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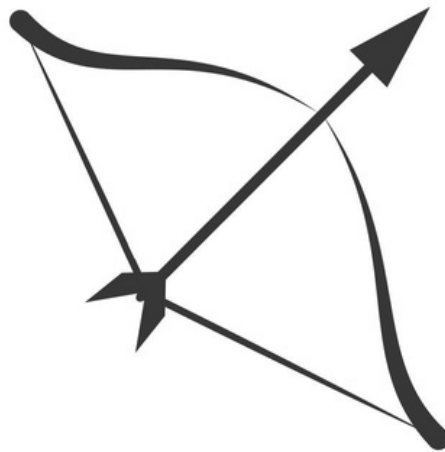
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est un néologisme **lobiri** formé à partir de **djir** « connaître, savoir » et **bouli** « regrouper, mettre ensemble ». En un mot, **DJIBOUL** symbolise l'expression des connaissances scientifiques ou savoirs qui permettront aux contributeurs ou chercheurs d'avoir une ascension professionnelle.

L'arc et la flèche symbolisent le courage, l'adresse ou l'habileté ce qui caractérise la vision de la revue.

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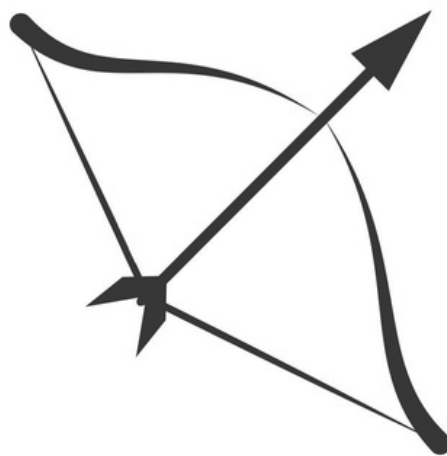
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- Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu'il le dit : Le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation socio- historique et une inadaptation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères.

Diakité (1985, p.105)

- **Conclusion** : Elle ne doit pas faire double emploi avec le résumé et la discussion. Elle doit être un rappel des principaux résultats obtenus et des conséquences les plus importantes que l'on peut en déduire.
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DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AS A PROPAGANDA TOOL FOR THE BENINESE GOVERNMENT: ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF A DIGITAL STRATEGY

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Abstract : The experiment of normo communication advocated by the Beninese government, known as the "rupture," aimed to reduce government propaganda in the media. However, this strategy soon revealed its limitations. The government's communication department not only infiltrated traditional national and international media but also heavily utilized digital platforms to promote government actions. The presidency of the republic is active on various social networks and numerous platforms, which have become the preferred channels for informing the population, surpassing traditional media. In the Beninese context, over 65% of the population is illiterate, and Benin ranks 191st in the ICT development index. This raises the question of whether this digital-oriented trend effectively reaches the majority of Beninese citizens. To assess the real impact of the Beninese government's digital communication strategy on the population, we conducted an analysis focusing on two topics: "Consommons Local" and "Azoli," which the government extensively communicated. We measured the effects of this communication through a sample study. Echo chamber theory is the theoretical approach utilized in this work. Our investigations revealed that not all segments of the population are aware of certain government actions. This mode of communication does contribute to improving the government's image among Beninese citizens living abroad. While digital communication plays a role

in the development of African countries by providing easy access to information, several factors can impede this progress. These factors include limited internet coverage, the issue of literacy, and restricted access to digital platforms, among others.

Key words: Benin, digital communication, government, media, platforms

LA COMMUNICATION DIGITALE COMME OUTIL DE PROPAGANDE POUR LE GOUVERNEMENT BÉNINOIS : AVANTAGES ET LIMITES D'UNE STRATÉGIE NUMÉRIQUE

Résumé : L'expérience de la normo-communication prônée par le gouvernement béninois dit de la rupture à son installation avait pour but de réduire la propagande gouvernementale dans les médias. Si cette stratégie a tôt fait de révéler ses limites puisque, la direction de la communication gouvernementale a non seulement envahi les médias classiques nationaux et internationaux mais a pris également d'assaut les plateformes numériques pour relayer de façon abondante les actions de gouvernement. La présidence de la république est présente sur plusieurs réseaux sociaux numériques, elle est présente sur de nombreuses plateformes digitales. Ces plateformes deviennent même les canaux privilégiés pour informer la population au détriment des médias classiques. Dans le contexte béninois, la population est analphabète à plus de 65%. De plus, le Bénin est un pays qui occupe aujourd'hui la 191^e place en matière d'indice de développement des TICs. Cette tendance orientée pratiquement vers le digital permet-elle de brasser la large majorité des béninois ? Cette question nous a permis d'analyser la stratégie de communication digitale du gouvernement béninois afin de déterminer son impact réel sur les populations. La méthode utilisée est d'identifier deux sujets : le moins du *Consommons Local* et *Azoli* sur lesquels le gouvernement a abondamment communiqué et de mesurer auprès d'un échantillon les effets de cette communication. La théorie de la caisse de résonance est l'approche théorique mise à contribution dans ce travail. Au terme des investigations, nous sommes parvenus à comprendre que toutes les couches de la population ne sont pas informées de certaines actions du gouvernement. Ce mode de communication permet de bonifier l'image du gouvernement auprès des béninois de la diaspora. S'il est vrai que la communication digitale participe au développement des pays d'Afrique avec une facile possibilité d'accès à l'information, plusieurs facteurs peuvent plomber cet élan dont notamment la couverture internet, la question de l'alphabétisation, l'accès aux plateformes digitales et bien d'autres.

Mots clés : Bénin, communication digitale, gouvernement, plateformes numériques, média

Introduction

Information and Communication Sciences (ICS) have undergone a significant transformation in recent years, with various disciplines emerging as a result of the digital revolution. Putting CIS into perspective during this time, Bougnoux (2001, p.67) notes that it "accompanies and seeks to shape the changes in the media, the continuous development of new technologies, and the rise of public relations in general." From this viewpoint, ICS inherently incorporates the use of digital technology. El Kaoune (2020, p.146-147) highlights how technological transformation and the rise of the Internet have helped decision-makers recognize the importance of integrating new digital tools into corporate communications. Digital communication is becoming an



increasingly vital component of communication strategies, not only for companies but also for public authorities. Beyond simply digitizing the medium for transmitting information, digital communication presents a genuine challenge for institutions aiming to excel, particularly from a communication perspective (Mokrani and Ayache, 2018 p. 128). It transcends spatial boundaries and the traditional pace of information dissemination, now accessible at any time and with just a click (Kalu, 2022, p.9).

Political communication experts have always used the powerful impact of images to enhance their communication actions. In the United States, television has played a significant role in politics. According to Schudson (2015, pp.162-163), Kennedy's victory over Nixon in 1960 was attributed to his more appealing image during the first televised debate. Reagan's success also relied on his skill in manipulating visual media, rather than purely rational factors. With the advancement of technology, digital media has become a part of political communication. Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, extensively used the social network Twitter during his presidential campaign and throughout his term. Journalists at the New York Times even nicknamed him the "tweet-president." His Twitter account became a valuable source of information for certain major media outlets seeking news about the White House. Barack Obama, his predecessor, also heavily relied on the Facebook social network to communicate before, during, and even after his presidency.

Over the past decade, African governments have increasingly used digital channels for official communication (Brahim et al., 2022, p.15). In West African countries like Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, and Benin, governments have adopted a communication strategy centered around digital tools. For example, in Benin, the Presidency of the Republic maintains a presence on various social networks and digital platforms. They extensively share information about current and future government activities on these platforms to keep the population informed. Minutes from traditional Wednesday cabinet meetings are even posted on social networks before they are announced on radio at 1 p.m. or television at 8 p.m. In some cases, these digital platforms have become preferred channels for sharing information, sometimes even surpassing traditional media. Additionally, they serve as a source of information for certain traditional media outlets.

In the Beninese context, where digital platforms are heavily utilized by the government's communication department for the rapid dissemination of government information and propagandist messages, this situation can contribute to the spread of unilateral or biased information, serving solely the government's interests. This may lead to a polarization of public opinion, making the population vulnerable to partisan and controlled information.

This research is relevant as it addresses both the advantages and limitations of the government's digital-based communication strategy. The internet penetration rate, which dropped from 70.40% in the first quarter of 2021 to 69.08% in the first quarter of

2022¹, suggests that this score supports the government's digital communication strategy, given the significant growth of the digital population. This could present a major asset for promoting and publicizing government actions. This approach will help the research explore the benefits of government communication. However, the issue of the efficiency of a digital-focused strategy remains, as the digital divide is still noticeable. In this regard, the government acknowledges inequalities in access to digital infrastructure and, as part of its action program, plans to deploy high and very high-speed Internet nationwide, along with a digital transformation of local communities. Benin ranks 191st in terms of the Internet development index². In such an environment, is it wise for the Beninese government to focus its communication efforts on digital platforms when more than 65% of the population is still illiterate? This main question gives rise to several other inquiries, two of which will be the focus of this work. These are: How does the Beninese government use digital communication to inform the population? And what are the impacts of the government's digital communication on the digital population? Indeed, Tufekci's (2017) work demonstrates that digital social networks have transformed the way information circulates, but the power they wield can also be used to manipulate facts and influence public opinion. In this vein, this study aims to explore the strengths and limitations of a government communication strategy centered on digital platforms.

1. Theoretical approach

The echo chamber theory is the one chosen for this study. It emerged from media studies alongside agenda-setting theory and limited effects theory. However, its rise coincided with the advent of digital communication. Sunstein's (2001) work highlighted how the internet can reinforce ideological divides due to algorithms that present users with information aligned with their interests. The application of echo chamber theory in digital communication shows that individuals surfing the internet surround themselves with information sources that match their interests. Digital platforms attempt to amplify this phenomenon by predominantly showing content similar to what users have already liked or shared. In the case of the Beninese government, several digital platforms are utilized to inform the public about government actions. Algorithms that have identified the interests of the population increasingly propose this type of messaging. This kind of strategy can, intentionally or unintentionally, contribute to the amplification of positive perceptions among the public regarding government actions.

¹ These data are those of the *Autorité de Régulation des Communications Electroniques et de la Poste*, which can be consulted at <https://arcep.bj/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Tableau-de-bord-Internet-au-31-Mars-2022.pdf>.

² The ICT Development Index is a global ranking produced by the International Telecommunication Union of the United Nations. Based on internationally-agreed indicators, this index determines the level of ICT access and use in member countries of the United Nations



2. Study approach

The purpose of this study is to analyze government communication, specifically through digital media, and evaluate its impact on the target audience. This form of communication aims to either inspire the target audience to align with a specific ideal or persuade them to take action. Therefore, selecting the appropriate target audience is crucial for the success of any communication campaign. In this study, we closely examine the digital communications of the Beninese government. To achieve this, we conducted documentary research throughout the entire process. We reviewed scientific literature on political and government communication, with a specific focus on digital communication adopted by the Beninese government.

This study is both descriptive and analytical, aiming to better understand the impact of the Beninese government's digital communications. In the descriptive approach, the researcher observes and transcribes the observed facts. The analytical approach involves evaluating the observed and described facts. To accomplish this, we have chosen to focus on two prominent activities that have received significant media attention from the Beninese government. The first activity, titled "*Mois du consommations local*" (Month of Local Consumption), took place in October 2021 and involved a major media campaign on digital platforms. The second activity, titled "*Azoli*"³, is being implemented by the "*Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi*" (ANPE) as part of the "Inclusion des Jeunes" Project. The research involves collecting data on the various digital communication campaigns related to these two activities, as well as surveying the target audience to assess the impact of this communication. The cities chosen for this study are Cotonou and Porto-Novo, which are the country's main cities in terms of economic and political significance. These cities have multiple infrastructure facilities for internet access, the primary medium for information dissemination, and offer sufficient diversity and opportunities for a representative sample. A sample size of 200 people was selected, including 100 online participants and 100 respondents from direct questionnaires. The sample selection was based on a non-probabilistic method of reasoned choice. Direct questionnaire respondents were chosen from users of specific public services and individuals encountered in the informal sector. Online respondents were selected based on their regular presence on digital platforms. The selected age range is between 18 and 60, considering the chosen topics mainly focus on employment and local product consumption. The survey questions primarily inquire whether individuals have followed the digital campaign for these two events, and if so, what actions they are likely to take as a result. The data collection period spans from February 15 to March 12, 2023. The collected data will be presented in the results section.

³ The expression comes from the local Adja language and means "there's work". It's a way of encouraging the target audience to realize that it is indeed possible to find a job or work in Benin. It's a government project to alleviate the employment problem as much as possible.

3. Results

The findings provided in this report are based on the data collected from the two specific activities that were targeted for a digital media campaign by the Government Communications Department of Benin.

3.1. *Digital communication for the "Mois du consommations local"*

The Government of Benin has designated October 2022 as Local Consumption Month. The objective is to promote the consumption of local culinary products among Beninese citizens, with the support of various media channels. This advertising campaign was conducted in October 2022 on social media platforms and other digital channels.

Image 1: Official event poster



Source : Ministry of Industry and Trade website

Image 2: Image showing the social media used to broadcast the activity



Source : Ministry of Industry and Trade website

Image 1 features the trailer for the "Mois du consommations local" campaign, which has gained significant traction on popular social networks like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. Image 2 showcases the various digital channels utilized to promote and track the campaign. It highlights the diverse range of digital platforms designated for communication regarding the "Mois du consommations local" initiative.



Image3: This image illustrates the Instagram Challenge organized as part of the "Mois du consommations local" campaign.



Source: Instagram page of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce

This image captures the launch of the Instagram Challenge for the "Mois du consommations local" campaign. The challenge encouraged internet users to participate in a culinary feast of local dishes and share their posts on Instagram for a chance to win a prize.

Image 4: Facebook cover page of the ministry in charge



Source: Ministry of Industry and Commerce Facebook page

Image 5: Poster with the most interaction on Facebook during the "Mois du consommations local" 2022



Source: Ministry of Industry and Commerce Facebook page

Image 4 shows the Facebook cover page of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, indicating that it has more than 4,600 followers. Similarly, image 5 highlights the most recent post on local consumption for the year 2022. This post received 30 likes from internet users and was shared by 4 individuals.

Additionally, a commercial has been produced and broadcasted on YouTube. You can view it by clicking on the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_ITDwb6nf4

3.2. Digital communication for "Azoli"

"Azoli" is a project implemented by the Beninese government that aims to provide a solution for unemployed youth. In December 2020, the "Azoli" program was introduced, offering training opportunities for young people between the ages of 15 and 30⁴. This initiative relies heavily on digital platforms for effective communication and outreach.

Image 6 : Home page of an official government website



Source : www.beninrevele.bj

Image 7 : Azoli promotional activity relayed on social networks



Source : ANPE Twitter page

⁴ <https://beninrevele.bj/article/149/azoli-pallier-chomage-benin/>



Image 6 showcases the homepage of an official government website. This page serves as a promotion for a project that holds great significance to the government. Additional images, like Image 7, which are widely shared on digital platforms, highlight promotional activities happening in the field.

Image 8 : Some project beneficiaries



Source : www.anpe.bj/azoli

Image 9 : Project Facebook cover page



Source : Azoli's Facebook page

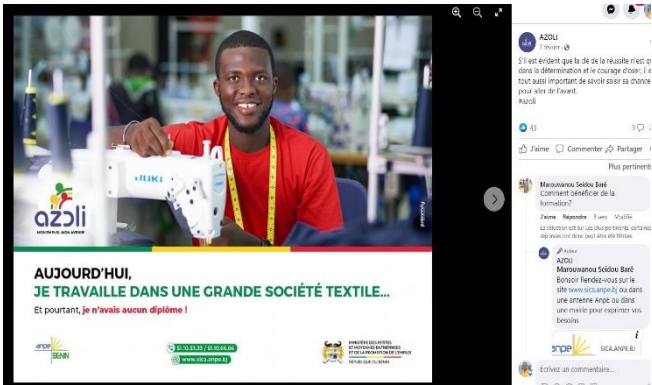
Image 8 presents a selection of the individuals who have benefited from the project. Similar images can be found on the ANPE website and social media channels. Image 9 features the cover image of the official *Azoli* Facebook page. This page actively engages with online users through daily posts and has gained a following of more than 3,600 people.

Image 10 : Some project beneficiaries



Source : Azoli's Facebook page

Image 11 : Project Facebook cover page



Source : Azoli's Facebook page

Images 10 and 11 display testimonials from some of the beneficiaries. Such images are abundant on the government's digital channels.

3.3. Impact of the government's digital communication on the target audience

Respondents were asked if this digital communication had influenced their decision to purchase the products targeted by the media campaign. The same questions were asked for both products. The first question asked whether the respondents had seen posters or other communication media for *Consommons Local* and *Azoli*. The answers are shown in the table below.



Table 1: Respondents who have followed digital communication

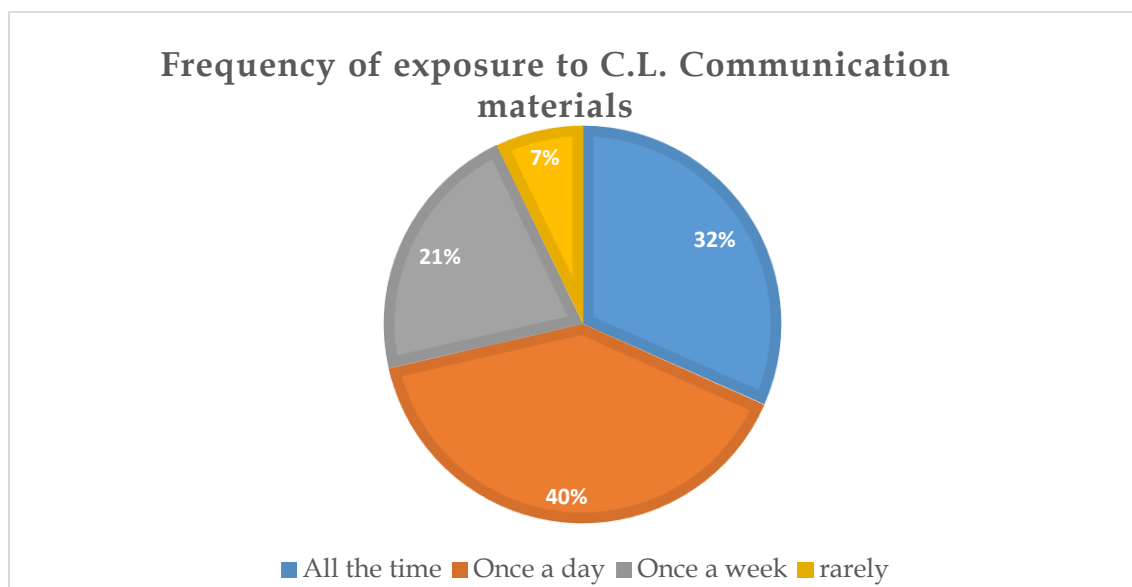
	<i>C.L.</i>		<i>Azoli</i>	
	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	98	49%	178	89%
No	102	51%	22	11%
Total	200	100%	200	100%

Kalu and *al.*, March 2023, field data

*C.L. : *Consommations Local*

This table shows the reach of digital communication for both activities. Less than half (49%) of the target audience saw *Support Local* in a month, while 89% of the target audience saw digital communication about *Azoli*.

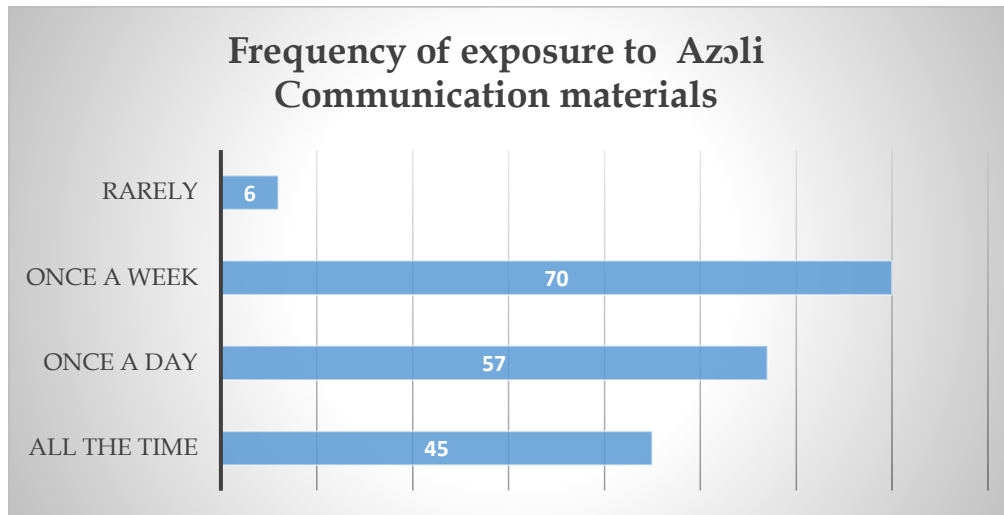
The next question aimed to determine how often the target audience encountered different digital communication channels for the two activities. The results are as follows:



Kalu and *al.*, March 2023, field data

This graph illustrates the frequency of exposure to online communications during *Support Local* month. Out of the 98 people who encountered these communication channels, 32% saw them infrequently across all platforms, and 40% saw them at least once a day.

Regarding the frequency of exposure to communication about *Azoli*, the collected information can be summarized as follows:



Kalu and *al.*, March 2023, field data

Graph 2 shows the frequency of exposure of the target audience to various communication channels related to Azoli. Out of the 178 people who saw a communication channel related to the activity at least once, only 25% (45 people) saw it multiple times, and 39% (70 people) saw it once a week.

Following this question, it was important to determine whether this communication had prompted a reaction from the target audience. For Support Local month, respondents were asked if they had participated in a session or actually consumed local food as a result of the communication. The question was closed to facilitate counting. Only 21 out of 200 people, or 10%, reported that they had slightly modified their eating habits to comply with the awareness campaign. The same was true for Azoli. The reactions elicited were either a decision to apply for the projects or to share the information with relatives or on social networks. Out of the 200 people surveyed, 131 acknowledged sharing the information or applying to benefit from the program, which equates to a percentage of over 65%.

These results will be further discussed in detail, considering various aspects and analyzing the implications thoroughly.

4. Discussion

Today, the use of digital technology is not just a method for exchanging information, but rather a culture with significant social, political, and ethical implications (Kalu, 2022). It employs techniques to mobilize and engage the digital population in supporting a cause. The Beninese government's adoption of a strategy to mobilize and engage its citizens through digital communication is justified by the rapid growth of its digital community. Out of an estimated population of over 13 million⁵, the digital population has significantly increased in recent years. According

⁵ This statistic is the result of cross-checking several sources, all of which agree on a figure in excess of 13 million



to *datareportal*⁶, it has reached over 4.6 million, which is approximately 35% of the population. By January 2023, nearly 13 million smartphones were in use in Benin. This justifies the government's focus on digital platforms for communication. Traditional channels for disseminating information are being replaced by digital channels, allowing the government to reach an audience that is more active online. The objective is commendable, and the strategy appears sound. However, it should be noted that over 65% of the population in Benin is still illiterate, and the Internet penetration rate is relatively low compared to global levels. The digital divide between developed and developing countries hinders the full utilization of the Internet as a unifying platform for all segments of the population. This situation leads us to consider the advantages of digital political communication in the Beninese context, as well as its limitations.

- *Advantages of a digital political communication strategy in the Beninese context*

The results presented in this work demonstrate the ease of evaluating digital communication actions. Feedback can be measured by the number of people reached and the interactions on communication channels. The two activities examined here benefited from similar distribution channels and strategies (Image1, Image2, Image6, and Image7). However, it is worth noting that communication about *Azoli* received more interaction than *Support Local* month (Image 4, Image 5, Image 10, and Image 11). This higher interest in the second communication (Table 1) can be attributed to the subject matter, which addresses youth and employment issues. The precariousness of jobs and the lack of employment opportunities make the subject of *Azoli* more engaging. In line with this, Benbouziane and Bensmaine (2020, p.111) found that 30.3% of Internet users are connected in search of job opportunities. Therefore, it is advantageous to use new media to address such concerns.

Digital communication allows for broader reach and can enhance the government's image among the target audience, as well as among Beninese living abroad and other individuals interested in Benin. This can be observed through the comments and likes on Facebook and Instagram pages related to the two activities. The engagement comes from people beyond Benin's borders. El Kaoune (2020, p. 143) emphasizes the importance of new media in tourism development, highlighting their role in restructuring public life by promoting freedom of opinion and responsibility. Digital communication enables the diaspora to stay informed about news from their home country without relying on intermediaries. Additionally, digital channels help overcome geographical barriers and reach the target audience worldwide.

Digital communication facilitates the sharing of information, making it accessible anywhere with just a click. As a result, almost all respondents (90%, see Table 1) have

⁶ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-benin> is a website that regularly publishes statistics on the world's digital population

been exposed to communication on the selected topics. Brahim and *al.* (2022, p.6) studied the digitization of administration and concluded that it allows the state to cut costs and time in reaching targets, thereby improving the productivity of companies and citizens. Digitization not only provides timely information to citizens but also allows them to choose the type of information they wish to receive.

While digital communication is a crucial part of the Beninese government's communication strategy, it is not without limitations.

- ***Limitations of digital communication initiatives***

As demonstrated earlier, using digital technology to reach target audiences has its advantages but also its limitations.

Benin is one of the countries where the digital divide is still evident, despite government efforts. The results of this study indicate that the enthusiasm of the digital population, especially young people, for digital communication depends on the subject matter. In this case, *Azoli* is more popular than C.L. This choice may also be influenced by the limited room for error when using the internet due to connection instability or costs. The preference for *Azoli* over CL may be attributed to the digital divide. The divide is not only evident between developed and developing countries but also within the same country in terms of income levels (Ollivier, 2006).

The income gap can contribute to the digital divide. For instance, when assessing the impact of the communication covered in this study, it is observed that only a small proportion of respondents have made the decision to change their eating habits. This decision is closely related to budget availability and income. Kiyindou (2009, p.16) refers to the digital divide not as a gap between spaces, but as a difference in digital accessibility, usage, and benefits.

Achieving perfect digital communication can be challenging due to various factors that can hinder its efficiency (Azizkhon, 2021, p.35). This study supports this assertion by revealing the level of interaction (Image 4, Image 5, Image 8, and Image 9) and the frequency of exposure to the government's digital communication actions (Graph 1 and Graph 2). These results demonstrate the relatively low impact of the government's digital communication efforts through these two activities. The target audience's exposure to digital communication is limited, which consequently affects the feedback obtained. Few individuals have changed their eating habits, for example. Concerns about personal data protection can also make internet users hesitant to embrace communication products. Some researchers (Chenal et al., 2021, and Brahim et al., 2022) emphasize the need for African states to address the issues of cybersecurity and personal data protection, as having a high penetration rate of mobile telephony and the internet is not enough. A range of skills is necessary to fully benefit from information and communication technologies.



Regardless of the aforementioned factors, several elements contribute to digital exclusion, which hampers the government's digital communication efforts.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into institutional communication in the digital age within the context of Benin. It examines the effectiveness of government communication on digital platforms, recognizing the increasing prominence of digital tools for information dissemination. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the existence of the digital divide and the obstacles posed by digital exclusion and limited access to digital infrastructure. The research focuses on assessing the impact of the government's digital communication by analyzing two specific government activities: "Azoli" and "Mois du Consommation Local". The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, combining observation and analysis. Quantitative data collected from 200 internet users supports the analysis and validates the observed findings.

Digital communication is undeniably relevant in today's world, offering numerous advantages such as direct interaction with the target audience and easier measurement of feedback. The level of interest in online communication about a particular product or initiative depends on the target audience and the subject matter. In this study, youth and employment-related issues garnered more attention compared to gastronomy. While digital communication brings various benefits to the government, it also faces limitations within the Beninese context. Challenges such as the digital divide, digital exclusion in certain areas, concerns about cybersecurity and personal data protection, and limited access to digital infrastructure need to be addressed for effective digital communication initiatives. Although this study covers several aspects, it is important to note that certain factors, such as the intellectual level of the target audience and the consumption habits of the illiterate population (which constitutes a significant portion of Benin's population), were not explored in depth. Further research could focus on digital communication tailored to the needs of the illiterate population, as they form the majority in Benin. Overall, this study highlights the importance of considering the advantages and limitations of digital communication as a propaganda tool for the Beninese government. It serves as a foundation for future research in understanding the impact of digital strategies on the population and informing communication efforts in the dynamic digital landscape.

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