

Decolonising Digital Inclusion: Participatory Media and Community Knowledge Production in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Digital inclusion in Nigeria continues to be shaped by digital coloniality, uneven infrastructural development, linguistic marginalisation, and forms of epistemic injustice. In practice, these conditions often privilege Western digital platforms and dominant knowledge systems, and this is particularly evident in rural communities and among speakers of minority languages. This study is situated within broader debates on digital inequality in postcolonial contexts, with particular attention to Nigeria's socio-linguistic diversity. Utilising Decolonial Theory and Participatory Media Theory, the synthesis identifies structural barriers to equitable digital engagement and considers how the participatory media community radio stations, local message networks, and indigenous language digital initiatives network support knowledge development, language preservation, as well as inclusive digital citizenship. Decolonial Theory exposes how colonial power continues to shape knowledge systems, social hierarchies and digital infrastructures. On the other hand, Participatory Media Theory highlights co-creation, local agency, and community engagement as key pathways to culturally grounded digital participation. Methodologically, the study relies solely on secondary sources, conducting a conceptual and thematic analysis of academic literature, policy documents, including Nigeria's National Digital Economy Policy and documented digital initiatives. No primary data were collected. Taken together, the study argues that efforts to advance digital inclusion in Nigeria must move beyond narrowly technological interventions and, instead, address the wider political, cultural, and epistemic conditions that shape equitable digital participation.

Keywords: Digital inclusion; decoloniality; participatory media; community knowledge; Nigeria.

Introduction

As information and communication technologies rapidly transform the ways people engage socially, economically, and politically, ensuring digital inclusion has emerged as a pressing concern at both local and global levels (Paul & Eghe, 2023; Elebiju, 2024). In Nigeria, however, marginalised populations including rural communities, speakers of minority languages, and low-income urban residents continue to face substantial obstacles to meaningful engagement with digital tools. In many remote areas, access to technology is mediated through shared devices or community kiosks, limiting opportunities to participate in online learning, access government services, or obtain civic information (Balogun, 2018; Mabweazara, 2020; Oyinlola, 2022). These conditions reflect broader trends across the Global South, emphasising that digital inequalities are structural, systemic, and transnational in nature (Willems & Mano, 2016).

These inequalities are amplified by digital coloniality, a phenomenon in which technological frameworks and platform governance systematically favor Western knowledge, dominant languages, and commercially-driven content (Acey et al., 2021; Bernal, 2021). In Nigeria, for instance, leading global platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Google largely function in English, sidelining indigenous languages such as Tiv, Hausa, Igbo, Edo, Kanuri, and Yoruba (Molnar & Chartrand, 2021; Onyenankeya, 2022). This linguistic exclusion reinforces epistemic injustice, limiting the recognition, dissemination, and influence of local knowledge across civic, educational, and policy domains (Nyabola, 2024). Participatory media provides a powerful avenue to counteract these inequities. By allowing communities to collaboratively create, govern, and share content, such platforms place local agency at the forefront, strengthening epistemic sovereignty and offering a meaningful challenge to the dominant narratives shaped by global digital systems (Gullion & Tilton,

2023). Examples from community radio networks in Mexico, citizen journalism initiatives in Kenya, and WhatsApp-based local news groups in India illustrate how participatory media amplifies marginalised voices and fosters civic engagement (Intahchomphoo, 2023; Manjarrez, 2023). In Nigeria, community radio stations in Edo State and WhatsApp broadcasts in Borno similarly enable citizens to participate in local governance, preserve indigenous knowledge, and articulate community priorities, demonstrating participatory media's dual value as both a local intervention and a transferable model across contexts (Manjarrez, 2023).

Community knowledge production further enhances the transformative potential of participatory media. This approach emphasises generating, preserving, and sharing knowledge grounded in social, cultural, and political realities (Gullion & Tilton, 2023). Nigerian projects digitising Tiv folktales, Yoruba oral histories, and Kanuri agricultural practices mirror international initiatives such as India's Indigenous Knowledge Digital Library and participatory mapping projects in Kenya (Owiny et al., 2014; Balogun, 2018; Vuma, 2021). These endeavours assert cultural authority, challenge dominant epistemologies, and highlight the importance of validating local knowledge systems in digital spaces (Balogun & Kalusopa, 2021; Plockey, 2015).

Despite these promising developments, digital divides in Nigeria continue to constrain meaningful participation. Gaps in infrastructure, rural–urban disparities, gendered barriers, and uneven digital literacy remain significant obstacles (Paul & Eghe, 2023; Oyinlola, 2022; Elebiju, 2024). Regulatory frameworks including restrictive broadcasting policies and unequal access to mobile technologies also influence who can produce and share digital content (Mabweazara, 2020; Ngozi & Nzan-Ayang, 2023; Uchegbu & Azubuike, 2023). In addition, inconsistent digitisation of indigenous knowledge threatens linguistic and cultural continuity, potentially further marginalising local epistemologies (Balogun, 2018; Vuma, 2021). Without deliberate, context-sensitive interventions, these divides risk reinforcing digital coloniality and undermining the authority of community knowledge.

Participatory media and community knowledge production offer practical strategies to mitigate these challenges. Indigenous-language newspapers, community radio stations, digital libraries, and locally governed social media platforms act as sites of epistemic sovereignty, amplifying local voices and supporting cultural preservation (Molnar & Chartrand, 2021; Onyenankeya, 2022; Madima et al., 2023). In Nigeria, such initiatives contribute to inclusive digital citizenship, strengthen community engagement, and enhance local control over knowledge production (Nyabola, 2024; Ojo et al., 2023). Interpreted through Global South and decolonial perspectives, these practices offer insights beyond Nigeria, informing broader debates on equitable and culturally responsive digital participation (Acey et al., 2021; Iliadis et al., 2023; Govenden & Mwaura, 2024).

Decolonising digital inclusion therefore requires integrated approaches that prioritise epistemic justice, participatory governance, and bottom-up engagement. Recognising and validating local knowledge systems, supporting community-led content creation, and reforming digital policy frameworks are essential for achieving equitable access and meaningful participation (Acey et al., 2021; Schoon et al., 2020; Nyabola, 2024; Willems & Mano, 2016). Community-driven efforts in digital literacy, content co-creation, and language revitalisation ensure that technological interventions remain culturally relevant and aligned with local priorities (Gullion & Tilton, 2023; Meighan, 2021; Molnar & Chartrand, 2021).

This study situates Nigerian experiences within wider global trends in participatory media and community knowledge production to explore the potential of decolonised digital inclusion. Specifically, it aims to: (i) Identify structural, sociocultural, and regulatory barriers that sustain digital divides; (ii) Examine how participatory media advances epistemic sovereignty, language preservation, and inclusive digital citizenship; (iii) Propose strategies for decolonising digital spaces through community-led content creation, policy reform, and participatory digital literacy initiatives. In doing so, the paper presents an integrated framework for academic research, policy

development, and professional practice, supporting equitable and culturally responsive digital inclusion in Nigeria and comparable contexts across the Global South.

Research Method

This study adopts a conceptual and thematic approach, focusing on the analysis, synthesis, and critique of existing literature rather than primary data collection. It examines scholarly debates and theoretical perspectives on digital inclusion, participatory media, decoloniality, and community knowledge production, with particular reference to Nigeria and the Global South. The methodology incorporates illustrative case examples of Nigerian participatory media, drawing on secondary literature, policy documents, and digital media initiatives that demonstrate community knowledge production and participatory engagement. Guided by decolonial research approaches, the study situates analysis within local knowledge systems, foregrounds participatory practices, and maintains reflexivity. The analytical focus is on identifying structural and sociocultural barriers as well as opportunities for advancing decolonised digital inclusion.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Decolonial Theory and Participatory Media Theory.

Decolonial Theory

Decolonial Theory offers a critical lens for examining the enduring influence of colonial power and knowledge structures on contemporary social, political, and technological systems. A central concept within this perspective is the coloniality of power, introduced by Aníbal Quijano (2000), which illustrates how hierarchies embedded in knowledge production, social organisation, and economic systems persist long after formal decolonisation (Quijano, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2011).

A key tenet of Decolonial Theory is the inseparable relationship between modernity and coloniality. This study argues that social hierarchies, epistemic injustices, and global inequalities are shaped by both historical and ongoing colonial processes embedded

in knowledge systems, governance structures, and technological infrastructures (Escobar, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2011). Knowledge is therefore neither neutral nor universal; Indigenous and subaltern epistemologies offer legitimate alternatives that challenge Eurocentric dominance (Escobar, 2007; Asher, 2013).

Decolonial Theory also emphasises epistemic justice, highlighting that addressing structural inequalities and digital exclusion requires recognising and integrating marginalised knowledge systems (Mignolo, 2009; Dei & Lordan, 2016). This approach is inherently practice-oriented, calling for active participation in knowledge-making processes that contest Eurocentric paradigms and validate plural ways of knowing (Ferdinand, 2021; Dei & Lordan, 2016). The framework further advocates a transmodern perspective, which values global interconnectedness while centring non-Western epistemologies and challenging hegemonic power structures (Grosfoguel, 2011).

Within this study, Decolonial Theory provides a foundational critique of coloniality and epistemic injustice in digital systems. Drawing on concepts from the Epistemologies of the South and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, it highlights Nigeria's locally grounded, community-based knowledge practices (Escobar, 2007; Quijano, 2000; Ferdinand, 2021). These perspectives are applied complementarily, emphasising participatory, community-rooted knowledge rather than abstract theoretical analysis.

Applied to digital inclusion in Nigeria, Decolonial Theory illuminates how colonial legacies shape access to digital technologies, privilege certain forms of knowledge, and determine who participates in digital knowledge production. By centring marginalised knowledge systems, the theory identifies pathways for community-led, participatory digital practices that promote epistemic justice and challenge the coloniality of digital knowledge. This theoretical foundation provides a bridge to Participatory Media Theory, which offers a framework for understanding the mechanisms of community engagement, co-creation, and local agency in digital spaces.

Participatory Media Theory

Participatory Media Theory provides a lens for understanding the active involvement of communities in creating, disseminating, and governing media content, moving beyond conventional notions of passive consumption. Rooted in Henry Jenkins' work on Convergence Culture (2006) and expanded in *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era* (Jenkins, Ito, & boyd, 2016), the theory reconceptualises audiences as proactive participants, or "prosumers", who collaboratively circulate, remix, and generate content. This perspective challenges hierarchical, top-down media structures, positioning communities as agents capable of shaping cultural narratives, fostering collective creativity, social problem-solving, and civic engagement (Ihlebæk, 2017).

In this study, Participatory Media Theory complements Decolonial Theory by demonstrating how co-creation and community participation can advance decolonial approaches to digital inclusion. The theory frames participatory media as a decolonial practice, recognising that media technologies are socially and culturally embedded rather than neutral. By prioritising local knowledge, cultural practices, and community priorities, participatory media empowers communities to assert epistemic agency and contest historically entrenched power structures within digital systems (Okoro & Abodunrin, 2019). A central assumption of the theory is that audiences are active co-producers of media, engaging in the construction of cultural and social narratives (Jenkins, 2006, 2016). Such participation is inherently empowering, enhancing democratic engagement and offering marginalised groups, including young people, opportunities to influence decision-making processes and develop critical media literacy (Buckingham, 2008). Participatory media ensures that digital engagement is culturally grounded and socially meaningful, placing local knowledge at the heart of content creation. Viewed in this way, digital spaces become platforms for knowledge co-production, collective problem-solving, social inclusion, and community empowerment, thereby promoting epistemic justice (Jenkins, 2016; Ihlebæk, 2017).

Applied to Nigeria, Participatory Media Theory highlights the potential for communities to actively shape digital knowledge production, creating inclusive practices that validate local epistemologies and cultural identities. By framing participatory media as a form of decolonial praxis, the theory bridges conceptual and practical dimensions, reconceptualising digital inclusion as extending beyond technical access to embrace participatory, culturally relevant, and socially just engagement.

On Digital Divide in Nigeria

Inequalities in digital access in Nigeria are shaped by a complex mix of structural, economic, and socio-cultural factors, which create uneven opportunities for participation in online spaces. At the heart of this divide are persistent disparities in infrastructure, particularly between urban and rural areas. Unequal access to electricity, internet infrastructure, and digital devices limits the ability of many communities to engage meaningfully in digital spaces (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2019; Adeleke, 2020). While urban centres generally enjoy more reliable connectivity and higher rates of device ownership, rural areas often contend with unstable networks and frequent power outages, reducing their visibility online and their capacity to contribute to knowledge production (Chair, 2017; Aondover et al., 2022). These infrastructural imbalances reinforce existing social and economic hierarchies, concentrating digital participation among urban elites and marginalising rural populations (Oluwatayo & Ojo, 2017; World Bank, 2016).

Economic barriers further deepen digital inequality. The high cost of internet access and data often places sustained online engagement beyond the reach of low-income households, shaping patterns of participation (Tayo et al., 2015; Ekenimoh, 2018). As a result, many users are limited to passive consumption rather than active content creation, narrowing the range of voices represented in participatory media (Ridwanullah, 2023). These affordability challenges disproportionately affect marginalised groups, allowing wealthier, urban users to dominate digital discourse and reinforcing pre-existing inequalities in knowledge production online

(Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2019; Okocha & Edafewotu, 2022).

Gendered social structures also exacerbate these material inequalities. Women, particularly in rural or culturally conservative areas, often face social and economic barriers that restrict access to digital technologies and opportunities for skills development (Adeleke, 2020; Ridwanullah, 2023). Limited access to digital literacy programmes further reduces women's participation in online knowledge spaces (Oluda & Josephs, 2023). Addressing digital inequality, therefore, requires attention to gendered power dynamics alongside infrastructural and economic interventions, as including women strengthens both civic engagement and the diversity of community knowledge (Warf, 2019).

Digital literacy is another critical dimension of the divide. Many people in under-resourced regions lack the skills to navigate digital platforms, evaluate information critically, or create original content (Nyeche & Emeka, 2016; Oluwatayo & Ojo, 2017). As a result, digital narratives tend to be shaped by urban, professionally trained users, reinforcing socio-educational hierarchies (Tayo et al., 2015; Vitalis et al., 2025). Without targeted programmes to develop digital skills, initiatives that focus solely on access risk perpetuating existing inequalities rather than enabling meaningful participation in digital knowledge economies (Ridwanullah, 2023).

Organisational and governance structures also affect patterns of digital engagement. Media licensing regimes, spectrum allocation, and broadcasting policies often favour national broadcasters and urban-based institutions, limiting opportunities for local journalists and community media (Chair, 2017; Aondover et al., 2023). Evidence from Northern Nigeria shows that digital transitions often benefit centralised actors, marginalising peripheral communities and constraining decentralised knowledge production (Aondover et al., 2022; Vitalis et al., 2025). Regulatory reforms that support community-driven media are therefore essential to achieving more equitable participation.

Geographical marginality further compounds these challenges. Border regions and areas affected by conflict often rely on low-bandwidth or informal

communication channels to access news and civic information (Idris & Msugther, 2022). Fragile infrastructure and security concerns create conditions of informational precarity, limiting both digital participation and political visibility (Chair, 2017). Addressing digital inequality in these contexts requires strategies that consider physical access, safety, and local circumstances (Okocha & Edafewotu, 2022).

Educational disparities also reinforce digital divides. While urban schools increasingly integrate digital technologies into teaching and learning, rural schools often lack reliable connectivity and sufficient devices (Nyeche & Emeka, 2016; Oluwatayo & Ojo, 2017). These gaps limit students' ability to develop the skills needed for digital knowledge production, perpetuating intergenerational inequalities and reducing rural youth participation in digital economies (Tayo et al., 2015; World Bank, 2016).

At the level of content creation, global platforms and urban elites continue to dominate digital knowledge spaces, shaping which narratives gain prominence (Vitalis et al., 2025). Marginalised communities are often relegated to passive roles, reducing the circulation of local knowledge and perspectives (Aondover et al., 2022). Strengthening participatory and community-led media offers a way to challenge entrenched digital hierarchies, enabling local groups to generate, preserve, and share their own narratives (Okocha & Edafewotu, 2022; Oluda & Josephs, 2023).

All in all, digital inequality in Nigeria goes beyond simple disparities in connectivity. It arises from the interplay of infrastructure, affordability, digital literacy, regulatory frameworks, and socio-cultural factors that determine who can participate meaningfully in online spaces (Vitalis et al., 2025). Addressing these inequalities requires coordinated interventions that combine access with skills development, supportive policies, and culturally relevant participatory media initiatives. A holistic approach positions digital inclusion as a catalyst for epistemic diversity, civic engagement, and more equitable development (Ridwanullah, 2023; Warf, 2019).

Defining Digital inclusion

Definitions of digital inclusion vary across disciplines and policy contexts. The concept is closely linked to broader social inclusion efforts, reflecting global initiatives to enable all individuals and communities to participate meaningfully in economic, educational, and civic life (United Nations, 2016). Early strategies focused primarily on providing hardware, software, and internet connectivity, often neglecting essential skills, knowledge, or social support required for effective use (Nguyen, 2022). In rural and isolated communities, limited connectivity, high costs, and insufficient training heighten barriers to genuine digital participation (Okocha & Dogo, 2023).

Current perspectives frame digital inclusion as a multidimensional process that combines access to technology with digital competence, alongside the capacity to critically evaluate, organise, and apply information. It also emphasises empowerment, enabling individuals and communities to use digital tools for greater opportunities and engagement (Carmi & Yates, 2020; Nguyen, 2022). Digital inclusion extends beyond infrastructure to encompass socio-cultural, educational, and economic enablers, allowing people to fully leverage digital technologies (United Nations, 2016).

In this sense, digital inclusion functions both as a conceptual framework and a practical approach for participation in online spaces. It can be understood as the ability of individuals and communities to engage with, use, and derive meaningful benefits from digital technologies in their social, economic, and cultural contexts (Carmi & Yates, 2020; Nguyen, 2022). This definition stresses that access alone is not sufficient skills, knowledge, and empowerment are equally crucial. By adopting this understanding, the focus shifts from technical provision to the structural and cultural factors that shape digital engagement.

On Decolonising Digital Inclusion

Decolonising digital inclusion in Nigeria means looking beyond just technical access or building infrastructure. Many initiatives assume that simply providing connectivity is enough for meaningful participation. In reality, such approaches often ignore the historical, political, and structural inequalities that

shape Nigerian society (Bernal, 2021; Mabweazara, 2020). Digital technologies exist within postcolonial political and economic systems that often reinforce social hierarchies and epistemic inequalities deciding whose knowledge counts and whose perspectives remain marginalised (Willems & Mano, 2016; Bernal, 2021). In this context, giving people access without giving them real agency can end up maintaining, rather than challenging, existing power imbalances.

Participatory media offers a powerful way to redistribute communication power and support community-driven knowledge creation. By centring local voices, these approaches challenge dominant narratives pushed by global digital platforms and outside development actors (Asey et al., 2021; Nyabola, 2024). They give communities not just access to digital spaces but influence over the knowledge that circulates in public discourse (Meighan, 2021; Turner, 2023). In practice, effective decolonial strategies combine access with digital literacy and the capacity for communities to shape and produce knowledge, positioning people as active creators rather than passive consumers.

Community engagement is central to this process. Participatory media allows local actors to set content priorities, co-create knowledge, and express everyday experiences often overlooked in mainstream media (Schoon et al., 2020; Mabweazara, 2020). This approach challenges top-down development models by redistributing narrative authority and enhancing the legitimacy, relevance, and sustainability of digital interventions (Bernal, 2021; Gullion & Tilton, 2023). It also allows marginalised groups to confront exclusion, strengthen cultural identity, and exercise agency. In this sense, participation is not just a research method it is an ethical and political commitment that shapes how inclusion is realised.

Methodology is equally important in decolonising digital inclusion. Conventional research often treats communities as passive subjects, taking knowledge without giving anything back and reinforcing global hierarchies of knowledge (Bernal, 2021; Gullion & Tilton, 2023). In contrast, community-based and participatory research frameworks treat local actors as co-researchers, recognising lived experience as

legitimate knowledge (Schoon et al., 2020; Meighan, 2021). Reflexive methodologies informed by Indigenous epistemologies counter extractive practices, improving the relevance, accountability, and contextual sensitivity of digital projects in Nigeria (Willems & Mano, 2016; Bernal, 2021). In this way, methodological decolonisation strengthens both academic rigour and meaningful participation. Language inclusion is another key aspect. Many digital platforms privilege English or dominant national languages, which marginalises minority language speakers and limits access to information and cultural expression (Nyabola, 2024; Turner, 2023). These linguistic hierarchies perpetuate epistemic injustice by silencing local knowledge systems (Bernal, 2021; Willems & Mano, 2016). At the same time, digital tools can support language revitalisation and the preservation of cultural knowledge. Ensuring that local languages are included in digital spaces enhances fairness, cultural recognition, social cohesion, and civic engagement (Meighan, 2021; Turner, 2023).

Critical digital literacy goes hand-in-hand with access, helping communities understand the broader structures that shape digital participation. Technical skills alone are not enough they do not equip people to navigate platform governance, algorithmic influence, or content moderation processes (Acey et al., 2021; Nyabola, 2024). By developing critical literacy, communities can resist exploitative dynamics, participate in knowledge creation, and exercise real agency online (Schoon et al., 2020). Programs rooted in local realities ensure that skills development is culturally relevant, socially meaningful, and adapted to Nigerian contexts (Matli & Ngoepe, 2020; Mabweazara, 2020).

Decolonial approaches also require shifting the focus from deficits to structures. Talking only about the “digital divide” can obscure the creativity, resilience, and informal networks that communities use to participate despite limitations (Mabweazara, 2020; Schoon et al., 2020). Recognising local ingenuity challenges the idea that communities are passive or deficient and highlights the risks of policies that ignore indigenous innovation (Gullion & Tilton, 2023; Bernal, 2021). Inclusion strategies should

therefore emphasise empowerment, adaptability, and context-sensitive design.

Decentralised governance and institutional frameworks are also crucial for equitable digital participation. Centralised control over infrastructure and content often limits community voice and knowledge production (Willems & Mano, 2016; Bernal, 2021). Community-managed digital spaces, by contrast, promote transparency, accountability, and cultural relevance, while supporting epistemic sovereignty and resilience (Schoon et al., 2020; Acey et al., 2021). Similarly, schools and educational institutions that adopt inclusive digital teaching methods can co-design learning environments that recognise student knowledge and extend benefits beyond formal classrooms (Turner, 2023; Luke et al., 2023).

Finally, historical and contextual awareness underpins all decolonial strategies. Even when framed as tools of empowerment, digital technologies can reproduce colonial continuities, sustaining inequality and epistemic dominance (Bernal, 2021; Willems & Mano, 2016). Celebratory narratives of digital inclusion risk masking these power asymmetries unless they are grounded in careful analyses of political economy, governance, and knowledge hierarchies (Acey et al., 2021; Nyabola, 2024). A historically informed approach ensures that digital inclusion tackles root causes rather than just surface-level access.

In short, decolonising digital inclusion in Nigeria requires multi-layered strategies. Participatory media, language inclusion, methodological reform, critical literacy, and decentralised governance all play essential roles (Schoon et al., 2020; Meighan, 2021). By enabling communities to co-create content, shape knowledge production, and assert agency, these strategies redistribute power, increase visibility, and foster civic engagement and sustainability (Bernal, 2021; Nyabola, 2024; Gullion & Tilton, 2023). Decolonial digital inclusion works best when reflexivity, local adaptation, and institutional support are at the centre of participation.

Participatory Media and Community Knowledge Production

Participatory media has become an important way of empowering communities in Nigeria, allowing people to actively create, share, and access knowledge through platforms like community radio, social media, and local digital networks. Unlike traditional media, which often works top-down, participatory media emphasises dialogue, collaboration, and local ownership of information. This approach encourages civic engagement and community-driven problem-solving (Okocha & Ola-Akuma, 2022; Yar'Adua & Galadima, 2023). It also aligns with decolonial thinking, challenging the dominance of Western knowledge frameworks and recognising local communities as legitimate producers of knowledge rather than just passive consumers (Obiakor et al., 2025).

A core idea behind participatory media is the creation of communal knowledge; knowledge that emerges from shared experiences, indigenous practices, and local priorities. When this knowledge is incorporated into digital platforms, communities can maintain their cultural identity while engaging meaningfully in governance, development, and advocacy (Vuma, 2021; Molnar & Chartrand, 2021). In this way, knowledge is no longer controlled solely by elites; it becomes something co-created and owned collectively, supporting local decision-making and problem-solving (Servaes, 2020). Participatory media thus acts as a bridge between traditional knowledge systems and modern digital technologies, ensuring that development initiatives are grounded in everyday realities (Ojo et al., 2023).

Participatory media also plays an important role in promoting linguistic inclusion. Radio programmes in indigenous languages, as well as local-language social media platforms, allow communities to pass on cultural heritage across generations. These initiatives help counter historical marginalisation, strengthen social cohesion, improve literacy in both local and national languages, and foster a sense of pride in indigenous knowledge systems (Molnar & Chartrand, 2021; Munyadziwa & Mncwango, 2021; Onyenankeya, 2022; Vuma, 2021).

In the civic and political arena, participatory media can enhance political literacy and democratic engagement. Young people and grassroots organisations increasingly use digital platforms to mobilise communities, share information, and monitor public policies (Okocha & Ademu-Eteh, 2022; Okocha & Ola-Akuma, 2022). By giving communities direct access to information and reducing inequalities in who gets to participate, participatory media strengthens accountability and connects local concerns to broader policy debates (Oloruntoba & Ojebede, 2023; Manyozo, 2022). This illustrates how closely digital inclusion and democratic participation are linked.

From a decolonial perspective, participatory media challenges entrenched knowledge hierarchies that have historically prioritised outside expertise over local voices. By giving communities control over what knowledge is created and shared, it legitimises local experiences and promotes diverse narratives that reflect Nigeria's rich ethnolinguistic landscape (Wyatt et al., 2013; Servaes, 2020). Moving away from top-down communication to collaborative approaches enables communities to shape both social and policy agendas (Manyozo, 2022).

Social media plays a particularly important role in Nigeria's knowledge ecosystem. While it connects communities to global networks, it also supports local knowledge production by enabling people to share experiences, document community issues, and solve problems collectively (Molnar & Chartrand, 2021; Onyenankeya, 2022). This kind of participation fosters innovation in areas such as agriculture, health, and governance, while preserving cultural memory and strengthening community agency (Vuma, 2021; Adetola et al., 2024).

Despite its potential, participatory media faces ongoing challenges. Digital divides, especially in rural areas with poor connectivity and low digital literacy, restrict equal participation (Okocha & Edafewotu, 2022; Zainuddin et al., 2024). Unequal access to media tools can also reinforce social hierarchies, as urban and elite groups often dominate digital spaces (Obiakor et al., 2025). Addressing these challenges through better infrastructure and targeted digital literacy programmes is essential to enable

inclusive community knowledge production (Servaes, 2020; Manyozo, 2022).

Community media such as local radio stations, newsletters, and online forums remains vital for grassroots empowerment. These platforms allow communities to document local realities, advocate for resources, and set development priorities. They position citizens as active participants in policy debates, rather than passive audiences, and help strengthen democratic practices, transparency, and responsive governance (Mojaye & Lamidi, 2015; Oseni & Omale, 2024; Yar'Adua & Galadima, 2023). Knowledge co-production through participatory media also promotes social accountability. By documenting issues such as infrastructure gaps or educational inequalities, communities generate evidence that informs government responses and policy decisions (Oloruntoba & Ojebode, 2023; Oseni, 2024). This feedback ensures accountability is grounded in community-verified data, improving transparency and trust (Okocha & Ola-Akuma, 2022). Integrating indigenous knowledge with digital media further supports sustainable development. Recording and sharing traditional practices in agriculture, conflict resolution, and environmental stewardship helps communities preserve cultural heritage while enabling local innovations to scale and adapt (Vuma, 2021; Molnar & Chartrand, 2021). Digital platforms thus provide culturally sensitive and environmentally sustainable solutions.

Participatory media also facilitates intergenerational knowledge transfer, allowing young people to engage with elders' insights and traditional expertise through digital tools. This strengthens cultural continuity, mentorship, and skills development, ensuring that local knowledge evolves while staying connected to tradition (Okocha & Ola-Akuma, 2022; Onyenankeya, 2022).

By and large, participatory media in Nigeria has the power to transform community knowledge production. By enabling collaboration, supporting digital literacy, and promoting inclusion, it allows communities to influence governance, improve accountability, and shape development priorities. Participatory media is therefore a key strategy for creating more equitable and sustainable community

development (Servaes, 2020; Manyozo, 2022; Obiakor et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This paper has shown that decolonising digital inclusion in Nigeria is about much more than simply providing infrastructure or devices. By drawing on decolonial and participatory media perspectives, the analysis has shown how digital inequalities are shaped by intersecting structural conditions, including uneven infrastructural development, linguistic marginalisation, gendered exclusions, and regulatory environments that privilege dominant global platforms and Western epistemologies (Quijano, 2000; Jenkins, 2016).

In this context, participatory media including community radio, locally run messaging networks, and digital projects in indigenous languages offers a powerful way for communities to take control of their own knowledge. These approaches allow people to speak on their own terms, challenge old hierarchies, and affirm the value of Nigeria's linguistic and cultural diversity.

Beyond representation, such initiatives also foster civic engagement, intergenerational knowledge sharing, and locally relevant development outcomes. Nevertheless, challenges remain. Many communities still face gaps in digital skills, limited access to reliable infrastructure, and weak institutional support. Addressing these issues calls for strategies that combine critical digital literacy, supportive policies, reflexive research, and local governance to ensure communities hold the power to shape knowledge, rather than simply consume it.

Recommendations

To make digital inclusion genuinely decolonial, Nigeria needs to move beyond technology alone. Policies should focus on community-led approaches, recognising local media practices and indigenous knowledge systems. This includes providing funding, regulatory support, and infrastructure for grassroots digital initiatives, so that marginalised groups can fully participate in digital spaces while challenging the dominance of global platforms and Western knowledge.

Research must also change its approach. Scholars should centre Nigerian voices and lived experience, using participatory and reflective methods that treat local knowledge as valid and important. Integrating indigenous ways of knowing and community communication practices can help researchers understand how people navigate digital spaces, co-create knowledge, and respond to structural barriers moving away from extractive, top-down methods. On a practical level, digital engagement should be seen as both a cultural and developmental process. Supporting content creation in local languages strengthens accessibility, preserves cultural identity, and ensures outcomes are meaningful for communities. At the same time, locally grounded digital literacy programmes build critical thinking, creativity, and ethical skills that go far beyond simple technical competence. Future studies could explore how these approaches affect communities over time across different parts of Nigeria, helping to refine strategies for inclusive, decolonial digital participation.

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