Decoding Digital Participation through the Promotion of Equitable Social Practices

Bruce Mutsvairo, Professor at the Department of Media and Culture Studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands

Social media platforms continue to attract widespread attention amid criticism that they are responsible for amplifying social and economic inequalities, which in turn intensifies the diffusion of conflicts in many societies around the world. Indeed, digital networks play a pivotal role in the promotion of social and economic segregation of the underprivileged, potentially exacerbating longstanding community-based conflicts and deep-seated divides. However, efforts aimed at reducing the social networks-inspired inequalities rarely involve the less fortunate. In other words, academic, pro-business, state and other institutional-based interventions dominate policy, scientific and private sector measures in addressing these inequalities. Yet, the process of helping those disadvantaged by existing web-inspired social disparities should involve the 'common citizen' who bears the brunt of these socio-economic inequalities. To this end, the decolonisation of social media would be meaningless if populations based in the Global South were not part of the collaborative efforts to rethink how digital media should be structured. It is important to think about what alternatives are available for communities living in non-Western societies, for whom access to social networks remains an important barrier to digital inclusivity. The main objective of this paper, therefore, is to conceive a post-digital framework aimed at promoting the interests of less affluent societies as an underlying driver of sustainable web-based participation.