individuals, teams, and organisations through tailored training, coaching, and consultancy services to help them communicate more effectively – whether in professional, public, or personal settings.

We believe that communication is more than just a skill – it's a strategic tool for influence, connection, and success. That's why we focus on Applied Human Communication (AHC).

AHC integrates theory and practice, leveraging scholarly knowledge and research insights to address real-world communication challenges and achieve tangible outcomes across individual, interpersonal, group, organisational, and societal settings.

This covers a wide range of fields, including the specialties of Persuasion, Cognition and Communication, Cross-Cultural, Interpersonal, Group Dynamics, Artificial Intelligence, Non-Verbal, Negotiation, Speech, Sign Language, Health, Internal Organisation, Legal, Leadership, and Digital Communication.

As part of the Centre's contribution to advancing knowledge in the practice of human communication, this publication aims to provide a platform for communicators to engage in meaningful discussions that share insights, explore innovative research, case studies, best practices, and experiences that illustrate the real-world application of communication theories in various contexts within the African setting.

► WELCOME



Welcome to the inaugural issue of “The APPLIED Communicator”, the new flagship publication of Jade Communications and the Centre for Applied Human Communication.

Over the past two decades, we have provided innovative Applied Human Communication (AHC) training, coaching, and consulting services to a diverse range of individuals and organisations across the private, public, and non-governmental sectors. AHC focuses on combining theory and practice, using scholarly knowledge and research insights to address real-world communication challenges and deliver tangible outcomes for individuals and organisations.

Having worked with many professionals and technical experts to generate, shape, and communicate impactful ideas that lead to transformation, it is evident that communication plays a critical foundational role in determining the success or failure of initiatives. However, most often, communication is viewed merely as supportive rather than strategic, thereby limiting its functionality and impact. Yet there is evidence that, when applied strategically, communication can address human challenges across diverse contexts. And these need to be highlighted.

As part of the Centre’s contribution to the development and advancement of knowledge in the practice of human communication, this publication seeks to create a platform for communicators to engage in robust conversations that share insights, explore innovative research, case studies, best practices, and experiences that highlight the practical application of communication theories in diverse contexts in the African setting.

This inaugural issue combines theory with lived experience, research with storytelling, and policy critique with solution-oriented analysis. The case studies and analysis communicate that communication, when used strategically and rooted in inclusivity, research, and responsiveness, can rebuild public trust, influence behaviour, and foster change. However, neglect can lead to the loss of public trust. From Kenya’s Social Health Insurance Act (SHA) and the 2024 Finance Act to the Youth and Women Quality Centres (YWQCs) model in Tanzania and the reform process of the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA), the underlying lesson remains consistent.

“The APPLIED Communicator” is a hybrid platform for robust, evidence-based conversation. It is a space for academics to test their models against the complex realities of the African context, and for practitioners to share the inventive strategies they employ on a daily basis. We are committed to fostering a professional ecosystem in which theoretical knowledge is translated into actionable solutions to organisational and societal challenges.

To our readers—researchers, communicators, policymakers, and citizens—I invite you to engage with these ideas, challenge them, and apply them.

The launch of this first issue represents our commitment to advancing the practice of Applied Human Communication. By consistently bridging theory with practice, we can collectively enhance trust, strengthen governance, and drive meaningful transformation for individuals, organisations, and our communities.

I extend my gratitude to all contributors, reviewers, and the editorial team who made this publication possible. Your work affirms our belief in Africa's communication scholarship and practice.

Welcome to "The APPLIED Communicator", where theory meets practice and communication becomes the foundation for transformation.

Paul Achar,

Chief Executive Officer,
Jade Communications Ltd.
Managing Editor,
The APPLIED Communicator



Enabling individuals and organisations to
communicate effectively

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EDITORIAL

The Applied Communicator: Bridging Theory and Practice

Welcome to the inaugural issue of

“The APPLIED Communicator”,

a platform for communicators to engage in robust conversations that share insights, explore innovative research, case studies, best practices and experiences. We highlight the practical application of communication theories in diverse contexts, solving real-world challenges and demonstrating impact at the individual, organisational and societal levels.

In this issue, the case studies, analytical pieces and an engaging conversation with a practitioner are a testament to the critical role of communication. Policy and progress succeed or fail at the level of human communication. Where dialogue is weak, systems fracture. Where communication is strategic, inclusive, and evidence-based, it becomes a force for legitimacy, learning, and impact.

The turbulence surrounding Kenya’s Social Health Insurance Act (SHIA) and the 2024 Finance Act highlights this reality. As contributors, Were and Dr Mwencha show that technically sound policy goals were undermined by mixed messaging and a lack of genuine public engagement. The silence before the SHIA rollout created a void—quickly filled by rumours that biometric registration was linked to taxation. Such misinformation was not unavoidable; it was the expected result of treating communication as an afterthought.

When 80 percent of young people perceive government information as “bulky, boring, and untrustworthy,” as Orina’s study on Gen Z finds, the consequences are profound. The youth-led protests of 2024—mobilised not through traditional channels but through organic, authentic conversations on TikTok and X—signalled more than discontent. They represented a reconfiguration of the public sphere, in which citizens engage and deliberate on platforms the state has yet to understand, trust, or embrace fully.

Despite these missteps, two case studies demonstrate that theory, when applied correctly, can yield positive, sustainable outcomes. The Youth and Women Quality Centres (YWQCs) model in Tanzania, presented by Lengewa, offers a compelling case of communication engineering adoption and empowerment. By embedding the socio-ecological model and diffusion of innovations theory at the core of intervention design, the initiative transformed awareness into ownership. Through local champions, demonstration plots, and participatory training, the adoption of improved groundnut and sorghum varieties increased to 26% and 32%, respectively, resulting in an estimated USD 4.43 million in new grain value.

Oketch and Nyaga demonstrate how integrating public sphere theory, stakeholder theory, and the diffusion of innovations led to the transformation of the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) from a low-profile institution to one of growing public trust. By launching a toll-free hotline (1559) and the ‘SemaNaIPOA’ digital dialogue, IPOA operationalised the public sphere, making accountability platforms accessible and immediate. The strategic integration of dialogue, multi-stakeholder management, and technological innovation led to increased citizen engagement and a doubling of complaints lodged.

The findings in the research contained in this issue demonstrate how Applied Human Communication bridges the technical ‘what’ of a policy with the social and behavioural ‘how’ of its success. As Dr Lengewa warns against “treating people as if they exist in isolation”, professionals must treat communication not as posters and press releases, but as a discipline rooted in formative research, audience segmentation, and sustained, two-way engagement. This means advocating for communication to be incorporated into policy design from the outset. Not as an afterthought. It also means demanding the resources to conduct the necessary field testing and dialogue, as well as to implement innovations that leverage technological advancements.



Case Studies

Communication that drives change for
sustainable impact

Last-Mile Solutions for Quality Seed Adoption:

A BEHAVIOUR-LED YOUTH AND WOMEN QUALITY

By Dr. Catherine Lengewa,



Finger Millet Farmer in Busia, Kenya. (Photo/ CBCC)

The Problem: Systemic Barriers to Accessing Improved Varieties

Smallholder farmers in remote areas of Tanzania and Kenya face a web of interlinked challenges that block access to improved seed varieties, making them hard to obtain and even harder to use. Under-investment and weak value

chains mean crops like groundnut, sorghum, and finger millet attract little public extension or private distribution. As a result, last-mile markets stay thin and Agro-dealers avoid places where demand looks fragmented and transport is costly.

Gendered crop economies compound this: dryland cereals are framed as “women’s crops,” yet women, who supply much of the labour, have limited say over input purchases, varietal choice, or income, reducing incentives to buy quality seed and undermining women’s roles as input suppliers. Social and cultural frictions further slow uptake; formative research revealed beliefs such as fears associated with improved finger millet practices, layered onto low literacy, scarce agronomic advice, and risk aversion after years of poor yields - all reinforcing a “stick with what we know” mindset. Structural last-mile constraints then cement these limitations: certified seed can be hours away on poor roads, often arriving after the planting window; community seed producers face cash-flow and certification hurdles that encourage early sale as grain; and financing products rarely fit small, seasonal purchases.

The result is persistent reliance on home-saved seed, suppressed yields and incomes, and the marginalisation of women and youth as customers and entrepreneurs, outcomes that one-off handouts and isolated trainings have failed to shift. Against this backdrop, the programme’s strategic intent is clear: grow women- and youth-led seed enterprises that can reliably meet seed demand in both quality and quantity, restructuring the supply and demand fundamentals of improved seed in hard-to-reach areas.



Communication Theories and Models Applied

The project was grounded in the socio-ecological model, which recognises that farming decisions are never made in isolation; they are shaped simultaneously by individual, social, and wider structural factors. At the personal level, the model targets farmers' knowledge, attitudes, motivations, perceived risks, and confidence, as well as their ability to act given the constraints of affordability and timing. At the social level, it addresses the weight of norms, gender and age roles, and the influence of peers, champions, and local institutions such as churches, schools, and farmer groups. Structurally, it engages with the physical and institutional environment, improving the availability and certification of seeds, ensuring financial and market access, and aligning supply with seasonal planting windows.

To stimulate change within this ecosystem, the approach drew on the diffusion of innovations theory by using demonstration plots, early adopters, and visible local role models—especially women and youth—to reduce risk perceptions, normalise new practices, and accelerate adoption. It incorporated behavioural economics insights through nudges such as branded prompts, mobile SMS, and timely availability in convenient pack sizes, all of which lower switching costs for first-time users. Participation and community ownership are also central, as centres are run by trained youth and women from within the community, which generates higher trust, stronger accountability, and greater local relevance.

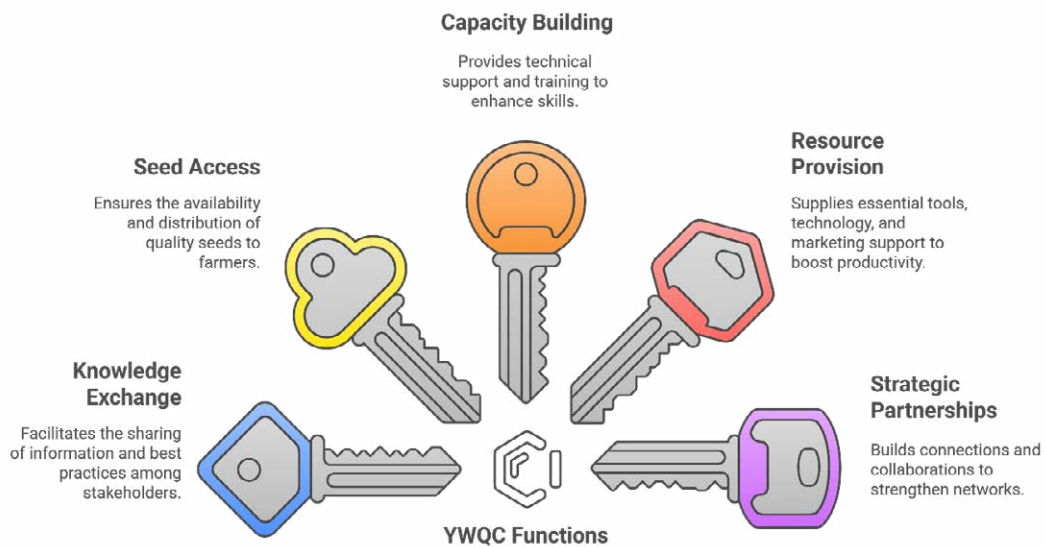
Finally, the model applied principles of integrated marketing communication, aligning mass media campaigns such as Kizazi Cha Mabadiliko (Generation of Change)

in Tanzania and Ukulima Sure (Secure Farming) in Kenya with interpersonal channels like youth champions, peer groups, market fairs, and field days, ensuring that consistent messages reinforced one another from awareness through to purchase and use. This fusion of socio-ecological theory, innovation diffusion, behavioural nudges, participatory communication, and integrated marketing sets YWQCs apart from conventional Agro-dealer outlets. Rather than treating communication as an add-on, the model embedded it at the heart of service delivery, making behaviour change an integral part of how improved seed reaches the last mile.

Methodology and Communication Strategies/Tactics

This approach was implemented through CBCC's Youth and Women Quality Centres (YWQCs), a behaviour-led last-mile model that combined community-driven action with a clear communication and behaviour change strategy. At the heart of the model were two types of centres: community-based hubs hosted in government or private facilities, and co-operative-based hubs embedded within existing farmer institutions. Regardless of type, each YWQC was staffed and managed by trained youth and women, which ensured local ownership.

These centres served multiple functions, including providing access to certified seed, fertiliser, and post-harvest technologies; leasing small equipment; offering training through field days and technical assistance; promoting behaviour change communication; and linking farmers to markets through aggregation and scheduled buyer visits. They also incubated and supported community seed entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises, positioning the YWQCs as multi-service agricultural nodes.



Functions of the Behaviour-led Youth and Women Quality Centres (Illustration /CBCC)

The behaviour change communication strategy was informed by a formative behavioural study carried out in 2021, which explored barriers at individual, social, and structural levels. This research guided the design of the model and approaches, the framing of messages, the choice of channels, the identification of credible messengers such as youth champions, neighbours, and successful women farmers, and the timing of communication activities around planting seasons.

Mass media formed the backbone of outreach. In Tanzania, the *Kizazi Cha Mabadiliko* (“Generation of Change”) campaign used local-language radio, expert interviews, and songs to reach nearly two million listeners, emphasising yield benefits, income potential, and the importance of timeliness. In Kenya, the *Ukulima Sure* (“Secure Farming”) campaign reached over 700,000 people, building curiosity around finger millet and driving participation in community-level demonstrations.

These efforts were reinforced by youth champions, who became the face of the campaigns through interpersonal connections. Forty-five in Tanzania and thirty-four in Kenya conducted peer-to-peer meetings, micro-trainings, and home visits, reaching approximately 12,000 farmers in Tanzania and training 5,386 in Kenya. Learning by doing was another key method. Fifty-five demonstration plots across the two countries showcased new varieties of groundnut, sorghum, and finger millet under local

conditions. Farmers could see and compare differences in germination, pest tolerance, and yields. This experiential approach transformed abstract information into visible and credible results.



Kizazi cha mabadiliko campaign poster (Illustration/CBCC)

The design was deliberately gender-intentional and youth-inclusive. Women and young people were prioritised for leadership roles, with four YWQCs in Busia County, Kenya, owned and managed by women. Training cohorts consistently maintained around a 60% representation of women and youth, while dialogue sessions addressed entrenched norms that limited their agency, such as the belief that men alone should sell crops and control income. These sessions encouraged households to negotiate new pathways for joint decision-making on input purchases and marketing.

Building local enterprise capacity was equally central. Seventy-one seed entrepreneurs were trained, including twenty-two women in Kenya, alongside business skills courses for youth groups and seed dealership modules for select trainees.

By 2024, 256 jobs had been created across the seed and input ecosystem, from partnerships tied the model into broader agricultural systems. Breeders, such as the Tanzania Agricultural Research Institute (TARI) and the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation (KALRO), supplied early-generation seed and technical advice, while certification agencies, including the Tanzania Official Seed Certification Institute (TOSCI) and the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS), ensured quality seed standards. Seed companies co-invested in demonstrations and extended their distribution networks through YWQCs.

Technology providers introduced affordable mechanisation and post-harvest solutions, and financial partners piloted credit distribution and aggregation to transport and equipment operation.

Together, these strategies established YWQCs as locally owned platforms that combined input access, training, market linkage, and enterprise development with an evidence-driven behaviour change communication strategy. The integration of behavioural insights, media campaigns, demonstrations, inclusive leadership, and systemic partnerships made the model more than a distribution point - it became a trusted catalyst for changing farming practices and expanding access to improved seed varieties.

Impact and Outcomes: Successes and Challenges

Behavioural Outcomes (Awareness, Adoption, Purchase)

Endline studies showed that YWQC interventions led to clear and significant behaviour changes. In Tanzania, awareness of improved varieties surged to approximately 75% for sorghum and 82% for groundnut, compared to under 10% in non-intervention areas. Adoption also rose sharply, with groundnut use climbing from just 2% to 26.7% and sorghum from 6.3% to 32.7% within two seasons. Purchases of certified seed increased in parallel, reaching 25% for groundnut and nearly 30% for sorghum. In Kenya, more than 5,300 farmers—most of them women—were trained, prompting local Agro-dealers to stock finger millet seed for the first time. Endline data confirmed a sustained impact: awareness reached 99.6%, adoption 75.3%; yields rose by 40%, and incomes by 39%. Additionally, 98% of farmers intended to continue, signalling strong sustainability.

Social Outcomes (Norms, Participation, Leadership)

The YWQC initiative significantly advanced inclusion and empowerment. Around 60% of participating farmers were women, and 60% were youth, with community seed entrepreneurs increasing from zero to 36 within two years. Leadership breakthroughs were evident in Busia, where women now lead four YWQCs, normalising their roles in finance and management. In Teso South, cultural fears around finger millet were dispelled through dialogue and evidence, while in Tanzania, women secured more equitable access to information, technology, and markets within the sorghum value chain.

Structural and Economic Outcomes (Supply, Scale, Value)

The YWQCs have transformed seed access in remote areas, establishing nine hubs in Songwe Region in Tanzania and Busia in Kenya that trained 7,670 people - 60% of them women - and set up 55 demonstration plots. They built local enterprise capacity by developing 71 seed entrepreneurs and generating 256 jobs across the seed and service ecosystem. The production of quality seed reached 37 tonnes, showing growth between 2023 and 2024. Meanwhile, 8,393 farmers cultivated 4,221 hectares using improved varieties. The result was an estimated grain value

of US\$4.43 million. In effect, YWQCs have turned once-neglected areas into vibrant micro-markets where farmers access reliable seed, services, and consistent buyer linkages.

Challenges and How They Were Managed

The YWQC model delivered significant results but also faced hurdles that required adaptive responses. The timeliness of supply was critical, as late seed deliveries weakened adoption. Certification costs and cash-flow gaps pushed some producers to sell seed as grain. Norm change proved slower, but persistent dialogue, visible success stories from women and youth, and respected messengers gradually shifted attitudes.

Lessons for Practitioners

For practitioners, the YWQC experience shows that real change comes from designing for the whole system rather than isolated symptoms. Pairing social and behaviour change with reliable last-mile supply is crucial since awareness alone cannot drive adoption if stock is missing or mistrusted. Equally important is local ownership and visibility: when youth and women lead centres, they build trust and shift community expectations, provided their governance and leadership skills are deliberately nurtured.

Timing is as vital as content. Synchronising campaigns, dialogues, and stock availability with planting calendars ensures relevance, while demonstrations and trials allow farmers to 'see to believe', creating powerful conviction.

Sustainability depends on institutionalising quality and shortening the supply chain, whether through streamlined certification or local seed producers. Practitioners should support farmers to de-risk early purchases, with small pack sizes, flexible credit, and secure markets for surplus.

For centres themselves, diversified income streams from seeds, fertiliser, equipment hire, or aggregation services are essential, alongside strong governance, which should be treated as a technical skill. Finally, practitioners should plan for scale from day one, standardising tools and building ecosystems of partners so that expansion is smooth and credible.

Conclusion

The YWQC model has proven its strength by adapting across crops and geographies, from sorghum and groundnuts in Tanzania to finger millet in Kenya, and even replication in Uganda in the rice and bean value chains. Its sustainability lies in a blend of enabling investments such as capacity building, input distribution, post-harvest technologies, and micro-finance, alongside firm policy and institutional anchoring in extension plans and seed strategies.

This experience shows that when communities lead and build trust, behaviour-led platforms can drive inclusive growth. With steady investment and supportive policies, YWQCs can enhance food security and improve livelihoods for smallholder farmers.



Julieth Shombe's Journey to Financial Independence Through Seed Entrepreneurship



Miss Julieth Shombe, at Ihanda YWQC, is showcasing new improved groundnuts, sorghum and bean varieties to farmers during a seed fair at Mbozi YWQC. (Photo/CBCC)

Before the intervention

Julieth Shombe, a small-scale farmer in Mbozi, Songwe Region of Tanzania, was financially dependent on her husband's maize farming. With limited income opportunities, she was unable to pursue further education beyond Form Four (secondary school completion).

After the intervention

Through the AVISA project, Julieth became a community champion, receiving training in farming, seed production,

and agribusiness. As a manager of the Ihanda YWQC, she serves five villages, engaging 3,000 farmers and collaborating with 15 key stakeholders. Under her leadership, seed production increased from 0.75 to 3.33 tonnes, generating USD 3,960 within two seasons. Individually, she earned USD 1,344 from agro-input distribution. As a result, Julieth expanded her farming operations, financed maize production, reinvested in her education, and now mentors youth, empowering women in agribusiness to drive economic growth.

A Last-Mile Behaviour Change Agent Transforming Seed Access

JOSEPH GAMBI



Joseph Gambi in his groundnut farm. (Photo/CBCC)



Before the Intervention

Before the AVISA project, Joseph Gambi from Ukwile village in the Songwe Region, Tanzania, farmed just half an acre of groundnuts, earning little income. At the same time, many youths and women in his community struggled with low yields and limited opportunities. Quality seeds were hard to access, pushing most farmers toward maize despite the high costs.

After the Intervention

With AVISA's support, Joseph was trained as a last-mile change agent, gaining skills in mobilisation, demand creation, and seed production. He expanded to three acres of groundnuts, one acre of sorghum, and half an acre of beans. He also co-founded the Ukwile Youth and Women Quality Centre, which now serves over 1,000 farmers across five villages and hosts more than 10 demonstration plots.

Joseph has reached at least 600 farmers, created demand for more than two tonnes of seed, which was supplied to more than 120 farmers in three villages, partnered to distribute one and a half tonnes of groundnut seed, and mobilised 10 farmer groups. His efforts generated USD 4,000 in revenue (November 2022–January 2024), including USD 1,456 from his own two-acre quality-declared seed (QDS) farm.

Acknowledgement

The Accelerated Varietal Improvement and Seed Systems in Africa (AVISA) project was conducted in the Songwe Region, Tanzania, and Busia, Kenya, with a focus on groundnuts, sorghum, and finger millets. This work was made possible through the generous support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The project was led by CIMMYT and implemented by the Centre for Behaviour Change and Communication (CBCC), in close collaboration with TARI and KALRO.



Dr. Catherine Lengewa PhD

Dr. Catherine Lengewa is co-founder of the Centre for Behaviour Change and Communication (CBCC). She holds a PHD in Educational Foundations and Behaviour Change, a Master's in Counselling and a Bachelor's in Education. Her role fundamentally involves connecting people and ideas, bringing together government, partners, and communities to drive change. She ensures that projects are not only sustainable but also genuinely enhance people's lives. She is dedicated to inclusion, making sure no one is left behind, and she continually advocates for new ideas to establish CBCC as a hub for innovation and social progress. She also chairs the Academic Committee of the PAC University Governing Council.



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AT THE CENTRE OF REAL CHANGE





Building Trust Through Dialogue:

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN KENYA'S POLICE OVERSIGHT

Dr. Dennis Danson Oketch, PhD., and Elizabeth Nyokabi Nyaga

Abstract

This paper examines the role of strategic communication in advocating for the position and achievements of Kenya's Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) between 2018 and 2024. It analyses how Habermas's public sphere theory, stakeholder theory, and the diffusion of innovations theory grounded and enhanced public awareness, institutional visibility, and reform collaboration within a transitional democracy. Drawing on a case study of IPOA's End-Term Board Report (2018 - 2024) and related literature analysis, the study highlights transformative initiatives including digitised complaint systems, increased media and public engagement, stakeholder dialogues, and grassroots outreach. The findings demonstrate how these theories informed communication strategies to navigate institutionalised resistance, low public trust, and resource constraints, thus contributing to stronger accountability and

legitimacy. The study argues that strategic communication is a central pillar of governance infrastructure in police oversight institutions.

Keywords: Communication, diffusion of innovations, Kenya, police oversight, public sphere, stakeholder engagement, transitional democracies

Introduction

Civilian oversight of policing is vital for accountability, particularly in transitional democracies grappling with historical impunity and public mistrust in policing services (Probert et al., 2020). In Kenya, the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) was created under the IPOA Act (2011), CAP 86 of the Laws of Kenya and Article 244 of the Constitution to provide independent oversight of the

National Police Service (NPS). While its legal foundation is robust, IPOA's effectiveness relies on communicating its mandate to foster legitimacy and build public trust in police accountability processes. Between 2018 and 2024, IPOA underwent a notable transformation in its communication practices, as its second Board integrated communication as a strategic pillar.

This approach was used to increase visibility, build trust, and influence police reform (IPOA, 2024a). This article examines IPOA's communication history, the challenges encountered, and lessons learned, through the framework of the public sphere theory, stakeholder theory, and diffusion of innovations theory: to integrate their unique attributes, understanding how communication underpins police accountability, legitimacy, and transparency, and providing insights for oversight institutions in similar settings.

History and Impact of IPOA Communication in Kenya

Established in 2011, IPOA is mandated to provide civilian oversight over policing to ensure the gradual professionalisation of policing services in Kenya (Independent Policing Oversight Authority Act, 2012; The Constitution of Kenya, 2010). From its inception, IPOA's effectiveness has been linked to its ability to communicate its mandate, build public trust, and mobilise support for police accountability reforms. Over the years, IPOA's communication strategies, driven by an evolving communication environment, have evolved significantly, transitioning from low visibility and reactive messaging to proactive, data-driven, and digitally enabled outreach. This trajectory underscores the pivotal role that communication plays in institutional legitimacy through awareness creation and the fostering of participation in policing oversight. Moreover, IPOA's communication strategies inform Kenyan policies on police accountability, providing a model for communication-driven oversight regulations.

Theoretical Framework

These communication strategies can be examined through a composite lens which integrates the public sphere theory, stakeholder theory, and diffusion of innovations theory. While each theoretical framework offers distinct analytical insights, their intersection provides a robust understanding

of how communication underpins accountability, legitimacy, and transparency in policing oversight.

Habermas's public sphere theory conceptualises the public sphere as a space where individuals communally deliberate on matters of common interest, influencing governance through reasonable discourse (Amosin, 2017; Benson, 2009; Holub, 2017). IPOA's communication through public forums, policy briefs, media briefings, and outreach events embodied this principle by creating platforms for dialogue between the public and their government. These communicative spaces enabled the articulation of grievances against police conduct, facilitated transparency in investigative processes, and reinforced democratic participation in civilian policing oversight. However, while public sphere theory emphasises citizen deliberation, it does not account for institutional complexities or inter-institutional coordination, which are crucial in a governance context involving state agencies, civil society, and the police.

Stakeholder theory addresses this limitation by grounding the need to manage relationships among multiple actors with divergent interests (Guterman, 2023; Harrison et al., 2015; Mogaji et al., 2021). In the oversight environment, IPOA's communication was not directed solely at the public but also strategically targeted institutional stakeholders, including the police, parliament, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), media outlets, and development partners. By customising messages to suit these audiences, IPOA enhanced inter-agency collaboration, helped align narratives on police accountability, and mobilised support for police reforms. This focus on structured, multi-level engagement complements the public sphere theory by extending deliberative principles into the institutional domain, where influence is mediated through stakeholder networks rather than public discourse alone.

Meanwhile, diffusion of innovations theory (Dearing & Cox, 2018; Fortner, 2011; Sahin, 2006) offers a technological and behavioural dimension to IPOA's communication practices. Scholarship posits that innovations spread within a social system through communication channels, with adoption shaped by perceived advantages, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. IPOA's introduction of toll-free hotlines, SMS complaint reporting, ERP-based case

management, and online platforms aligned with this trajectory. Early adopters, primarily urban complainants familiar with digital tools, pioneered the use of these innovations before they gradually diffused to broader demographics through targeted outreach. This theory explains how IPOA's communication evolved to harness technology, thereby expanding access, improving efficiency, and strengthening engagement, especially in previously underserved areas.

When compared, these theories reveal complementary and contrasting emphases. Public sphere theory emphasises participatory dialogue and legitimacy-building through citizen engagement (Amosin, 2017; Benson, 2009; Holub, 2017), whereas stakeholder theory situates communication within structured, interest-driven networks that are essential for policy and institutional influence (Gutterman, 2023; Harrison et al., 2015; Mogaji et al., 2021). Diffusion of innovations theory, by contrast, emphasises the role of communication in behavioural change and technology adoption, highlighting how oversight institutions modernise interaction with citizens (Dearing & Cox, 2018; Fortner, 2011; Sahin, 2006).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, drawing on a case study of IPOA's End-Term Board Report (2018–2024) and related literature analysis. Data collection focused on publicly available reports, related documents, and institutional outputs. Analysis utilised qualitative content analysis to identify patterns in communication strategies, informed by Habermas's public sphere theory, stakeholder theory, and diffusion of innovations theory. This triangulation of these theories justified the interpretive approach, enabling deeper insights into institutional communication dynamics. Ethical considerations included rigorous handling of sensitive oversight data and adherence to principles of transparency, accountability, and respect for confidentiality.

Early Communication Foundations (2012–2018)

The first IPOA Board (2012–2018) operated in an environment of deep public mistrust in the NPS following the 2007–2008 post-election violence. Public

understanding of civilian oversight was minimal, and police resistance to scrutiny was entrenched. Communication at this stage primarily focused on enhancing institutional visibility and creating awareness. IPOA relied on press briefings, stakeholder forums, and print media to explain its mandate and processes. Limited resources and poor regional presence constrained outreach outside the main cities. Public perception studies conducted during this period revealed confusion between the IPOA and the Internal Affairs Unit (IAU), underscoring the need for more transparent and more accessible messaging.

During the six years, IPOA encountered institutional resistance from the police, who persistently framed it solely as a fault-finding civilian body intent on punishing officers. This portrayal disregarded IPOA's broader mandate, including its initiatives aimed at enhancing police welfare and professional development. Such resistance undermined the reception and legitimacy of IPOA's messaging, impeding the growth of its institutional credibility and brand value. The prevailing indifference among sections of the NPS escalated into active non-compliance, manifesting in refusals to honour summons, obstruction of investigations and denial of IPOA access to facilities. This antagonism significantly complicated efforts to advance police reforms and curtailed the potential for constructive dialogue between IPOA and the police.

Resource constraints, including inadequate staffing within the communication function, limited financial allocations, and the prioritisation of investigative activities over outreach, curtailed IPOA's ability to effectively reach the entire Kenyan population. Consequently, awareness of IPOA's mandate remained low, with many citizens frequently conflating it with IAU (Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, 2014). This lack of mandate clarity eroded public trust in the institution and diminished the utilisation of its complaint management mechanisms, thereby weakening civilian participation in oversight processes.

Despite targeted training for crime and court journalists, media coverage frequently sensationalised incidents of police violence, thereby overshadowing IPOA's investigative and reform-oriented messaging. This dynamic illustrates the risks identified in framing theory, wherein dominant media



narratives overshadow institutional accounts, distorting public understanding of police oversight functions (Arowolo, 2017; Borah, 2011; Keren, 2012).

Nonetheless, IPOA's early efforts, especially media coverage of its investigations, began reshaping narratives on accountability, signalling the birth of an oversight institution committed to police professionalism.

Strategic Transformation and Professionalisation (2018–2024)

The second IPOA Board, in office (2018–2024), prioritised communication as a strategic pillar. Guided by the 2019–2024 Strategic Plan (as reported in the IPOA's End-Term Board Report), the Authority adopted a structured approach centred on research-driven messaging, stakeholder segmentation, and the integration of digital tools, including social media (IPOA, 2024a). The infusion of strategic communication revolutionised informational exchanges with stakeholders.

A significant milestone was the launch of the Call Centre (1559) and digital reporting platforms, including the website, toll-free lines, SMS modules, and an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. These innovations aligned with the global shift towards e-governance and improved accessibility for citizens who could not physically

visit IPOA offices. Social media platforms, including a blog, Facebook, and Twitter (X), were harnessed for real-time updates, amplifying IPOA's presence in public discourse on policing.

A special interactive question-and-answer session, held weekly and dubbed 'SemaNaIPOA' (Speak to IPOA), was hosted on the X platform, featuring themed dialogue on topical issues related to the Authority's mandate. Complementing this digital shift were media capacity-building initiatives, including training sessions for crime and court reporters and editorial briefings with senior editors. These engagements reduced sensationalism and improved accuracy in reporting IPOA's work, fostering a more nuanced portrayal of independent and committed oversight. Additionally, IPOA institutionalised stakeholder dialogue forums, bringing together state actors (such as the ODPP, NPS, and the Judiciary) as well as non-state actors (including civil society organisations and development partners). Policy briefs and thematic reports translated complex findings into accessible formats for policymakers and the public.

These efforts operationalised Habermas' concept of the public sphere (Amosin, 2017; Benson, 2009; Holub, 2017), providing citizens with platforms to deliberate

on policing accountability. Targeted grassroots outreach, collaborations with county governments, and the opening of an additional regional office further localised messaging, bridging the urban–rural awareness gap and enabling more citizens to access IPOA’s information and services. Communication also emerged as a crucial tool for fostering collaboration among justice sector actors. Platforms such as the National Council on the Administration of Justice (NCAJ) forums and joint taskforces with the ODPP, NPS, and IAU facilitated structured engagement. These initiatives harmonised institutional narratives, reduced duplication of oversight efforts, and strengthened accountability pathways within the policing and justice sectors.

As communication strategies matured, IPOA’s transparency in sharing case updates, publishing regular performance reports, and showcasing tangible oversight outcomes, such as the conviction of 39 police officers, bolstered its credibility. Public opinion surveys (IPOA, 2019, 2024b) reflected increasing recognition of IPOA as an impartial oversight body, vital in countering impunity within the police service and reinforcing public trust in civilian oversight. Furthermore, IPOA’s evidence-driven approach to communication enhanced its policy influence.

By disseminating research findings through policy briefs on issues such as policing standards, extrajudicial deaths, and detention conditions in police stations, IPOA shaped public discourse and informed parliamentary debates and continental dialogue on the value of independent police oversight. These efforts contributed directly to legislative reforms, including inputs to the Security Services Laws (Amendment) Bill of 2023, underscoring the role of strategic communication in governance and policy advocacy.

Digitisation further transformed IPOA’s communication landscape, improving case tracking and the user experience. Real-time SMS updates on complaint progress increased transparency and minimised bureaucratic opacity, while social media platforms became vital tools for rapid civic education. During the 2022 general election, IPOA’s targeted online campaigns effectively disseminated information, demonstrating the agility and reach of digital platforms in fostering public engagement and strengthening accountability in real time.

To address the persistent challenge of non-cooperation from the NPS and other actors, IPOA adopted stakeholder collaboration and complementarity as a core result area in its strategic plan. In pursuit of this objective, it implemented structured dialogue sessions to engage the NPS and other stakeholders, as well as to disseminate research-based communication. Additionally, IPOA regularly issued policy briefs and reports, and it facilitated targeted engagement with the Executive, Parliament, the KNCHR, ODPP, and civil society organisations. This approach fostered inter-agency collaboration, enhanced policy coherence, and significantly improved the uptake and implementation of IPOA’s oversight recommendations.

IPOA also prioritised the capacity-building of editors, crime and court reporters, and journalist associations to foster more balanced and accurate reporting on its activities. This initiative sought to reframe prevailing narratives from an adversarial stance towards one of partnership-oriented accountability. The strategy proved effective, as media coverage of IPOA became more balanced and accurate, while also enhancing journalists’ direct access to IPOA for fact-checking and information sourcing, thereby strengthening the credibility of reporting on police oversight matters. Together, these developments illustrate how IPOA’s integrated communication strategies not only expanded its visibility and public accessibility but also deepened institutional trust, enhanced inter-agency collaboration, influenced policy reforms, and harnessed technology to deliver timely and impactful informational engagement.

Communication Challenges

With only nine regional offices and constrained outreach budgets over its first decade of operation, IPOA’s communication reach remained inadequate, particularly in remote and marginalised regions. This limitation reinforced the premise of agenda-setting theory, which posits that in settings where information is scarce or inaccessible, public discourse is shaped predominantly by those who control or influence the available narratives (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). High-profile and high-tension events, such as public order management during protests and allegations of extrajudicial killings, required rapid and accurate communication. However, IPOA lacked an

institutionalised crisis communication framework, thereby constraining its capacity to pre-empt misinformation and effectively manage such incidents in real-time.

Successes and Innovations

Between 2018 and 2024, IPOA recorded a significant increase in complaints lodged, rising from a cumulative 10,381 between 2012 and 2018 to 20,112 in 2024. This growth can be attributed to improved visibility and heightened public awareness of IPOA's mandate, driven by sustained communication campaigns and the expansion of reporting channels. IPOA's innovations yielded significant outcomes, including the digitisation of complaints intake and feedback.

All these innovations aimed to enhance transparency, foster stakeholder dialogue, and align accountability narratives, thereby making communication an integral part of civilian oversight legitimacy and police reform. The digitalisation of complaint management communication channels, including the integration of a toll-free hotline (1559), SMS, VoIP, ERP systems, and online platforms, significantly enhanced institutional accessibility and streamlined case tracking and feedback mechanisms for complainants.

This approach was consistent with ICT4D (ICT for Development) principles, fostering greater transparency, empowering citizens to engage with IPOA's processes more effectively, and strengthening the institutional profile of the Authority as a responsive and technology-driven institution. Community engagement, facilitated through both traditional and digital media, dialogue sessions, outreach forums, complaint clinics, and conferences, served to localise communication and render oversight more relatable, particularly in far-to-reach regions.

These platforms also played a critical role in demystifying IPOA's mandate, addressing misconceptions, and clarifying inconsistencies in public understanding. Furthermore, such engagements fostered stakeholder and public participation, thereby introducing external perspectives into IPOA's policy processes and enhancing the inclusivity and legitimacy of its decision-making.

Linking Theory to Practice

IPOA's communication strategies exemplify the practical interplay of public sphere theory, stakeholder theory, and diffusion of innovations theory. Its community forums, media briefings, and outreach initiatives operationalised



**Compliment or lodge complaints
against the police directly with
IPOA by dialling the toll free*
number 1559**



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IPOA.NEWS

Or by email: complaints@ipoa.go.ke

* Calls are free of charges

Habermas' concept of the public sphere by providing deliberative spaces for citizens to engage directly with state institutions, thereby enhancing legitimacy through participatory dialogue. Simultaneously, IPOA's structured engagement with the Executive, Parliament, justice actors, and civil society reflected Freeman's stakeholder theory, demonstrating how tailored, multi-level communication fosters alignment across divergent interests and supports the implementation of police reforms. Furthermore, the adoption of digital reporting platforms, ERP systems, and SMS feedback mechanisms mirrored Everett Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory, illustrating how technological uptake reshapes institutional-citizen interaction by improving accessibility, transparency, and responsiveness.

The integration of these theoretical approaches highlights that effective oversight communication in transitional democracies is inherently multi-dimensional, requiring the simultaneous activation of participatory, relational, and technological levers to build legitimacy, trust, and reform momentum. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that effective police oversight communication demands a blend of deliberative public engagement, targeted stakeholder management, and adaptive technological integration. This combined framework is particularly relevant in transitional democracies such as Kenya, where public mistrust in policing coexists with complex inter-institutional dynamics and evolving digital ecosystems.

IPOA's communication practices demonstrate that public forums and media briefings activated the public sphere. At the same time, targeted engagements operationalised stakeholder theory, and ICT-enabled complaint management mechanisms reflected the diffusion of innovations theory. By converging all three theories, IPOA was able to build legitimacy, foster collaboration, and modernise accountability mechanisms, offering a model for civilian oversight communication in comparable jurisdictions.

Lessons Learned

This paper established that communication functions as a core component of police oversight infrastructure, rather than a peripheral activity. Within IPOA, communication

tools and messaging advanced from vehicles of disseminating information to mechanisms through which the Authority demonstrated its legitimacy, reinforced its institutional efficacy, and visibly exercised its mandate. By framing communication as integral to its oversight processes, IPOA established transparency and accessibility as central pillars of its operational identity, thereby aligning its external messaging with its police accountability function.

Trust-building within civilian police oversight contexts was inherently a gradual process. IPOA's experience revealed that sustained and consistent messaging, coupled with demonstrable outcomes such as case resolutions and prosecutions, played a crucial role in gradually cultivating public confidence. This iterative process underscored that trust cannot be achieved through isolated communication campaigns or one-off media announcements; rather, it requires persistent engagement, ongoing visibility, and reinforcement through tangible evidence of impact.

Furthermore, strategic partnerships significantly amplify communication reach and credibility. IPOA's collaborations with civil society organisations, media networks, and justice sector institutions facilitated a more coordinated dissemination of information, leveraging the credibility of external actors to extend its communicative influence. Such partnerships enabled IPOA to reach diverse audiences, including communities historically sceptical of state institutions, while simultaneously lending external validation to its messaging.

Finally, evidence-based messaging emerged as a critical driver of institutional credibility. By integrating empirical data such as complaint trends, investigation outcomes, and mandate delivery statistics into its communication outputs, IPOA enhanced both the persuasiveness and authority of its messaging. This evidence-led approach helped shift public discourse from circumstantial perceptions of policing to data-informed debates on accountability, reinforcing IPOA's image as an objective and research-driven oversight body. Collectively, these insights demonstrate that effective communication in police oversight is not a supplementary activity, but an embedded, multifaceted practice essential for legitimacy, trust-building, collaboration, and evidence-informed discourse.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that communication is foundational to effective civilian oversight in transitional democracies. IPOA's integration of participatory engagement, stakeholder alignment, and technological innovation advanced institutional legitimacy, strengthened public trust, and accelerated uptake of police reforms. By bridging theory and practice, IPOA transformed communication from a support function into a governance infrastructure central to accountability. These findings underscore the importance of civilian police oversight bodies embedding strategic, evidence-based communication into their core functions, providing a replicable model for institutional strengthening and reform in comparable contexts.

Recommendations

1. Establishing a dedicated crisis communication unit is essential for swiftly delivering verified information, countering misinformation, and maintaining legitimacy during high-stakes incidents, thereby strengthening narrative control and reinforcing public trust.
2. Expanding grassroots outreach and formalising regional partnerships with devolved authorities, civil society, and community actors would embed police oversight locally, bridge information gaps, improve accessibility, and foster trust in marginalised areas.
3. Simplifying complex police oversight data into easily understandable formats, briefs, and visualisations would enhance public understanding, fostering informed engagement and transforming communication into a participatory, knowledge-sharing process.
4. Formalising structured partnerships with media institutions to establish responsible reporting standards, develop joint fact-checking protocols, and ensure the dissemination of accurate information would position the media as a source of balanced narratives on police oversight and reforms.

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A magnifying glass with a brass frame and handle is positioned over a laptop keyboard. The lens is sharply focused on a few keys, while the rest of the keyboard and the background are blurred. The background is a vibrant mix of green and blue bokeh lights, suggesting a digital or technological environment. The overall lighting is warm and focused, emphasizing the act of research or investigation.

▸ Research

“The **Applied Human Communicator** ensures that all communication hinges on clarity, achieved through facts based on research.”

Jade Communications

Breaking News in the Age of Citizen Journalism:

THE NATION'S USE OF FACEBOOK USER COMMENTS

By Agewa Wainaina

Abstract

This study examined Nation Media Group's use of Facebook audience comments in breaking news coverage. While previous research suggested that online audiences influence content and can even compel editors to alter or delete posts, this study found otherwise. Using qualitative interviews and quantitative content analysis, audience comments were categorised as additive, critical, or corrective. Results showed that most comments (94%) were additive, mainly contributing details to breaking news, while 4% were critical and only 2% corrective. Despite this, Nation Media editors rely primarily on professional journalists, sub-editors, and senior editors to source and verify information before posting. The findings show that while social media users enhance news stories, their input lacks editorial authority due to misinformation risks, legal concerns, and non-journalistic standards.

Keywords: online news, citizen journalism, social media comments, social media news, breaking news, social media engagement theory

Introduction

Internet penetration across society has sparked debates about its impact on traditional media (Magade & Dwesini, 2021; Newman et al., 2014) and whether it will replace traditional media in the future. The growth of the internet has introduced new players in information gathering and dissemination, including citizen journalists, bloggers, and other networked individuals (Magade & Dwesini, 2021; Newman et al., 2014; Stroud et al., 2015a). It has empowered previously silent audiences to participate through direct opinion sharing (Dutceac Segesten et al., 2022; Reis et al., 2015; Stroud et al., 2015a; Young et al.,

2018). Consequently, mainstream media have adopted new sourcing, production, and publishing methods while balancing audience input with editorial values.

Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com, purchased the Washington Post and leveraged its social media presence to boost advertising and profitability amid declining newspaper sales (MindSea, 2019). With high internet use and the growing popularity of Social Networking Sites like Facebook and X, media consumers now have more power to engage with news content by sharing, liking, and commenting (Stroud et al., 2015). A study by Oywer (2021) indicated that consumers use comment sections on news websites as platforms for civil debate.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to determine how the Nation Media Group uses comments made on its Nation Facebook page to advance breaking news online.

Specific Objectives

- To describe the breaking news story development posted on the Nation Facebook page.
- To analyse the type of comments the audience posts on breaking news content shared by The Daily Nation on Facebook.
- To assess how audience comments influence Daily Nation editors' story advancement decisions.

Problem Statement

Scholars have determined that journalists and other media practitioners rely heavily on social media information for story ideas, breaking news, and providing updates on ongoing events (Bennett, 2016; Kim, Lewis, & Watson,

2018). According to Oywer (2021), audience-generated content, such as comments, can influence the policies established by media houses. However, there remains a gap in knowledge as to the extent to which comments on social media platforms are used by legacy media houses in Kenya to break and develop news stories. This study examined whether media houses, specifically NMG, monitor comment sections of their social media page and how they implement the feedback they receive in their stories.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the Social Media Engagement (SME) theory and the news values theory. Developed by Di Gangi and Wasko in 2016, the SME theory suggests that social media audiences engage with content through likes, comments, shares, and emojis. User engagement is shaped by social interactions among users and the features of the platform. As a media house, NMG receives feedback in the comments that can be categorised as uncivil, critical, corrective, and engaging, according to a study by Oywer (2021). The News Values Theory is used to help fill the gap in determining how social media editors at NMG use comments on Facebook to develop breaking news stories.

The news values theory, originating from Lippman's Public Opinion (1922), explains that to attract and maintain a steady audience, newspapers often venture beyond general news into areas such as society, scandal, sports, entertainment, advice columns, school updates, women's interests, shopping, cooking, board games, gardening, comics, and political bias (p.217). The news values theory explains the criteria and characteristics of potential news items that media practitioners use to determine how to develop news stories on social media (Al-Rawi et al., 2021). Araujo and van der Meer (2020) argue that legacy media often pick up on trending social media topics, which shape news coverage and influence journalistic practice by offering insight into audience interests. With the news values theory, one can predict how social media editors will choose to develop breaking news stories by the types of comments they receive on Facebook.

Breaking News and the Development of Breaking News on Social Media

Breaking news, according to Stănescu (2015), can be defined as any recent piece of news that implies a certain interest and which should be broadcast quickly. Breaking news has to comply with the following conditions: "it is extraordinary information, it is unique, it is an absolute novelty, it is of general interest, and it has a major impact" (Stănescu, 2015).

Since online news emerged in the 1990s, digital consumption has grown steadily, reaching 70% of news consumers by 2014 (Diel, 2017). The popularisation of online news harmed traditional news platforms, with the biggest impact felt on newspapers.

According to Diel (2017), over the last two decades, in the United States, a total of 16,200 newspaper jobs and 38,000 magazine jobs have been cut. Even in Africa, particularly in Kenya, media houses have been forced to retrench their staff while restructuring their newsrooms to become converged with a digital first approach (Nation, 2020; Oduor, 2021) whereby media houses first post news items on their online platforms, such as websites and social media platforms and while covering in-depth stories on their traditional platforms such as newspapers and television.

Types of Audience Commentary

The rise of real-time feedback on social media has introduced significant challenges for journalists, particularly in managing comments from colleagues, public figures, and the general public. Responding to or ignoring such feedback can be risky (Segesten et al., 2022; Oywer, 2021; Stroud et al., 2015b). Overall, navigating these challenges is essential for maintaining the integrity of journalism.

According to Stroud et al. (2015), comments posted on social media often lack deep meditative thought and are often irrelevant, uncivil, and misleading. Oywer (2021), however, found that comments on the websites of media houses are not only negative but also have positive impacts on the news production process. In her study, Oywer (2021) found that comments can be engaging, leading to

debate and discourse as well as corrective, which implies that they help editors disseminate correct information and remove errors.

Journalistic Independence in the Age of Citizen Journalism

Bruns and Highfield (2012) reference journalist Abbott Joseph Liebling's statement, "freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one," highlighting how media owners can engage in political lobbying that aligns with their interests. Amutabi (2013) supports this view, noting that many African governments nationalised media after independence to promote their agendas. In Kenya, for instance, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) became a mouthpiece for former President Moi's administration. While media organisations have the freedom to discuss various topics, individual journalists are often restricted to the themes permitted by their employers.

The evolution of the internet has led to the rise of citizen journalism, which Bruns and Highfield (2012) define as a collection of journalistic activities enabled by specific technologies. Participants voluntarily contribute and share content online through platforms like Reddit and Twitter, supplementing traditional reporting. Scholars note that citizen journalism emerged in response to the shortcomings of mainstream journalism (Bruns & Highfield, 2012; Mwangela, 2015).

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. Creswell (2009) emphasises that this integration enhances the overall strength of the research (p.2). A total of 450 comments from 45 breaking news stories on the Nation Facebook page were analysed. The researcher selected 10 comments per story, focusing on those that resonated with both the audience and the Nation's social media editors. Data collection took place from October 1st to 21st, 2023, using consecutive-day sampling (Bilon & Clemente, 2020). This approach examined three elements: comment types, editorial responses, and story development processes.

Nation Media Group was selected due to its dominant digital presence (3.6 million Facebook followers) and

75% newspaper market share in Kenya (Media Council of Kenya, 2021). The Nation posts an average of 100 stories on Facebook a day (Nation, 2023). The researcher analysed user comments on the Nation Facebook page through directed quantitative content analysis and in-depth interviews to understand how social media editors develop breaking news stories based on those comments. Content analysis involves applying a structured coding scheme to classify text and draw conclusions about its content (Rose et al., 2014). The characteristics of user comments, additive (Bennett, 2016), corrective, and media criticism (Oywer, 2021; Young et al., 2018), were used to create a code sheet, which helps researchers analyse and code the text according to specific criteria.

The researcher used a codebook developed from the three attributes of audience comments that can help advance a news story. The code sheet guided the content analysis of the first 10 comments on all the hard news stories of the day. The researcher trained a research assistant to monitor the comments in real time on the Facebook page as well as to note any changes to the original breaking news posts. To find out how the social media editors publishing the stories online use the comments section to develop the stories online, the researcher conducted an in-depth interview with online editors from the Nation Media Group.

Findings

Comment Categories

The study established that out of the 450 comments on breaking news stories, the majority of the comments were additive comments that added details to what NMG had posted as breaking news stories. The findings show that since breaking news stories are usually posted as just one sentence on Facebook, most of the commentators simply add details. This suggests that there is not much information for the commentators to either correct or criticise. The findings also show that corrective comments were the fewest, at only 2%, which suggests that the Nation's social media editors follow set procedures to eliminate most spelling and factual errors before posting on social media. The breakdown of the comments is as follows:



- * Additive: **94%** – audience adding eyewitness details, relevant context
- * Critical: **4%** – questioning editorial priorities
- * Corrective: **2%** – fact-checking or correcting errors

Under the overarching categories of additive, critical of the media and corrective comments, the researcher further sorted the comments into sub-categories. Under additive, the study established that comments fell under the four sub-categories as follows, in the tables below

Table 4.1 Categories of Additive Comments

	Frequency	Percent
Articulate comments from witnesses/participants that give more details	9	2.1%
Comments that add to the story and suggest further details	348	81.1%
Comments from authority figures (experts, institutions)	7	1.6%
Comments that give information that can be used for new story ideas	65	15.2%
Total	429	100%

Below are examples of additive comments from a selected breaking news post on Facebook:

October 4th, 2023- Police Reforms Taskforce: President Ruto accepts recommendations to move the Police Service, Prisons Service and NYS to the security sector.

“Security budgets are not particularly open to public scrutiny, and men are hungry.” (Facebook Commentator)

“What does that come with in terms of service delivery and working terms and conditions?” (Facebook Commentator)

Table 4.2 : Categories of Critical Comments

	Frequency	Percent
Comments questioning the accuracy, correctness, and fairness of journalism	4	21.1%
Comments that insult and attack individual journalists	1	5.3%
Disparaging comments about the stories Nation chooses to prioritize.	9	47.3%
Disparaging comments about the media house and the media business	5	26.3%
Total	19	100%

Below are examples of comments that were critical of the media:

October 10th 2023 - Flamboyant Advocate, Donald B Kipkorir writes to Muthaiga Country Club demanding the right of access.

“And that’s Breaking news, nation please style up”
(Facebook Commentator)

“How is this BREAKING news? Stupid gutter press”
(Facebook Commentator)

Table 4.3 Categories of Corrective Comments

	Frequency	Percent
Comments that provide evidence to challenge the accuracy of news content	0	0%
Comments highlighting grammatical, spelling and typing errors in stories	1	50%
User comments that indicate discrepancies from an indicated source	0	0%
Comments from an authority figure that point out mistakes in the stories.	1	50%
Total	19	100%

Below are examples of additive comments from a selected breaking news post on Facebook:

October 2nd 2023- Senator Jackson Mandago (right) Appears in Court for Mention of the Finland Scholarship Scandal Case.

“Drunkard editor, it’s “Jackson”, Jackson no to maru (is yours) ” (Facebook Commentator)

Editorial Workflow

Research revealed that Nation Media Group has an internal WhatsApp group for all editorial staff, where field journalists post breaking news. Editors select these posts and send them to sub-editors, who craft brief alerts. Social media editors then create a “Breaking News” card and share the story links on Facebook. Additionally, social media editors sometimes gather tips for breaking news from platforms like Facebook but are discouraged from using this information due to verification challenges. The process for sourcing and distributing breaking news involves several editorial steps, ensuring that posts are rigorously checked for accuracy.

Mismatch Between Perception and Practice

The findings suggest that, due to rampant misinformation and fake news, the Nation Media Group editorial staff relies mostly on information received from their journalists rather than citizen journalists. This suggests that citizen journalism is not highly trusted and is still not considered a viable source of news, considering that the information given would be difficult to verify.

Discussion

The findings reveal that breaking news posts on Facebook are updated and edited to correct factual, grammatical or spelling errors. The post is also edited to include information unavailable during initial posting. If the link to the story on the website was unavailable at the time of posting, the post is edited to include the link. Additionally, if a comment contains verifiable information- such as a photograph of unfolding events- that the newsroom did not have, social media editors, with the guidance of senior editors, can use the comments to add value to the breaking news stories they post. Bennett (2016) discusses how media houses usually grapple with the decision to be first or to be accurate online. This study confirms that Nation works to be the first with breaking news stories, opting to include additional information later.

The news values theory suggests that the entertainment and attractiveness values (Diel, 2017) of videos and photos on social media increase audience engagement, which is why Nation’s social media editors include images in breaking news alerts. Additionally, audience comments are often not used in stories due to concerns about accuracy and relevance, as well as the prevalence of fake news and potentially defamatory content, making editors cautious about unverified sources.

The study concludes that the Nation editorial staff does not extensively use comments to advance breaking news stories, contradicting previous findings by Bennett (2016) and Bruns and Highfield (2012). It shows that while comments can correct mistakes, breaking news primarily relies on internal sources and field journalists rather than social media. The Nation has established processes that limit the use of social media commentators as verified sources. While disproving the hypothesis may typically harm a researcher,

in this case, it indicates that the media industry is adapting to remain relevant in the social media era.

Conclusion

The study found that Facebook's comment section fosters debate and civil discourse among users. It also highlights the audience as a valuable content source. The study recommends that media organizations invest in digital platforms, like a digital letter to the editor, to enhance audience engagement in political, economic, and national discussions. These platforms should be well-regulated to maintain civility.

As newsrooms evolve, new departments like the social desk are emerging, requiring journalists to acquire additional skills to stay relevant in the digital media landscape. The researcher suggests that the industry should invest in hiring journalists for these digital roles and empower current

managers to handle digital media challenges. Academic institutions should also incorporate relevant skills into their curriculum, offering courses like Fact Checking for the Digital Journalist and Management of a Converged Newsroom.

Further Research

The study found that certain comments can enhance the value of content on media houses' social media platforms. The researcher suggests further studies to explore how these comments influence the development of breaking news stories on news websites. The research aims to determine if factors contributing to engagement on social media directly impact stories published on media houses' sites. The research recommends that empirical studies should be conducted to establish whether the engagement on social media directly affects the readership of news stories in newspaper readership.

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REFLECTIONS

"The **Applied Human Communicator** uses **green** as a sign of tranquility, other than a symbol that merely gives permission to "go"

Jade Communications



Government Communication, Young People (Gen Zs), Political Change and Development:

A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

DECEMBER 2024

By Denis Orina

Abstract

Effective communication between the government and young people, including university students, fosters civic engagement, ensures policy compliance, and builds trust in public institutions. Kenya has a youthful population, over 80% aged 35 years and below. This study aimed to explore the current communication strategies employed by the Government of Kenya, evaluate their effectiveness, and provide recommendations for improvement. Understanding how young people consume information and their preferences will help tailor communication efforts to reach and engage this demographic. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative data were analysed using statistical software to identify significant trends and correlations. Qualitative data from focus groups and interviews were coded and thematically analysed to extract key themes and insights. This study was guided by two theoretical underpinnings: diffusion of innovations theory and uses and gratification theory.

Background Information

Young people represent a significant portion of the population and are the future leaders and decision-makers. Effective communication helps engage them in civic activities, encouraging participation in democratic processes such as voting, advocacy, and community service (Lansdowne, 2002). When the government communicates transparently and effectively, it builds trust among young people. This trust is essential for fostering a positive

relationship between the youth and the state, ensuring that young people feel heard and valued. Government policies often directly impact young people, especially in areas like education, employment, health, and technology. Clear communication ensures that they understand how policies affect them and provides a channel for feedback, allowing the government to adjust and improve its initiatives.

By addressing the concerns and interests of young people, government communication helps promote social cohesion. It ensures that young people feel included in the national narrative and are less likely to be marginalised or alienated. The government can use communication to promote positive behaviours among young people, such as healthy lifestyles, responsible social media use, and respect for the law (Lansdowne, 2002). This is essential for nurturing a generation that makes a positive contribution to society. Young people are often early adopters of digital technologies.

The Government can effectively utilise social media, apps, and other digital platforms to reach and influence young people, where they spend a significant portion of their time, ensuring that government messages are delivered efficiently and effectively. Young people are often at the forefront of social change, advocating for issues such as climate action, equality, good governance, patriotism, and innovation. A Government communication that listens to and incorporates the views of young people can help

shape future policies that are more forward-looking and responsive to emerging trends.

Research Objectives

1. Assess the current government communication strategies and their effectiveness with young people and university students
2. Identify the most effective communication channels for reaching young people and university students.
3. Evaluate the content preferences and communication styles that resonate with young people and university students.
4. Develop recommendations for enhancing government communication strategies to better engage young people and university students.

Problem Statement

This research project aimed to develop a structured approach to investigating the communication gap between the government and young people/university students, to provide actionable insights for improving public communication strategies. The research sought to come up with the following:

- A comprehensive understanding of young people's and university students' communication preferences.
- An evaluation of current government communication strategies and their effectiveness.
- Practical recommendations for improving government communication with young people and university students.
- Insights that could inform broader public communication strategies and enhance civic engagement.

Literature Review

Young People and Political Participation

Modern research approaches identify that young people are becoming intolerant of information that does not represent a diversity of perspectives and opinions (Drok & Hermans, 2016; Kulchitskaya et al., 2019; Laufer, 2011; Lee, 2015; Vartanova, 2017). They are interested in the information that can be used for personality development or can help address social issues, among other things (Drok, 2017; Gyldensted, 2015; Haagerup, 2014; Nichols et al., 2006). Some studies suggest that young people are more involved in their everyday lives and the community they represent rather than in 'big-time politics'.



Such identification is not directly connected with a nation or government but has a more personal focus and, therefore, an equally integral structure (Blumler, 2011; Drok & Hermans, 2016; Drok et al., 2017). In the context of interaction between youth and politics, a theoretical issue of the motives that determine the behaviour of young people comes to the fore. The definition of motives in the context of a new understanding of the nature of political engagement is closely related to the social nature of politics and thus to such social determinants of personality as identity development and self-actualization (Beck, 2001), which is also confirmed by research on the current motives of media consumption by young people in Russia (Dunas & Vartanov, 2020).

A. Giddens refers to such actions as a manifestation of 'life politics' and defines it as a politics of self-actualization in a reflexively ordered environment' (Giddens, 1991). To capture this qualitative shift in media engagement in even more detail, researchers prefer to talk about participatory culture /convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006, 2019) or 'digital media culture' (Dunas & Vartanov, 2020), where new forms and motives for youth to produce and disseminate culture and knowledge take centre stage. The research discourse on the impact of social media on young people and their political engagement is diverse. On the one hand, the perception of new technology as 'disruptive' is still strong (Christensen, 2009; Gavra, 2020; Gureeva et al., 2020; Vartanova, 2017). Researchers warn us about the detrimental effects of digital media on young people; the latter are described as 'technology addicts' who have lost the ability to interact face-to-face (Kahne et al., 2009; Twenge, 2019).

Concerns in the public discourse are raised by the risk of online sexual exploitation and other forms of violence, such as physical and emotional abuse, bullying, trolling, etc. (Gladkova & Cherevko, 2020; Jenkins et al., 2016). Other studies suggest there is a link between smartphone use, depression, and suicide (Twenge, 2019). This discourse concludes with a strong recommendation to parents and teachers to limit young people's access to technology (Jenkins et al., 2016; Twenge, 2019).

This discourse fails because it associates perceptions of the detrimental effects of digital media with dependence on

them or the specific nature of their use. Access restrictions may indeed limit the damage, but they will also limit the positive effects of digital media. Specifically, one of the most common motives for using digital media by young people is the exercise of civil rights and liberties through reading online news, joining online political groups, and discussing political issues in social media (Cammaerts et al., 2014; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). What is more, actions that were once possible only in the space of social, physical reality are now performed online at a much lower cost, which increases participants' activity

Youth Demonstrations, Political Change and Development in Africa

Young people constitute the biggest proportion of the African population and are the most affected demographic group in any country's socio-economic and political developments. By 2019, almost 60% of Africa's population was estimated to be under the age of 25 years, making Africa the world's youngest continent. According to United Nations (UN) demographic projections, the median age in Africa in 2020 is 19.8 years. Almost 16 million young Africans – around 13.4% of the total labour force of 15–24-year-olds – are unemployed, more than 40% of young Africans consider their current living situation to be very bad or fairly bad, and 60% of Africans (especially youth) think that their governments are doing a very bad or fairly bad job at addressing the needs of young people.

Young people are not represented well and are marginalised and excluded from development processes in many African countries. This pushes them to participate in demonstrations as they try to change political systems that are perceived to be incompetent and responsible for the daily suffering of people. These demonstrations have challenged institutions of power, but their influence has failed to go beyond post-protest governments and development. This article provides an overview of some of the causes and achievements of youth-led demonstrations in many parts of Africa since the Arab Spring in 2010. It also highlights several lessons from the recent developments that occurred in Sudan in 2019, where protests gave rise to a coalition government with the military and a roadmap to a civilian government through elections in three years.

Young People, Social Media and Political Participation in Africa

The youth utilise the internet and social media for mobilisation and organising activities. They support each other during protests through blogging and popular social media platforms such as Twitter(X), Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. Popular youth-led groups, such as Y'en a Marre (Fed Up) of Senegal, Le Balai Citoyen (The Citizen's Broom) of Burkina Faso, the #FeesMustFall movement of South Africa, the Forces of Freedom and Change of Sudan, and Gen Z protesters in Kenya, have also become prominent movements spearheading demonstrations. Young people, such as Fou Malade and Aliou Sane of Y'en a Marre and Robert "Bobi Wine" Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (a musician, activist and politician from Uganda), Kasmuel McOure, Morara Kebaso have become inspirations during demonstrations.

These young leaders have led street protests, marches and rallies that have inspired the youth to unite and speak with one voice. However, as Honwana observed, youth demonstrations have not allowed young people to directly influence the post-protest governments. Even young activists struggle to translate the political grievances of protest movements into a broader political agenda. It is a challenge for most of these protests to maintain their momentum and establish long-lasting solutions for their initial purpose and objectives. This can be attributed to the fact that most youth movements are built out of discontent and are developed and coordinated from the streets and with little resources.

Hence, they are not strong enough to challenge and disentangle long-established systems, which, in most cases, are comprised of revolutionary political parties that have fought for independence and have been in existence for a considerable time. Such political systems are well-resourced and coordinated, and have influence in many local, regional, and international institutions; hence, the youth are easily infiltrated and manipulated and cannot remain active in the streets indefinitely. In most cases, such youth protests are dispersed through forceful means, which include police and military brutality.

Social Media, Internet and Technology Impact on Kenya's Gen Z Protests

The recent Gen-Z protests in Kenya led to various outcomes and repercussions, including the rejection of the 2024 Finance Bill, changes in cabinet secretaries, the dissolution of 47 cooperatives, the suspension of reappointments in the civil service, and the abolishment of unconstitutional offices. But what are the implications of these events for Kenya and the African continent as a whole? Firstly, the youth challenged the established political order and tested the traditional political settlement theories that suggest power is primarily held by political elites.

These events in Kenya could potentially lead to a shift in political power and the onset of a "co-shared political power" era, characterised by increased public scrutiny of the state's affairs. Secondly, Gen-Z has redefined the organisation and conduct of protests. By using technology, especially social media, to coordinate and validate their concerns, garner support from allies – including millennials and civil society – and communicate and orchestrate peaceful nationwide protests, they have reshaped the negative perception often associated with demonstrations involving violence and destruction.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Quantitative Methods:

Surveys: Questionnaires were distributed to a representative sample of young people and university students to gather data on their media consumption habits, content preferences, and perceptions of government communication.

Analytics: Social media analytics and web traffic data were analysed to identify trends and patterns in engagement with government content.

Qualitative Methods:

Focus Groups:

Focus groups (10-15) with young people and university students provided more profound insights into their attitudes, preferences, and suggestions for improvement.



Interviews:

In-depth interviews with communication experts, university administrators, and government officials offered perspectives on current strategies and challenges.

Significance/Justification of the study

This research will contribute to understanding how the government can effectively communicate with young people and university students, thereby enhancing public engagement and trust. By adapting communication strategies to meet the preferences of this digital-native generation/Gen Z, the government can foster a more informed and participatory citizenry.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using statistical software to identify significant trends and correlations. Qualitative

data from focus groups and interviews were coded and thematically analysed to extract key themes and insights.

Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the research and their rights. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study, with data securely stored and used solely for research purposes.

Findings

Interaction between the government and young people in the social networking space

As part of the Applied Human Communication Research at the Centre, we conducted a survey of 250 young people

aged 18 to 30, including students from various universities in Kenya. During the design of the empirical study, we considered the geographical criterion. We decided to use the ratio of university students from the Nairobi area to those from other regions as the key sampling ratio for the pilot phase of the study. Nairobi County has a significant share of universities; thus, more students study within the county than in other regions (CUE,2020), to the tune of 55% and the share of regional students is 45% in the population universe. This ratio was used for the sampling frame.

The survey findings revealed that the absolute majority of the respondents (Figure 1) are interested in and willing to receive information about what is going on in the social and political sphere (80.5% of the respondents answered 'Yes' and 'Rather Yes'); a little over half of the respondents (Figure 2) are already engaged in civic activities (57.7%), and the absolute majority (Figure 3) considers it necessary to engage in civic activities (88.3%).

The top three most interesting media consumption topics for young students (Figure 3) are: human and civil rights (79.3%); employment and standards of living (69.1%); science and education (59.7%).

Figure 1.

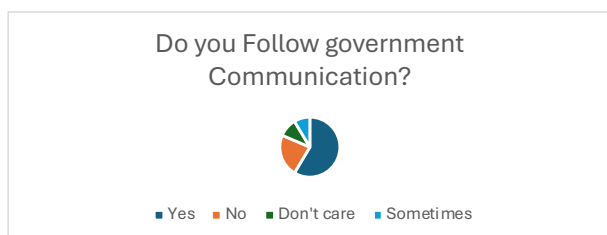
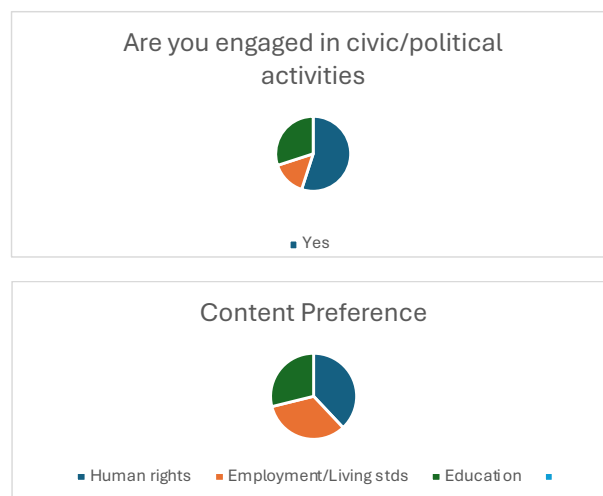


Figure 2



Perception of Government Communication

- **Lack of Relevance:** Young people often felt that government communication lacked relevance to their lives and concerns. They expressed a desire for more relatable and youth-centric content.
- **Trust Deficit:** Many young people expressed low trust in government communication, citing a perception of inauthenticity, lack of transparency, lies and broken promises.
- **Central Command Centre:** The participants expressed dissatisfaction and confusion about who really represents the government of Kenya.
- **Digital Divide:** While young people and students are highly digitally savvy, they highlighted inconsistencies in the government's digital presence, their preferred platforms being TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and X.

“Utilise data analytics to understand young people's preferences and tailor communication accordingly.”

Denis Orina Ogato

Preferred Communication Channels

- **Social media:** Overwhelmingly, participants preferred social media platforms (TikTok, Instagram, X) as their primary channels for information consumption.
- **Influencer Partnerships:** Young people and students expressed interest in the government collaborating with influencers to reach a wider audience and build credibility.
- **Interactive Platforms:** Platforms allowing for direct interaction, such as Q&A sessions and live stream use of podcasts, were seen as effective engagement tools.

Message Content and Style

- **Authenticity and Transparency:** Participants emphasised the importance of genuine and transparent communication, free from jargon and complex language.
- **Visual Appeal:** Short, visually appealing content with clear and concise messaging was preferred.
- **Storytelling:** Young people and students responded well to stories and case studies that highlighted the impact of government initiatives.
- **Brevity:** Young people prefer broken down/synthesised information that appeals to them, not long, bulky reports in a technical register.

Engagement and Participation

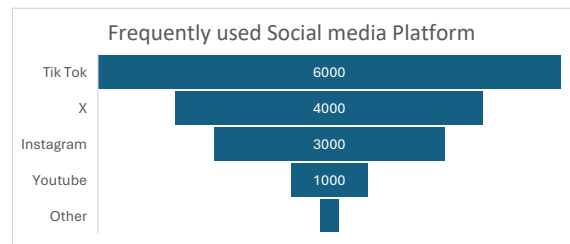
- **Opportunities for Input:** Participants expressed a desire to be involved in decision-making processes and provide feedback on government policies and want one of their own at the decision-making table.
- **Civic Engagement:** Many expressed interest in participating in various activities and initiatives promoted by the government.
- **Gamification:** Incorporating gamification elements into government campaigns was seen as a potential way to increase engagement.

Social Media Usage

Frequently Used Platforms:

The most frequently used social media platforms among the youth are:

- TikTok (85%)
- X (formerly Twitter) (75%)
- Instagram (70%)
- YouTube (65%)



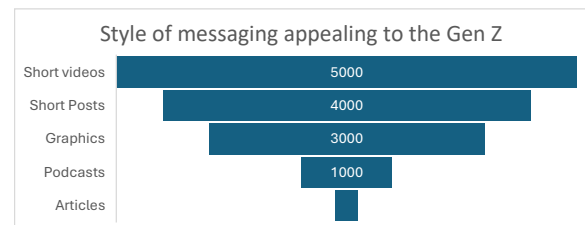
TikTok is a short video social platform widely preferred by Gen Z. The reason behind its popularity is the humour and cultural references that make it easier for young people to express their dissatisfaction with the government. Gen Z also uses the platform to share their experiences with other young people. Gen Z spends a great deal of their time on social media. It was noted that over 75% of young people spend more than eight hours a day on social media.

Content Preferences

Types of Preferred Content:

The youth enjoy the following types of content, in order of preference:

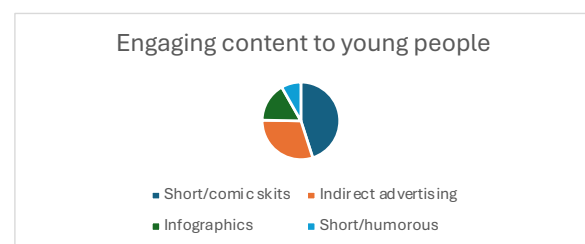
1. Short videos (90%)-memorable, entertaining and informative
2. Short posts (80%)
3. Graphics (70%)
4. Podcasts (60%)
5. Articles (50%)



Engaging Content:

The most engaging content for the youth includes:

- Short and comic skits (85%)
- Indirect advertising (70%)
- Infographics (65%)
- Short, humorous posts (60%)



Government Information Visibility

Seventy per cent of young people rarely or never come across government information on the internet unless they intentionally search for it.

Followed Government Social Media Platforms:

Some of the government social media platforms followed by the youth include:

- Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) **(55%)**
- Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) **(50%)**
- Statehouse **(45%)**

Perceptions of Government Information

Eighty per cent of the youth perceive government information as bulky, boring, and untrustworthy. They find the communication ineffective due to poor packaging and a pre-existing negative attitude towards the government.

Memorable Government Campaigns

Campaigns: Some of the most memorable government campaigns for the youth include:

- Angamiza Malaria **(75%)**
- COVID-19 **(70%)**
- Eyes on the Road by NTSA **(65%)**
- Kenyans for Kenya **(60%)**
- Kuwa True Campaign **(55%)**

Memorability Factors:

These campaigns were memorable due to:

- Consistency **(80%)**
- Timeliness **(75%)**
- Memorable jingles and catchy phrases **(70%)**
- Use of influential young people **(65%)**

Conclusion

There is a general dissatisfaction and confusion about how the Kenyan government communicates with young people. Young citizens generally feel alienated from the government's operations. They think there is no central communication organ/Centre for the government. Gen Z doesn't trust any communication from the government, referring to it as 'constant lies' that don't represent their aspirations and needs. The young people feel disenfranchised from participating in national issues. They opine that the government is not transparent and unaccountable.

There is a clear manifestation of the economic and social frustrations echoed by Gen Z owing to high unemployment rates and a skyrocketing cost of living; these young individuals are taking to the streets and social media to demand change. They feel that the government has done little to address their pressing matters, such as employment, education, health, representation, and access to basic necessities.

This generation is experiencing firsthand the impact of economic instability, marked by rising prices for basic necessities such as food, housing, and education. This critical population are also grappling with depression that has left a majority of them with no option but to take their own lives. The high unemployment rate further exacerbates their challenges, leaving many young people feeling disenfranchised and disillusioned about their future prospects.

Gen Z spends most of their time on social media platforms like X, Instagram, and TikTok, urging the government to utilise these spaces and tools to communicate with them.

From these key findings, a critical gap in the government's communication with young people is evident; there is an urgent need to understand their concerns and implement solutions that address their political, economic, and social challenges. Young people should be represented in decision-making processes on issues that affect them. To effectively communicate with Gen Zs, the government must adopt a digital-first approach, prioritise authenticity, and create opportunities for engagement. Through this, the government can build trust and foster a more informed and engaged population.

Recommendations

- **Leveraging digital technologies:** Develop a comprehensive digital communication strategy that leverages social media and other digital platforms, mostly TIKTOK, Podcasts and Instagram. (FACEBOOK is a parent/repository platform)
- **Digital-first strategy:** Develop a comprehensive digital communication strategy that leverages social media and other digital platforms.
- **Content creation:** Invest in creating engaging, youth-centric content that is visually appealing and easy to consume.

- Nature of content: Invest in creating engaging, youth-centric content that is visually appealing and easy to consume.
- Simple, palatable language: Synthesise/analyse data and tailor communication accordingly.
- A centralised communication platform: Build an app/platform consolidating all the government communication.
- Relatable/approachable/cordial/appealing personality: The government communicator(s) should inspire/be likeable/trustworthy generally to the young people.
- Communication personality: Skilled professional communicator/not PR/Spin/not Journalists-Strike a balance
- Trust building/involvement/public participation: Prioritise transparency, accountability, and authenticity in government communication on matters relevant to Gen Zs. Listening government.
- Influencer partnerships: Collaborate with notable influencers to reach a wider young audience.
- Two-way communication: Create opportunities for dialogue and feedback through interactive platforms.
- Data-driven approach: Utilise data analytics to understand young people's preferences and tailor communication accordingly.

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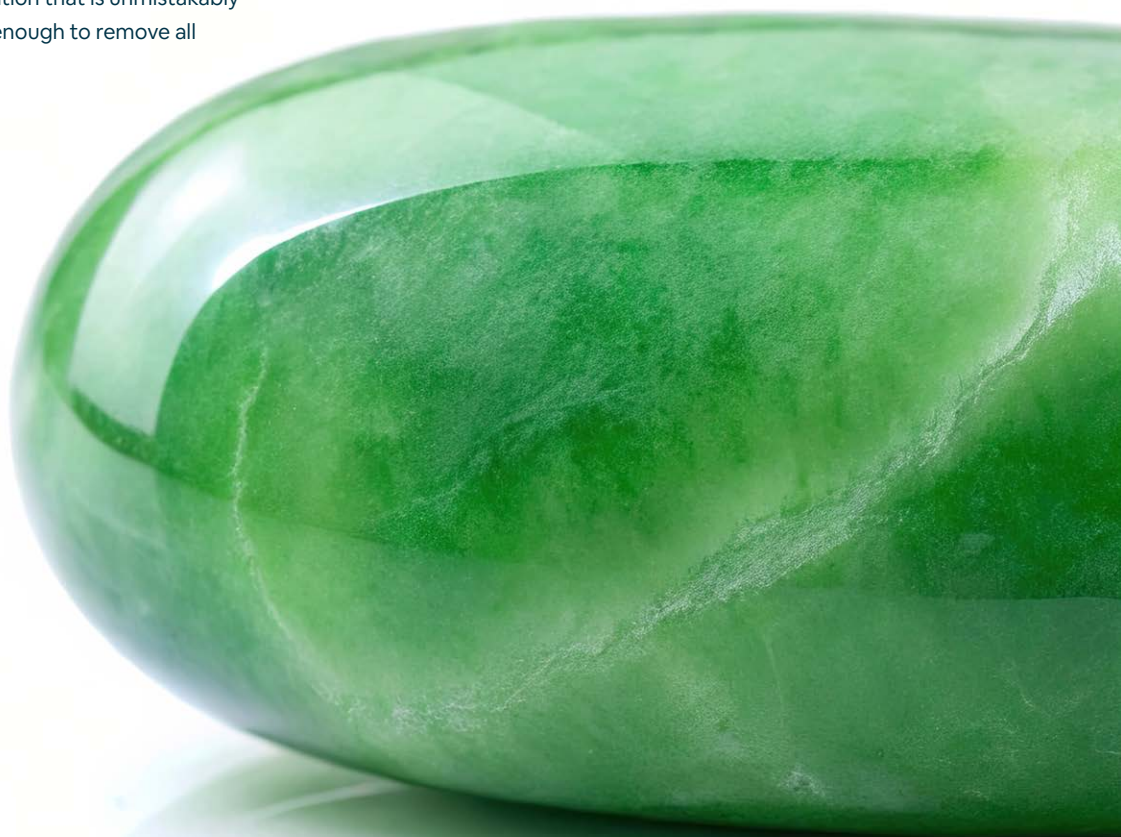
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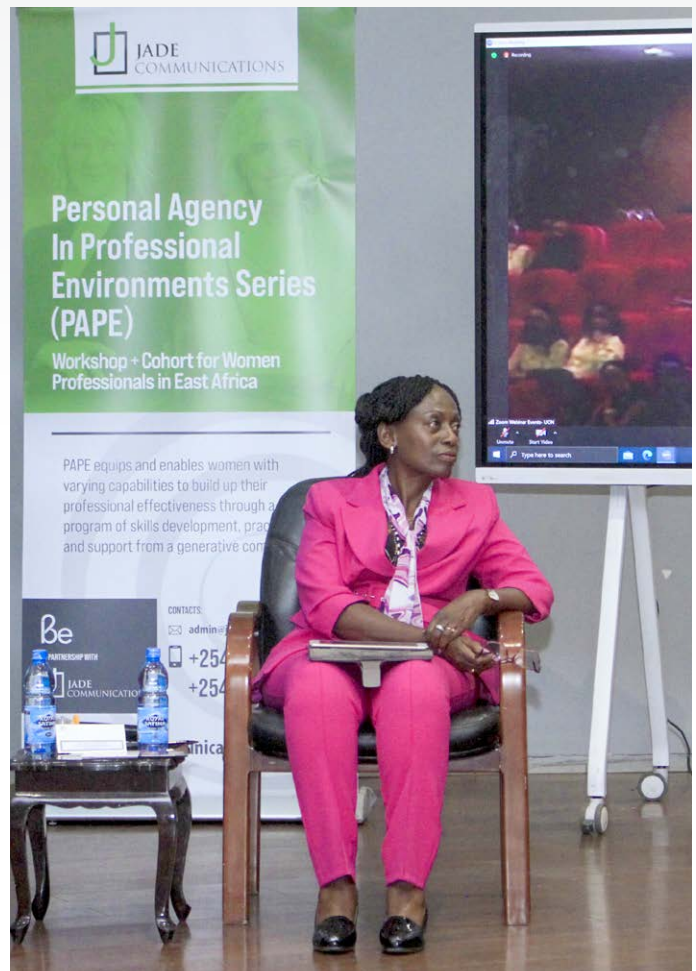
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Virtual Socialisation Theory:

A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH DIGITAL PLATFORMS

By Agewa Wainaina

Abstract

The virtual socialisation theory (VST) offers a conceptual framework for examining how individuals initiate, cultivate, and maintain interpersonal connections within digitally mediated environments. Building on social penetration theory and hyperpersonal communication theory, VST examines the dynamics of relational development across digital communication platforms. Rather than viewing digital interaction as a diminished form of “real” communication, VST considers it a distinct social terrain with its own norms, affordances, and emotional possibilities. At its core, the theory outlines a progression from surface-level exchanges to emotionally substantive interactions, highlighting mechanisms such

as controlled self-presentation, perceived anonymity, and platform architecture. It also accounts for the increasingly non-linear and accelerated trajectories of intimacy that emerge in virtual spaces, shaped not only by user intent but also by algorithmic curation and interface design. VST delineates a set of conditions under which meaningful bonds can emerge and persist online, while acknowledging structural and contextual limits, including disparities in digital access, cross-cultural variance, and the difficulty of capturing affective depth in mediated exchanges. Ultimately, VST aims to reposition digital socialisation as a legitimate and complex form of human relating, calling for more nuanced theoretical and empirical attention

to how connection, identity, and emotional resonance are negotiated in an era where much of our social world unfolds on screens.

Background

The primary factor that drives communication is the desire to express thoughts, ideas, emotions, and information. It is instinctive for human beings to feel compelled to share their thoughts (Ganmote, 2019). Before the 20th Century and the advent of the Internet, long-distance communication relied primarily on written correspondence. Human beings have an innate need to form relationships with others and thus find ways of keeping in communication with each other, primarily through letter writing. Shulman et al. (1994) found that adolescents, particularly girls, sought intimate friendships and imaginary companions through pen pals. Pen-pal writing created a communication platform where people could share experiences, cultivate mutual feelings, and support each other—elements that may have sometimes been lacking in their local relationships (Malinen & Kaarninen, 2024).

In the digital age, the need for sharing experiences, thoughts, and feelings persists. The evolution of technology today makes it easier for people to fulfil this need to engage with others in numerous ways. The development of Web 2.0 has enabled people to participate in diverse online discussions (Community, 2019). However, despite the ability to engage in public discourse (Yujie et al., 2022) and give their opinion to mass audiences, people still crave intimate relationships and seek ways to fulfil this desire. People achieve this through online dating sites, social media and other messaging platforms. Research shows that online anonymity significantly affects how people socialise and behave in public and private digital spaces (Gamage, 2022; Wang, 2018; Young et al., 2018). These communication dynamics, therefore, necessitate the need to develop a theory that captures how modern people communicate with each other via digital platforms, how they form close relationships with each other virtually, how they self-disclose and the factors that surround the self-disclosure.

Existing theories of interpersonal and computer-mediated communication, such as Social Penetration Theory and the Hyperpersonal Model, have offered valuable insights into

how relationships develop and are maintained. However, these frameworks were largely conceived in the context of face-to-face or early computer-mediated communication, and they do not adequately capture the unique dynamics of today's digitally mediated environments. Furthermore, existing models tend to treat digital interaction as a lesser or secondary form of "real" communication, overlooking the legitimacy of online spaces as distinct social domains with their own norms, affordances, and emotional richness. The theoretical gap necessitates developing virtual socialisation theory (VST), which aims to establish digital interactions as complex, emotionally meaningful, and culturally embedded forms of relating, while also addressing structural challenges such as digital access inequalities and cross-cultural differences.

Proposed Theory

Virtual socialisation theory (VST) addresses these theoretical limitations. It seeks to explain how relationships can be created and maintained despite vast geographical distances through the aid of digital communication technology, such as social media (Instagram, X, Facebook, Reddit), virtual meeting rooms (Zoom, Teams), messaging apps (WhatsApp, Slack) and email. Building on social penetration theory, VST demonstrates how a relationship can evolve from the superficial to the intimate through digital communication platforms.

The onion model of SPT (Carpenter & Greene, 2015) describes how every layer of the onion represents the layers of a person, with the outer layer representing their outward image. Using the same metaphor in VST, the outward layer of a person is represented by their profile picture and profile information on a digital means of communication. This information appears superficial, but it is more comprehensive compared to the information one has access to in a face-to-face scenario. In digital communication, one can see a person's name, age, nationality, sex, current residence, place of employment, and educational background, depending on the platform being used. Personal layers get peeled back when they:

1. Accept your friend/follow request. That way, you get access to more information about them, such as the friends/ connections they have on that networking

platform, their photographs, and other information that is not made public. This gives one a certain level of privacy while still making oneself open to intimacy (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004).

2. Start interacting with you through direct messages and allow you to engage and interact with their platform.
3. When they start sharing more intimate details about themselves that are not on the platform.
4. When the two people in the relationship find other ways to communicate with each other off very public social networking sites, such as WhatsApp, or even by sharing their phone numbers and email addresses for more intimate one on one communication.

Tenets of the Proposed

Virtual Socialisation Theory

1. It predicts the stages that online relationships go through as people meet and start self-disclosing to one another. For example, one can determine that a relationship with someone online can start when a friend/follower request is first sent.
2. It can also determine and demonstrate the decline of the relationship. When people stop interacting as much online, they stop directly messaging each other, and following conflicts, they may block each other, hence preventing future interactions.
3. It legitimises online socialisation and demonstrates that digital communication is not a diminished version of face-to-face interaction but a distinct social arena with its own norms, structures, and emotional depth. For instance, the researcher met and developed a friendship with someone they worked with at an online job. They are still friends, even though they live on different sides of the continent and have never met in person. They regularly communicate via online channels such as email, Slack, WhatsApp and Instagram.
4. It demonstrates the progression of relational depth in virtual contexts. Relationships in digital spaces move from surface-level exchanges (likes, emojis, short comments) to emotionally substantive interactions (private chats, voice notes, video calls). For example, an acquaintance on Instagram initially interacts through reactions but later transitions to private DMs, sharing personal struggles.
5. It explains the acceleration and non-linearity of intimacy. Unlike face-to-face relationships, virtual connections

often skip traditional stages of gradual disclosure as explained by the Social Penetration Theory and can intensify rapidly. This acceleration is evident in situations like support or advice groups, such as those found on Reddit or Facebook, where members expose intimate personal information to others very early on in the interactions.

6. There is perceived anonymity and safety from online interactions, which act as relational catalysts. Anonymity and distance in digital spaces can lower inhibitions, encouraging disclosure and intimacy that may not occur offline. For example, people are more open to talking about highly personal things, for example, on the Reddit subreddit, r/relationship advice, where people talk about aspects of their relationships that they do not feel comfortable talking about with people they know in real life.
7. It is characterised by structural and contextual constraints. VST is unevenly shaped by access to digital infrastructure, cultural norms, and linguistic barriers. For example, a rural Kenyan user with intermittent internet, who cannot sustain the same patterns of digital intimacy as an urban European user with unlimited connectivity.

Distinguishing VST from Existing Theories

While VST draws inspiration from established theories, it presents a new framework designed specifically for the realities of digital communication:

1. Social Penetration Theory (SPT) versus VST

- SPT, as described by Altman and Taylor in 1973 (Carpenter & Greene, 2015), is a concept that suggests interpersonal relationships deepen through gradual self-disclosure, much like peeling an onion.
- However, SPT was developed in the context of in-person interactions. It does not fully consider:
- The anonymity and controlled self-presentation (privacy) afforded by digital platforms (Ben-Ze'ev, 2004),
- Non-linear online intimacy development often manifests when individuals overshare personal information early in a relationship (Gamage, 2022).
- The powerful influence of algorithms, curated content, and indirect forms of communication—such as likes, retweets, and story views—plays a crucial role in fostering meaningful connections.

2. Hyperpersonal Communication

Theory versus VST

- Hyperpersonal communication theory, developed by Joseph Walther in 1996 (J. B. Walther, 1996; J. Walther & Whitty, 2021), explains how CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) can become more intimate than face-to-face due to selective self-presentation and idealisation.
- However, it fails to explain how these connections evolve and are maintained over time, or how different digital tools (such as messaging apps versus video calls) facilitate gradual self-disclosure.

Limitations of Virtual Socialisation Theory

While the virtual socialisation theory (VST) provides a structured lens through which to understand how digital communication fosters connection, it is not without limitations:

1. Platform Dependency: VST assumes users have access to and fluency with digital platforms, which may exclude older generations, digitally illiterate users, or populations in low-tech regions.
2. Assumes Willingness to Disclose: VST presumes that people want to self-disclose in a linear or structured manner — but many users maintain shallow, performative, or anonymous online interactions.
3. Difficulty Measuring Intimacy: It may be challenging to objectively assess the intimacy achieved in virtual spaces, as online communication lacks non-verbal cues, making it hard to interpret intent and depth.
4. Contextual Influences Not Considered: VST may overlook external social, cultural, or economic contexts that influence how and why people form online relationships (e.g., diaspora communities, refugee communication, gender norms).

Conclusion

The current reality of working from home, online classes and a “global village” has given rise to people forming and maintaining relationships through online platforms. The proposed virtual socialisation theory offers a framework for understanding the process through which individuals initiate, develop, maintain and eventually end these relationships. VST explains and predicts the nature and

evolution of relationships fostered online, going beyond the already existing theories that explain human communication as well as computer-mediated communication. Unlike earlier interpersonal or computer-mediated communication theories, VST moves beyond treating digital interaction as secondary to face-to-face communication. Instead, it positions online relational practices as legitimate and complex forms of socialisation, shaped by perceived anonymity, non-linear relationship development and the structural and cultural nuances involved.

VST describes how relationships evolve in virtual spaces and predicts the conditions under which they flourish or dissolve. VST offers scholars and practitioners tools to better understand digital connection, whether in personal relationships, online learning environments, or professional collaboration. However, this study also recognises the theory’s limitations, such as unequal access to digital technologies, cultural and linguistic barriers that shape and constrain virtual socialisation. Future research should explore strategies to address these disparities, while also testing VST across diverse cultural and technological contexts. This proposed theory, therefore, helps to establish the digital space as a legitimate communication environment whereby relationships can grow and thrive. It allows academics, communications experts, policymakers, and industry professionals to understand the dynamics of online relationships that can ultimately be used to enhance communication in this sphere.

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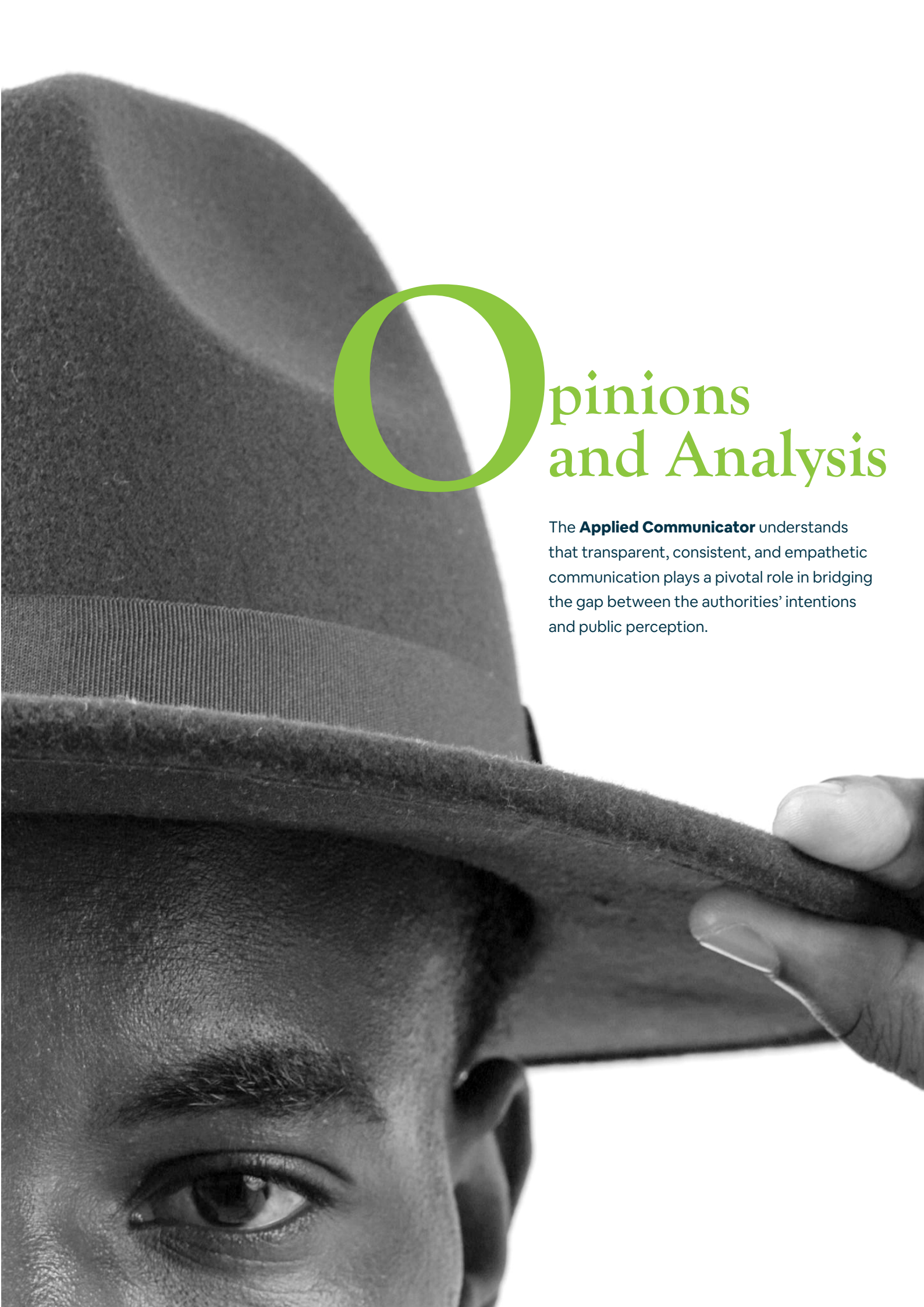
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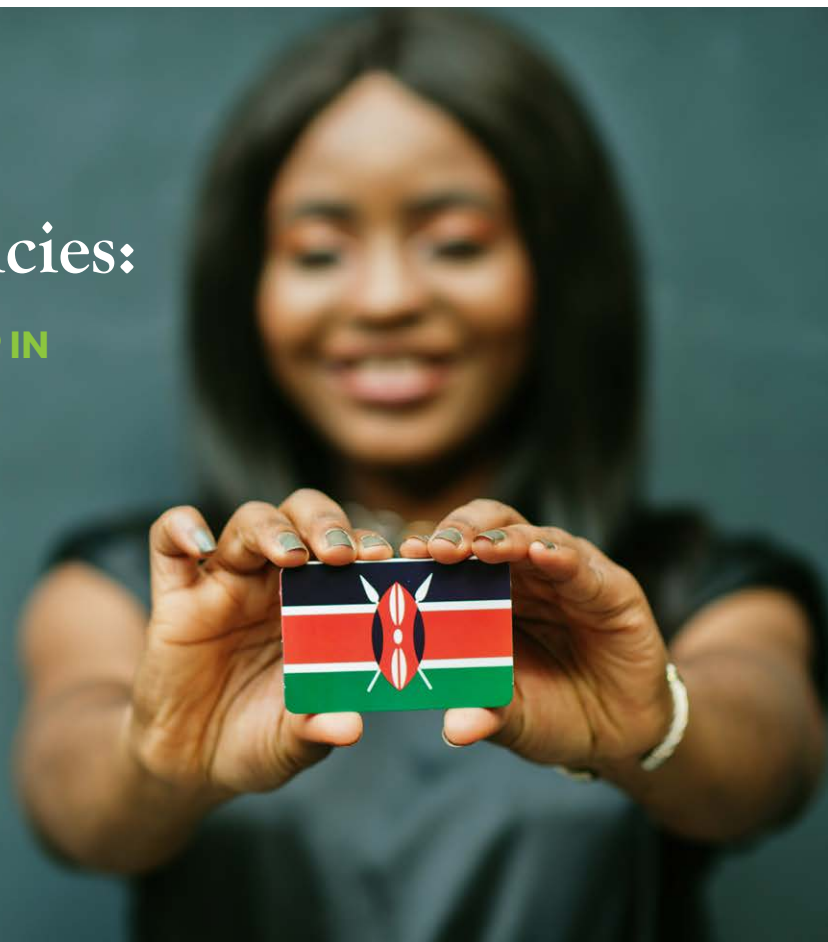
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Silent Citizens, Challenging Policies:

THE COMMUNICATION GAP IN KENYAN GOVERNANCE

Dr. Peter Mwencha

Kenya stands at a critical juncture where governance reforms, economic recovery, and social cohesion all hinge on effective policy communication. Yet, far too often, government policies struggle to be implemented, not because of a lack of merit, but because citizens are either unaware of them, misinformed about their goals, or excluded from the process of shaping and understanding them.



Kenya stands at a critical juncture where governance reforms, economic recovery, and social cohesion all hinge on effective policy communication. Yet, far too often, government policies struggle to be implemented, not because of a lack of merit, but because citizens are either unaware of them, misinformed about their goals, or excluded from the process of shaping and understanding them.

A closer look at the struggling policy implementation reveals a profound fault line in the country's governance. Despite the policy reforms meticulously crafted in Nairobi's corridors of power, citizens increasingly feel excluded, misled, or ignored. The culprit is not always poor policy design, but a pervasive failure of strategic communication.

Communication, in this context, is not merely about press releases and speeches. It is a critical and active process that translates complex policy into tangible action, incorporates citizen feedback, and builds credibility through consistency. In Kenya, the breakdown of this delicate chain has

repeatedly derailed the country's most ambitious reforms, leaving behind a trail of public frustration and a deeper erosion of trust.

Competency-Based Curriculum Introduction

The rollout of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) serves as a potent illustration. When the government announced it as a replacement for the rigid 8-4-4 system, the vision was bold: to nurture creativity, practical skills, and critical thinking for the 21st century. Yet, the rollout was met with widespread public confusion and resistance. Parents across the country voiced complaints about the hidden costs of specialised project materials, books, and other resources that strained already thin household budgets. The burden was a source of deep frustration, particularly for low-income families.

Meanwhile, teachers faced an acute shortage of training and inadequate school infrastructure, leaving many ill-prepared to deliver on the promise of the new, hands-on curriculum. The stark mismatch between the government's inclusive

message and the lived experience of citizens bred cynicism, proving that a policy's credibility is inherently tied to its implementability.

2024 Finance Bill Crisis

A more recent and dramatic illustration is the 2024 Finance Bill. Seeking to raise revenue and pay off the national debt, the Government proposed new taxes on essential items, including bread, cooking oil, and financial services. The public outcry was immediate and overwhelming. More than 70 per cent of Kenyans voiced their opposition to the bill during parliamentary hearings, but the decentralised, youth-led movement that followed captured the nation's attention. Mobilising through TikTok, Instagram, and X, young activists translated the bill's complex legal jargon into simple, accessible narratives, galvanising resistance across the country and bridging traditional tribal and ethnic divides.

The Government's initial response was to deploy force. Human rights reports detail police crackdowns that left dozens of people dead and hundreds injured. This heavy-handed response communicated its own powerful message: that the state would rather suppress dissent than listen to its citizens. Anger mounted, transforming the protests from a simple rejection of a tax bill into a broader rejection of leadership itself. Eventually, under immense pressure from the sustained protests, the president withdrew the bill. For many, this was a defining moment, illustrating how a perception of failure to listen, compounded by heavy-handed responses, could lead to the collapse of an entire fiscal strategy.

Communication and Policy Challenges

These case studies reveal a recurring pattern: policies are challenged not only because of their design, but also because of their communication. The Kenyan state often treats communication as an afterthought, relying on fragmented messaging or assuming that technical explanations will be enough to win support. But citizens do not evaluate policies on paper. They judge them through the lens of daily life, household economics, and, most importantly, their trust in leadership. Inconsistent messaging and a lack of clarity about how they benefit ordinary citizens mean that well-meaning measures are often met with scepticism and resistance.

The problem runs deeper than press statements. As experts have noted, meaningful public participation in policymaking enhances legitimacy and facilitates easier implementation. Many Kenyans feel that policies are secretly drafted and announced without meaningful input. This exclusion breeds resistance. When government entities deliver contradictory messages, credibility quickly erodes, and even well-meant promises sound hollow.

In the new digital communication battleground, Kenya's young population is not waiting for official explanations. They are interpreting, debating, and amplifying policies on their own terms online. If the government does not engage with credible, timely communication, it entirely cedes the ground.

Enhancing Policy Success

To enhance policy uptake, effective communication must be two-way. Integrating citizen feedback into the policy process is as vital as disseminating information. Platforms such as public consultations, town hall meetings, and social media engagement can provide invaluable insights into how policies are working on the ground. When communication is participatory, citizens feel empowered and are more likely to support government initiatives.

Ultimately, communication is not an accessory to governance; it is governance. In a democracy, citizens must not only be governed, but also be informed, heard, and engaged. To rebuild public trust, policymakers must elevate communication to a central governance strategy. This means fostering institutional frameworks that coordinate messaging across ministries and investing in trained communicators who can engage citizens with honesty and clarity.

It means embedding public participation into the DNA of policymaking, not just as a box to tick, but as a genuine practice of co-creation. Crucially, it means aligning communication with implementation capacity, so that what the government says matches what the government can deliver. Until policymakers make these changes, the country risks seeing good policies fail under the weight of public disillusionment.



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Rethinking Policy Communication Through the Lens of Strategic and Applied Communication in Kenya:

ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL HEALTH INSURANCE ACT AND THE FINANCE ACT 2024

By Elvis Were

This article examines policy communication through the practical lens of Applied Communication, using Kenya's Social Health Insurance Act (SHIA) and the Finance Act, 2024, as the primary case study. It demonstrates how communication failures can undermine technically sound policies, erode public trust, and provoke backlash. Drawing from media analysis, stakeholder reactions, institutional responses, and legal instruments, the article highlights the importance of framing, participatory design, and message clarity. It evaluates how inadequate planning, limited engagement, and jargon-laden messaging contributed to resistance, and proposes communication as a strategic—not supplementary—element in policy success.

It also critiques the transactional nature of policy rollout and examines the potential of the Public Participation Bill to institutionalise citizen voice in governance.

Anchored in applied communication theory, the article advances a framework for strategic, inclusive, and dialogic policy communication. It concludes by positioning communicators as integral policy actors, essential for designing transparent, human-centred governance in Kenya and beyond.

Understanding Policy Communication in the Context of Applied Communication

Defining Policy Communication

Policy communication refers to the structured dissemination and negotiation of public policies between the government and its constituents. It is a core function of public administration, crucial for democratic participation, policy legitimacy, and effective service delivery. More than just informing the public, policy communication involves active listening, co-creating narratives, and mediating between technical complexity and public understanding.

It integrates mass media, digital platforms, community dialogues, and interpersonal channels to foster inclusive and informed citizen engagement.

Applied Communication: A Strategic Governance Lens

Applied communication, as a discipline, is concerned with using communication theories and practices to address real-world challenges. In public policy, it encompasses audience analysis, message design, media strategies, and participatory tools to ensure that policies are understood, accepted, and embraced. Strategic communication is a core component of applied communication—it is purposeful, evidence-based, and oriented toward achieving specific goals. When anchored in human-centred design, it enhances the credibility, clarity, and emotional resonance of policy messages.

Case Study One in Communication Breakdown and Policy Contestation: The Social Health Insurance Act (SHIA)

Legislative Genesis and Aspirations

The Social Health Insurance Act (SHIA), enacted in 2023, was framed as a key pillar in Kenya's ambitious quest to realise Universal Health Coverage (UHC), a constitutional right enshrined in Article 43(1)(a) of the Constitution, guaranteeing the right to the highest attainable standard of health. The law aimed to replace the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) with a more inclusive and tiered health financing framework, comprising three main funds: the Primary Healthcare Fund, the Social Health Insurance Fund, and the Emergency, Chronic, and Critical Illness Fund.

The restructured law was designed to promote equity in healthcare access and ensure sustainability in health financing, covering a broader population, including informal sector workers, rural populations, and vulnerable groups. However, while the structural realignment appeared promising in its bid to establish a more robust health financing system, communication missteps in the planning and implementation phases proved to be a significant obstacle in achieving the intended goals. Despite its policy merit, SHIA lacked a foundational communication strategy

that could have translated its technical provisions into accessible and widely accepted reforms. This omission had severe consequences in the way the public perceived the policy, with misinformation and confusion driving public discontent.

The Silence Preceding SHIA

In the lead-up to the official rollout of SHIA, a glaring communication vacuum existed, exacerbated by insufficient engagement with the public, key stakeholders, and civil society. While Parliament did hold public hearings, these forums failed to effectively convey the bill's content, goals, and practical implications to a broader audience. Government briefings to the media were vague, focusing primarily on high-level rhetoric about achieving UHC but offering little in terms of explaining the policy specifics or its implications for citizens. For example, the Hansard records from the National Assembly show that while members of Parliament passed the bill quickly, there was limited discussion on the policy's communication and outreach strategy. Instead, the emphasis was placed on meeting donor-driven deadlines for health financing goals, which left little room for public-facing education. The rush to pass SHIA disregarded the constitutional requirement for public participation in policy formation and ignored the opportunity to engage citizens in meaningful discourse about the impending reforms.

The Rise of Rumour and Disinformation in the Absence of Dialogue

In the absence of clear and consistent communication, public discourse surrounding SHIA was primarily shaped by rumours, misinformation, and fear-mongering. In urban areas, social media platforms such as WhatsApp became breeding grounds for unverified claims, some of which took root as public truths. One viral rumour suggested that biometric registration for the program would be linked to tax enforcement, which fuelled fears that the government would use personal health data to track down tax evaders. The absence of a responsive communication strategy from the Ministry of Health allowed these narratives to gain traction unchecked.

Public forums, such as barazas, were held, but they were characterised by uncertainty. For instance, many rural

dwellers were unsure whether they would need to register at all, given the informal nature of their livelihood. The lack of community-specific messaging and localised engagement left many feeling excluded from the policy, leading to scepticism and resistance.

A particularly striking example of miscommunication occurred in Kiambu, where rumours spread that individuals who had not registered for SHIA would be denied healthcare services, including maternal care, at public hospitals. This narrative reinforced the broader concern that SHIA was a coercive policy, with individuals being punished for non-compliance rather than being educated about the benefits of registration.

Media Framing and Civil Society Pushback

In the early days following the policy's rollout, media coverage largely reflected official government statements, repeating assurances that the policy was an essential step toward achieving UHC. However, as public confusion deepened, media outlets began to investigate the implementation of the law and its impact on everyday citizens. A notable example is a vox pop conducted by Nation Media Group in late 2023 and a Town Hall hosted by Royal Media's CITIZEN TV in 2024, which revealed that over 70% of informal workers were confused about their financial obligations under the new scheme. Many respondents admitted that they did not understand how much they were expected to pay or the benefits they were entitled to receive.

Civil society groups such as Amnesty International Kenya and KELIN raised serious concerns about the policy's exclusionary nature, particularly regarding marginalised groups. They pointed out that persons with disabilities and language minorities were effectively left out of public outreach campaigns. For example, there were no accessible documents for persons with visual impairments or interpretation services in sign language during public consultations, despite the clear constitutional obligation to cater to these groups. These critiques were met with resistance from the government, which failed to incorporate these issues into the design and delivery of the policy.

Institutional Ambiguity and Conflicting Messaging

Even after the SHIA's passage, confusion and inconsistency continued to plague the implementation phase; different county health officers gave conflicting information about whether Huduma Namba (the national ID system) was necessary for registration. Some suggested it was mandatory, while others claimed it was not. This inconsistency contributed to public frustration and institutional chaos, as citizens were left to navigate an increasingly unclear and contradictory policy landscape.

At Kenyatta National Hospital, the country's largest public health facility, inquiries about SHIA-linked billing systems began flooding in, even before the new systems had been appropriately set up. With the rollout logistics in disarray, the policy seemed less like a well-thought-out solution and more like a top-down mandate, imposed without adequate preparation or consideration for its practical consequences.

Where Strategy Failed

Deconstructing Missed Opportunities

Absence of Integrated Communication Architecture

One of the key failures of SHIA was the absence of a cohesive and integrated communication architecture.

Unlike other large-scale government initiatives, such as voter registration or the census, where multiple agencies collaborate to develop and disseminate clear messages, SHIA's communication strategy was isolated within the Ministry of Health. This siloed approach limited the campaign's reach and effectiveness, resulting in inconsistent messaging and a failure to address the diverse needs of various audiences.

In the case of the 2019 national census, a well-coordinated, multi-agency communication plan ensured that all demographics—urban, rural, and marginalised—received targeted, clear messages in their preferred languages and formats. A similar approach was sorely lacking in the rollout of SHIA.

No Message Testing or Community Pilots

Message testing and community pilots—critical components of an effective communication strategy—were conspicuously absent in the development of SHIA. For example, the phrase “health for all” is powerful, but it carries different connotations depending on the audience. In urban areas like Nairobi, the call resonates for affordable health coverage. However, in more remote counties such as Turkana or Wajir, where healthcare infrastructure is lacking, this message may be seen as unrealistic or even patronising.

By failing to conduct pilot programs or message testing in select counties, the government missed the opportunity to fine-tune its message and identify potential areas of resistance or confusion.

An evidence-based approach would have identified key barriers early, allowing for a more adaptive and responsive communication campaign.

Communication as an Afterthought

Perhaps the most significant failure was the reactive nature of SHIA’s communication efforts. Communication was

not integrated into the policy development process but instead emerged only after public outcry. Effective policy communication requires anticipation and proactive engagement with the public at every stage of policy development, from design to implementation. For instance, had the government conducted a pre-policy communication audit, it might have identified key issues such as mistrust of the government, confusion over payments, or concerns about exclusion from the policy’s benefits. Anticipating these issues would have enabled targeted interventions to be implemented well in advance of the policy’s rollout.

Communication, Rights, and the Constitution

Article 35: The Right to Information

The SHIA debacle underscores the constitutional right to access information, guaranteed under Article 35 of the Constitution. The Access to Information Act (2016) requires public institutions to disclose information to the public proactively. This includes providing accessible documents, ensuring language inclusivity, and offering interpretation services during public forums. However, in the case of SHIA, the Ministry of Health failed to meet these standards, leaving many citizens in the dark about the specifics of the policy.

For example, there were no translated documents in local languages such as Kiswahili, Luhya, or Maasai, nor were there any efforts to make the policy accessible to low-literacy populations. Had the government adhered to the principles of proactive disclosure, these communication shortcomings could have been addressed early on, mitigating public discontent.

Public Participation as a Legal Standard

SHIA also highlights the flawed implementation of public participation, a critical constitutional value enshrined in Article 10(2) of the Constitution. As affirmed by judicial decisions such as *Doctors for Life v Minister of Health* (South Africa) and *Robert Gakuru v GOK* (Kenya), public participation must be meaningful and continuous—not merely a procedural step. In SHIA’s case, public consultations were sporadic, often occurring after the bill had already been introduced in Parliament, effectively reducing them to a checklist exercise rather than an ongoing process of engagement.



Toward a Strategic Communication Framework for Policy Implementation

The SHIA saga underscores the necessity for an integrated and dynamic communication framework that supports policy implementation from the outset. Kenya needs a national policy communication toolkit that incorporates the following elements:

- Communication Impact Assessments for significant policies to assess potential public reception.
- Public Readability Standards for policy documents, ensuring accessibility to diverse literacy levels.
- Multi-platform Communication Strategies, using different channels to reach both urban and rural populations.
- Feedback Loops are integrated into all implementation phases to address emerging concerns in real time.

Such a framework would support transparency, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity—values central to the success of policy initiatives like SHIA.

Case Study Two:

Kenya's Finance Act, 2024: Failures and Lessons

Introduction:

Context and Communication Breakdown

In 2024, the Kenyan government introduced the Finance Act, a critical piece of legislation aimed at reforming the tax system to address the country's widening fiscal deficit and improve revenue generation. The government positioned the Act as an essential tool to fund development projects, infrastructure improvements, and social services, as part of its long-term commitment to economic stability and national growth.

However, the rollout of this landmark legislation became a source of controversy and public unrest due to a series of communication failures. The government's inability to effectively communicate the Act's provisions, their purpose, and their expected impact led to confusion, misinformation, and widespread protests across the country.

The Act, although framed as a necessary step to stabilise the economy, quickly became a source of public discord.

The Kenyan government's lack of a coherent, well-coordinated communication strategy left the public misinformed and, in many cases, hostile toward the proposed tax measures. This analysis examines the strategic communication breakdown that characterised the implementation of the Finance Act, 2024, its consequences, and the lessons that can be drawn to avoid similar pitfalls in future policy rollouts.

The Finance Act, 2024: Legal and Fiscal Intentions

Legal Foundations and Key Provisions

The Finance Act, 2024, was designed to overhaul Kenya's fiscal framework, primarily focusing on tax revenue generation and economic modernisation. The most significant changes included:

1. **Income Tax Revisions:** The Act revised the personal income tax brackets, lowering the tax burden on middle-income earners while imposing higher taxes on the wealthy. It also introduced new tax exemptions and deductions for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to incentivise business growth in key sectors such as agriculture, technology, and renewable energy.
2. **VAT Adjustments:** The Act expanded the scope of VAT to include previously exempted items, such as essential foods and medical supplies. The aim was to diversify the tax base and increase government revenue, but the move was met with resistance, particularly from low-income households, as basic goods would now become more expensive for them.
3. **Introduction of Digital Taxation:** The Act introduced a new framework for taxing digital businesses, including international technology companies operating in Kenya. This measure aimed to ensure that global firms contributing to Kenya's digital economy paid their fair share of taxes, addressing long-standing issues regarding tax equity in the digital sector.
4. **Corporate Tax Reforms:** The government also revised corporate tax rates, particularly targeting multinational corporations and high-revenue firms, which were seen as contributing disproportionately less to the national treasury. The revision aimed to balance Kenya's competitiveness on the global stage with the need to enhance domestic revenue streams.

Despite the economic rationale behind these provisions, public reception was overwhelmingly negative. This gap between the government's fiscal goals and public perception was largely due to a failure to communicate the specific benefits and reasoning behind the Act's provisions.

Economic Objectives vs. Public Perception

The government's communication strategy failed to convey the broader economic objectives behind the Finance Act, such as reducing reliance on foreign debt, fostering economic self-sufficiency, and increasing public investments in healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Without this context, many Kenyans likely viewed the tax hikes as punitive, particularly in a time of rising inflation and economic uncertainty. For example, the government positioned the VAT on basic goods as a temporary measure to fund a new national health insurance initiative. However, this message was not effectively communicated to the public, leading to confusion about the Act's actual long-term benefits. Many people viewed the policy as a burden rather than a necessary step toward economic stability, leading to widespread dissatisfaction.

The Communication Breakdown: Key Failures and Consequences

Disjointed Messaging and Mixed Signals

One of the most significant failures in the government's communication strategy was the lack of a unified voice. Different government agencies, including the Treasury, Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA), and other ministries, issued contradictory statements regarding the details of the Finance Act. This disjointed messaging sowed confusion and eroded public trust in the government's ability to manage the implementation of such a complex policy.

For instance, while the Treasury issued a press release claiming that the VAT revisions would not affect essential commodities, the KRA later clarified that certain goods, including milk and bread, would indeed be taxed. This inconsistency created a sense of uncertainty and frustration among the public, particularly small business owners who were unsure about compliance with the new tax regulations. A retailer in Nairobi's downtown area stated,

"I have been trying to stay updated on the latest tax

changes, but the government keeps contradicting itself. One day they say one thing, the next day they say the opposite. This lack of clarity makes it difficult for small businesses like mine to stay afloat."

Media's Role in Amplifying Misinformation

In the absence of clear, consistent messaging from the government, media outlets—both traditional and digital—played a critical role in shaping public perception. Unfortunately, many media organisations either sensationalised the negative aspects of the Finance Act or misrepresented its provisions, further exacerbating the confusion. A prime example of this was the widespread media coverage of protests against the VAT increases. Without a nuanced understanding of the economic rationale behind the Act, media outlets focused primarily on the perceived negative impact, such as rising prices and financial hardships, thereby omitting a balanced view.

One viral news segment featured an interview with a protester claiming that the Finance Act would "cripple the economy and put food out of reach for many people." This kind of coverage, while reflecting genuine concerns, lacked a deeper analysis of the policy's broader fiscal goals, leading to widespread fear and panic among the public.

Missed Opportunity for Public Education and Sensitisation

The government's failure to adequately prepare the public for the changes in the Finance Act through education and engagement led to massive frustration. Effective public education could have mitigated the confusion by explaining the purpose behind the tax reforms, as well as the expected outcomes and mechanisms for implementation. Unfortunately, there was no substantial effort to engage the public through workshops, town hall meetings, or digital platforms where citizens could learn about the Act. In rural areas, where access to information is often limited, the Finance Act was met with scepticism. Many small-scale farmers and traders expressed confusion over how the new VAT regime would affect their operations. The lack of outreach and communication in these communities contributed significantly to the protests that followed.

The Public Reaction: Protests, Confusion, and Discontent

Violent Protests and Social Unrest

As the public's confusion and frustration grew, protests against the Finance Act intensified, which would later be known as the GEN Z Protests. The most visible protests occurred in urban centres where large groups of citizens gathered to demand the repeal or modification of the Act. What began as peaceful demonstrations soon escalated into violent clashes, with police using tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse crowds. The unrest, although initially centred around the Act's VAT and income tax hikes, was further fuelled by public perceptions of inequality, particularly among Kenya's marginalized communities. Protestors set up barricades on major roads and blocked business operations, demanding that the government reverse the tax hikes. As the protests turned violent, businesses were forced to close, and local police struggled to maintain order.

Government's Acknowledgment of Communication Failures

In the face of mounting public outcry, the Kenyan government eventually acknowledged its communication failures. In a televised address, President William Ruto admitted that the rollout of the Finance Act had been mismanaged in terms of public engagement and information dissemination. He noted that the failure to adequately explain the fiscal goals of the Act had led to unnecessary anxiety, tension and propaganda among citizens. The President's acknowledgment, while a necessary step in rebuilding public trust, came too late to prevent the widespread backlash. The damage had already been done, and the public's perception of the Finance Act had been irreparably shaped by the earlier communication failures.

Strategic Communication Lessons: Avoiding Future Failures

The Need for a Unified Communication Strategy

The primary lesson from the Finance Act debacle is the importance of a unified and coordinated communication strategy. For future policies of similar magnitude, the government must ensure that all departments and agencies involved in the policy rollout are aligned in their messaging. This can be achieved by establishing a central communication task force that is responsible for all aspects

of policy communication, ensuring consistency, accuracy, and clarity in every public statement.

Recommendation:

The government should invest in a national communications coordination office that is tasked with overseeing all public communications related to major legislative reforms. This office should be equipped with the tools and resources to issue timely, transparent, and accurate information to the public.

Proactive Public Education and Engagement

Moving forward, the government needs to prioritise public education before any major policy changes. The absence of this effort in the case of the Finance Act led to confusion and unrest, especially in underrepresented and marginalised communities.

Recommendation: The government should implement an extensive public awareness campaign well before the introduction of any major tax reforms. This campaign should utilise multiple channels, including social media, radio, TV, and public forums, to explain the rationale behind the policy and address potential concerns.

Collaboration with the Media

The media has a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, especially when it comes to the implementation of complex policies. The government must engage with media outlets to ensure that the public receives accurate and balanced information. Media organisations should also be educated on the policy's details to avoid the spread of misinformation.

Recommendation: The government should hold regular media briefings and collaborate with news outlets to facilitate accurate reporting on the policy's benefits and challenges. Providing journalists with direct access to policymakers can help ensure the information is presented accurately.

Moving Forward: Institutionalising Better Communication Practices **Institutionalising Strategic Communication in Government**

A critical step in avoiding future communication failures is to institutionalise strategic communication within



government structures. Clear communication must become a part of the policymaking process from the outset, not an afterthought. The government should establish dedicated communication teams within key ministries to ensure that effective communication is integrated into policy formulation. These teams should be tasked with developing communication strategies that prioritise transparency, clarity, and public engagement.

Enhancing Public Participation

Public participation is essential for ensuring that policies are in line with the needs and concerns of the people they affect. The government must create more inclusive platforms for public dialogue and input, particularly in areas where policies will have a direct impact on citizens' livelihoods. The government should ensure that future policies undergo comprehensive public consultation processes, including online forums, surveys, and public hearings, to allow

citizens to voice their concerns and contribute to policy formulation. The Finance Act, 2024, serves as a potent reminder of the importance of strategic communication in policy implementation.

While the Act's economic goals were sound, its failure to communicate these objectives to the public led to confusion, unrest, and social division. The lessons from this failure are clear: effective communication must be an integral part of the policymaking process to ensure that policies are understood, accepted, and successfully implemented.

Ultimately, the Finance Act debacle underscores the critical role that transparent, consistent, and empathetic communication plays in bridging the gap between policy intentions and public perception. Only by learning from these mistakes can Kenya move forward with more inclusive, informed, and successful policy frameworks.



► **Elvis Presley Were**

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REFLECTIONS

"In **applied communication**, silence isn't a gap -
it's a diagnostic tool.

We don't listen to wait for our turn;
we listen to map the terrain before
we dare to build a bridge."

Jade Communications





Practitioner Experience ▶

This conversation highlights the essence of **applied human communication**, where **theory and practice converge to address real challenges, create meaningful impact**, and drive lasting change. Jade Communications' mission is to support practitioners and organisations in bridging knowledge with practice. These experiences seek to inspire dialogue, foster learning, and strengthen the community of applied communication professionals across Africa and beyond.

Editor's note

Dr. Catherine Lengewa:

CONNECTING PEOPLE AND IDEAS FOR IMPACT

By Silas Owiti



The Applied Communicator spotlights practitioners who bring communication theory to life in real-world contexts. In this edition, we feature Dr. Catherine Lengewa, PHD, Director Partnerships, Sustainability and Social Impact at the Centre for Behaviour Change and Communication (CBCC).

Catherine is a co-founder of CBCC, overseeing partnerships, sustainability, and social impact. Her role fundamentally involves connecting people and ideas, bringing together government, partners, and communities to drive change. She ensures that projects are not only sustainable but also genuinely enhance people's lives. Catherine is dedicated to inclusion, making sure no one is left behind, and she continually advocates for new ideas to establish CBCC as a hub for innovation and social progress. Her motivation is simple yet powerful: "For me, communication is about giving people the tools, skills and strategies to make better choices and create better futures."

Can you briefly share your professional journey and what drew you into the field of applied communication?

Over the past 25 years, I have utilised Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) to improve lives across Kenya and beyond. From health and education to agriculture and governance, my work has impacted over 20 million people across Kenya and six other African countries.

My journey began in the classroom as a teacher and deputy principal. It is here that I realised how powerful communication can be in shaping young lives. That spark drew me into applied communication, not just as a teaching method, but as a tool for lasting social transformation. Since then, I have worked with governments, local and international organisations, leading projects in HIV prevention, malaria, water hygiene and sanitation, nutrition, maternal and child health, financial inclusion, and even COVID-19 risk communication across 21 countries in East and Southern Africa.

At CBCC, I have led over 80 projects and developed more than 500 knowledge products, building strong partnerships and ensuring that every effort leaves a lasting impact. I hold a PhD in educational foundations and behaviour change, a master's in counselling, and a bachelor's in education. Beyond work, I serve on the Governing Council of PAC University, where I chair the Academic Committee. I have also chaired the HOPE Media Board and served as a deacon board member at Christ is the Answer Ministry (CITAM), continually weaving service into my leadership.

Can you share a defining moment in your career that significantly shaped your approach to applied Communication?

One of the most defining moments for me was during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns meant no gatherings, no community meetings, no face-to-face engagement; yet people needed accurate information more than ever. We had to get creative, and that's how DigiRedio was born. Through a network of over 60 community radios across all 47 counties, along with social groups and online platforms, we kept people informed, connected, and engaged every single day.

DigiRedio became a space where communities could share their voices, hold leaders accountable, and act.

That experience taught me that applied communication is not just about sharing information; it's about finding creative, innovative, and practical ways to truly connect with people, even in tough times, and spark lasting change. For me, communication must always stay adaptable, people-focused, and forward-looking.

Based on your experience, could you provide us with a general outlook on applied communication? How do you define it, and what does it mean to you in your daily work?

Applied communication is fundamentally about using communication to improve everyday life. It's not just about relaying messages; it's about ensuring people understand, connect, and can act on them in ways that enhance their lives. Applied communication lies at the core of all we do at CBCC. Every day, whether working with farmers, supporting schools, or sharing health messages with caregivers and health workers, we employ communication as a practical tool to resolve real issues and foster lasting change.

How does it differ from theoretical or academic communication?

Theoretical or academic communication mainly exists in books, classrooms, and research, explaining the "why" and the 'how'. Applied communication involves taking those ideas and implementing them in real life. At CBCC, this means turning theory into action: for instance, using different communication channels to reach farmers with tips they can apply in the same season, or creating and delivering messages during COVID-19 that helped families protect themselves. In short, theory teaches us the rules, but applied communication is about rolling up our sleeves and making change happen in people's everyday lives.

Are there particular communication theories or models that you have found especially useful in your work, and how have you applied them in practice?

At CBCC, one of the main theories guiding our work is the socio-ecological model. In simple terms, it reminds us that people's behaviours are shaped by multiple layers, not just individual choices and actions, but also families,

communities, institutions, and the wider environment. We use this model as our foundation because it helps us design communication strategies that work at multiple levels simultaneously.

For example, when promoting healthy diets, we don't just focus on individual knowledge. We involve families, including men as key decision-makers to support better food choices, work with community health workers who guide households daily, and involve the government to develop supportive policies. We also collaborate with the community and traditional influencers to shift social norms, making healthier practices part of everyday life.

In practice, this means our messages and platforms are not one-size-fits-all; they are designed to speak to people where they are, while also addressing the broader systems around them. That's how we make theory tangible: by turning it into practical actions that create lasting change across households, communities, and even national policies.

How do you balance the need for clear messaging with the complexity of the information you communicate?

At CBCC, we have learnt that even the most complex issues can be communicated clearly when you start with people. We use Human-Centred Design (HCD) and immersions to truly understand how communities think, speak, and make decisions. This helps us translate technical information into simple, relatable messages that make sense in everyday life. For example, when working with low-literacy communities, we use local languages, stories, and visuals instead of dense text. We've also co-created solutions with communities so that messages feel natural and locally owned. This approach guarantees that whether we are discussing vaccines, nutrition, or climate-smart agriculture, people don't just hear the message — they connect with it, trust it, and act upon it.

How do you tailor your communication strategies to address diverse audiences in your work effectively?

At CBCC, we understand that one message doesn't work for everyone. People interpret, trust, and respond to information differently based on their age, gender, family role, or even where they live. That's why we always begin by listening first. For example, when promoting child health,

mothers often want practical “how-to” tips, while fathers may respond better to messages that highlight their role as protectors and decision-makers. Young people connect more through digital platforms and peer-led conversations, while communities with low literacy levels prefer drama, storytelling, and radio in their local language. For community health workers, we design job aids and tools they can use during home visits. By tailoring our strategies to suit each audience's language, culture, and daily realities, we ensure communication feels personal and relevant, rather than top-down or distant. That's what makes it effective.

Being both an academician and a practitioner, there has been a notion of a disconnect between academic theory and actual practice. Is this true? If so, could you expound?

Yes, the gap between academic theory and practical application is real, and we often observe it. Many graduates leave university with a solid understanding of communication theory, but when they join organisations like CBCC, they sometimes struggle to implement it in real-world situations. For example, during recruitment, we meet candidates who can explain models and frameworks very well but find it difficult to translate that knowledge into community-focused solutions. The gap is significant because universities tend to emphasise research papers and classroom learning, while the field requires adaptability, creativity, and practical problem-solving skills. Communities don't communicate in academic jargon; they need simple, relatable messages that fit into their daily lives. At CBCC, we have discovered that bridging this gap involves mentorship, immersions, and on-the-job learning, enabling young professionals to turn theory into action.

Could you describe a specific project or situation where applied communication made a measurable difference in outcomes?

For years, farmers in Tanzania and across Africa have struggled to access improved groundnut and sorghum seeds due to low awareness, weak market links, and poor infrastructure. To address these issues, CBCC, through the Accelerated Varietal Improvement and Seed Systems

in Africa (AVISA) project, introduced the Youth and Women Quality Centre (YWQC) model, a behaviour-led, community-driven approach based on the socio-ecological model. YWQCs act as local hubs that stimulate demand, connect farmers with seed suppliers, offer training, facilitate extension services, and strengthen market connections. They place farmers, especially women and youth, at the centre.

The impact has been significant. In Tanzania, 2 million people were reached through mass media, 45 youth champions were trained, and 12,000 farmers were engaged. Awareness of improved varieties increased to 75% for sorghum and 82% for groundnut, compared to less than 10% in areas not involved in the project. Adoption also rose notably, groundnut from 2% to 26.7%, and sorghum from 6.3% to 32.7%. In Kenya, 769,275 people were reached, 34 champions trained, and over 5,000 farmers engaged. YWQCs are also transforming norms, boosting women's participation, creating over 250 jobs, training 7,670 farmers, and producing 37 tonnes of seed valued at more than \$331,000 in just two years. What started as a pilot project is now expanding, reaching women, youth, and smallholder farmers in both Kenya and Uganda.

You have handled diverse projects in different contexts, but could you share a specific memorable project where communication was the single most critical factor for success? What was the challenge, and what was your strategy?

Promoting Peace and Civic Engagement through #WekaIssuesMbele Campaign

One of the most memorable projects where communication was vital for success was during Kenya's general elections under USAID's IGAPP programme. Elections often generate tension, misinformation, and mistrust, especially among young people. The challenge was to deliver credible, timely, and engaging voter education that could cut through the noise and promote peaceful, issue-based discussions.

CBCC launched a three-month digital social and behaviour change campaign, #WekaIssuesMbele, combining storytelling, relatable influencers, and interactive content in local languages. Using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Google Ads, TV, and radio, the campaign reached over 11.4 million people. Collaboration was central to the

success, particularly with micro-influencers, who made the messages relatable and broadened the reach. The main lesson is that effective communication, supported by partnerships and early engagement, can motivate peaceful participation and combat voter apathy, even in the most tense situations.

In your experience, what are the most valuable tools, technologies, or frameworks that have significantly improved your communication outcomes?

At CBCC, the most valuable tools are those that bring communication closer to people's daily lives. Human-centred design (HCD) and immersive techniques help us listen first and create solutions that communities genuinely trust and adopt. We also base our work on the socio-ecological model, which ensures we tackle barriers at individual, social, and structural levels.

What is a common communication mistake you see professionals make, and what practical advice would you give to avoid it?

A common mistake I observe is treating people as if they exist in isolation, assuming that providing them with information will lead to behavioural change. In reality, people are complex beings embedded within systems of family, culture, community, and structures that influence their decisions. My advice? Always design communication with this broader context in mind.

What are the biggest challenges you face when applying communication theories in real-world scenarios, and how do you overcome them? What did you learn from that experience?

One of the main challenges I face in applying communication theories is that, too often, communication is underfunded and undervalued. Budgets tend to focus heavily on visible, "hard" interventions such as infrastructure or supplies. In contrast, the less visible work of ongoing engagement, formative research, or long-term behaviour change receives very little support. This results in strategies being cut short, diluted, or treated as one-off campaigns, even though we understand that behaviour change requires time and consistency.

Another challenge is prioritisation. Communication is often regarded as an "add-on", something nice to have once everything else is in place, rather than a core driver of

genuine, sustainable change. Because of this, the theories we attempt to apply are frequently rushed, leaving no room for proper testing, adaptation, or measurement.

And finally, there is a limited appreciation of the depth of our field. Too often, communication is seen merely as messaging or media buying. What's overlooked is the complexity of audience segmentation, message framing, testing, social norm shifting, and participatory approaches. All of these are rooted in theory and distinguish between simply broadcasting information and achieving communication that genuinely transforms.

So, how can we overcome this?

For me, it's about advocating with evidence, demonstrating to stakeholders how communication directly impacts programme outcomes like increased vaccine uptake or better nutrition. It's about embedding communication from the outset of programme design, so it's not an afterthought. It's about utilising community structures and low-cost platforms when budgets are limited and continually building capacity, so more people see communication not as decoration but as the backbone of change.

What I have learned is this: communication is as much about advocacy and persistence as it is about theory. It takes creativity to stretch small budgets. For example, stretching small budgets has meant getting creative. Instead of relying on costly TV spots, we have leaned into community radio, peer educators, community structures, and resources — spaces where trust already exists, and messages spread quickly.

It also requires patience to change mindsets. I have sat in many meetings where communication was dismissed as “just posters or jingles.” During those times, I had to gently but persistently present the evidence, such as how formative research revealed that mothers were not rejecting vaccines out of fear, but because clinic hours conflicted with market days! That insight, based on communication theory, altered the scheduling and significantly boosted uptake.

And finally, it takes courage to continually remind everyone that without effective communication, sustainable change cannot happen. I have learned to seize every

opportunity, whether in reports, learning sessions, or stakeholder meetings, to emphasise how communication strategies support the success of “hard” interventions. For example, distributing water treatment tablets is useless if communities do not understand why and how to use them. Communication bridges that gap, transforming supplies into solutions.

So, the real lesson? Communication is not a side activity. It's the thread that weaves through everything else.

In your view, how does the African context (or your specific sector) shape the way communication theory is applied in practice?

In Africa, communication theory only works if it is grounded in the realities of people's lives. Communities are deeply shaped by culture, traditions, language, and social structures, so a message that works in one place may completely miss the mark in another. For example, in some areas, decisions about farming or health are not made by individuals but by families or community elders. In others, radio, drama, or storytelling is far more powerful than written materials.

What role does technology play in your applied communication practices, and specifically, how has the rise of digital and social media platforms changed the way you approach applied communication?

Technology has become a game-changer in how we communicate at CBCC. Digital and social media platforms allow us to reach millions quickly, but more importantly, they enable us to listen and interact in real time. At CBCC, we've developed the DigiSuite, including tools like DigiFahamu and DigiSomo, which offer innovative, technology-driven solutions tailored to the needs of different audiences. Social media has also transformed the way we design messages; they need to be short, visual, and engaging, often using video, GIFs, or influencers that people already trust. Analytics help us see what works and make quick adjustments.

What advice would you give to emerging communication practitioners who want to bridge theory and practice effectively?

My advice to young communication practitioners is this: don't stop at theory, take it out into the field. Books and models lay the groundwork, but real learning happens

when you sit with communities, listen to their stories, and adapt your approach to what makes sense for them. Be curious, open, and humble. Learn to simplify without losing meaning and always respect culture and context. Most importantly, remember that communication isn't about what you want to say; it's about what people need to hear, understand, and act on.

Looking ahead, what trends or shifts do you foresee as having a significant impact in the field of applied communication evolving in the next five to ten years, and how are you preparing for these changes, or how should practitioners prepare for these changes?

I see three major shifts shaping applied communication. First, the emergence of AI, the growth of digital platforms and data technology will keep changing how we reach people, listen to them, and assess impact. Second, there is increasing demand for localisation, as communities want solutions in their own languages, led by their own champions, not just top-down campaigns. Third, integration will be essential; communication will need to span sectors such as health, climate, agriculture, and governance, because people's lives do not fit into silos.

At CBCC, we are preparing by investing in AI, digital tools, human-centred design, and local capacity-building, while keeping cultural sensitivity at the core. Practitioners should do the same: stay adaptable, learn new technologies, and never forget that at the heart of communication are people.



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"The Applied Communicator"

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 **JADE
COMMUNICATIONS**

Centre of Applied Human Communications
www.jadecommunications.co.ke

REFLECTIONS

“**The Applied Communicator** understands that communication is the only currency that gains value when it’s spent. It is not an abstract art form; it is a functional tool that either moves people toward understanding or leaves them exactly where they started.”

Jade Communications



>> "Complexity is the refuge of the unsure.

The true applied communicator does the hard work of being simple, ensuring the message survives the journey from the boardroom to the street."

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