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ENGAGING AFRICAN YOUTH ON CLIMATE TALKS IN THE VIRTUAL SPACE VIS-À-VIS THE CHALLENGES OF COP27

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Abstract

Climate change is a crisis in need of a global response. There have been various global approaches towards climate change mitigation and adaptation across the globe, some of which have involved engaging children and youth in response to various intertwined environmental challenges. Missing pieces and insufficient information have led to numerous studies about climate change, and while some studies were focused on young people's views about climate change, there is very little existing research exploring ways in which this population could be more effectively engaged. This study uses a qualitative library research method to narrow existing research gaps through a specific objective that probes the idea of engaging African youth on climate talks within the arena of virtual spaces vis-à-vis the pertinent COP27 challenges. The social marketing theory was used to anchor the ideas within. The study found that the battle against climate change requires ambition, collective action and inclusivity, thus the study supports active youth participation in climate governance through the adoption and use of virtual spaces such as social media and virtual reality for the purpose of engineering climate talks, and accelerating climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Introduction

Climate change is a crisis that has taken a global dimension,and conversely needs an urgent response. It is therefore unsurprising that scholars from various fields have aired their views on the present climate change conundrum. For instance,Olagunju, Adewoye, Adewoye and Opasola (2021) explain that climate change is globally considered as a pressing environmental issue. Shehata, Johansson, Johansson and Andersen (2022) also affirm that across the globe, extreme weather events have brought climate change into people's daily lives. From extreme heat-waves, droughts, wildfires, heavy rainfall, flooding, and snowstorms, people on all continents are experiencing how the climate changes. There have been various global approaches towards climate change mitigation and adaptation across the globe, some of which have involved engaging children and youth in response to the various intertwined environmental challenges that are climatic in nature. Melissa (2022) explains that how ambitiously and inclusively the world tackles climate change will determine our success or failure in achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals.The concept of youth engagement is increasingly apparent in international and national agendas, marking a shift in thinking about young people as assets to society, as well as key development partners (Policy Forum, 2012). Napawan, Simpson and Snyder (2017) explain that connecting youth with a

sense of urgency represents one of the largest hurdles to effectively engaging them in climate resilience planning. A good answer to the question of how to engage youth in this sense may be captured from the window of opportunities that the virtual world has to offer. Though the effectiveness of such efforts may not be immediate, it is an approach that captures a majority of the population in continents like Africa, where the youth represent a demographically overwhelming majority in terms of population. With 200 million people aged between 15 to 24 years, Africa has the largest population of young people in the world and the fastest growing youth population in the world (COP27, 2022).

It is clear that efforts need to be channeled towards progress that is beyond information and consultation activities targeting youth, which too often is what is considered as successful youth participation (Melissa, 2022).The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) explain that many young people are eager to contribute towards climate and environmental challenges. Millions of school-age students have been marching for greater action against climate change from both national and regional governments. For instance, the COP27 in Egypt, made history with the first-ever youth-led climate forum, as young representatives from the Conference of the Youth presented the Global Youth Statement (COP27, 2022).It is not an overstatement to assert that young people have good ideas to offer concerning our climate as well as other social challenges that threaten our collective future. Mugeere, Barford and Magimbi (2021, p. 345) explain that "the poorest and most vulnerable young people are the most exposed to climate shocks—despite their negligible role in driving climate change." Engaging young people on climate talks via virtual spaces can be helpful in terms of highlighting COP27 challenges such as the present financing gap, issues of loss and damage as well as the adaptation gap. The youth as well as young people in general are highly affected by climate change and should be given a voice too. Godfrey and Tunhuma (2020) affirm that a recent UNICEF study demonstrates that climate change disproportionately impacts women and young people. The 1992 Earth Summit recognized nine groups as channels for achieving the worlds sustainable development goals, which included women, children and youth, indigenous peoples, farmers, business and industry, labor and trade unions, science and technology, local authorities, and NGO's (Han and Ahn, 2020). This does not only buttress the importance of all these groups working collectively, it shows that children and youth also need to be regarded as important agents in the ongoing battle against climate change, and the task of ensuring environmental sustainability.

There is no doubt that young people are related to climate change in multiple ways. Young people will live much of their lives on a planet altered by climate change (Sanson, Van Hoorn, and Burke, 2019). They must therefore be equipped with the right tools, if they are to

face such a future with any hope. It can be argued that the youth are the environmental stewards for the future. For instance, teenagers have fought against climate change through various forms of activism, including lawsuits against fossil fuel companies and governments (Parker, 2019).Some scholars have argued that youth engagement in environmental activism is nowhere near the peak of its potentials, despite their lack of prescription in terms of an effective way forward. Twenge (2012) asserts that a study found declining patterns in young people in terms of civic orientation such as political participation and interest in social problems, with the largest decline being observed in the area of 'environmental action.' Corner, Chiary, Roberts, Chiari, Völler, Mayrhuber, Mandl and Monson (2015) explain that while some studies have focused on young people's views about climate change, there is very little existing research exploring ways in which this population could be more effectively engaged. Also, there have been studies about youth participation in climate activism, but very few studies have focused their beam light on the daring need to engage African youth on climate talks via virtual space. This study uses a qualitative library research method to narrow existing research gaps through a specific objective that probes the idea of engaging African youth on climate talks within the arena of virtual spaces vis-à-vis the pertinent Conference of Parties (COP27) challenges. In doing so it also examines the United Nations (UN) COP27 challenges with the aim of methodically highlighting some of the strong academic debates that can be used as a compass for recommending a way forward.

Conceptual Clarification

Climate Change: The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 2007) define climate change as a change of climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity, that alters the composition of the global atmosphere, and that is in addition to natural climate variability over comparable time periods. The study explores climate change and how the virtual world can engineer climate talks.

COP: The COP refers to the United Nations (UN) Conference of Parties, which is the highest decision making body of the Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC).Parties have established their resolve to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5°Cin order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change (Global Climate Action). The COP organizes an annual conference which is focused on climate talks. The first Conference of Parties to be hosted by an African country took place in Egypt. The study explores the challenges of COP27 in light of the present climate change conundrum.

Virtual Space: Virtual space which is sometimes referred to as the virtual world has been defined as "an environment that visually mimics complex physical spaces, where people can interact with each other and with virtual objects, and where people are represented by animated

characters." (Bainbridge 2007, p. 472). Furthermore, virtual space can be viewed as a virtual social space that can serve the utilitarian purposes of communication and information sharing, which may be on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, or on any of the various immersive virtual reality gadgets. The study explores the concept of virtual space and how it can be used to engineer climate talks.

Theoretical Framework

The strings of this study are directly tied to the social marketing theory. The social marketing approach involves the systematic application of concepts and techniques to achieve specific behavioural goals that are for social good (Corner and Randall, 2011). Aryanto and Paramitadevi (2018) explain that a social marketing programme should not only identify the target audience, it is also important to have an in-depth understanding of the target audience. The process of engaging the youth on the advantages of climate talks via virtual spaces especially regarding COP27 challenges such as the present financing gap, issues of loss and damage as well as the adaptation gap can adopt a social marketing approach, especially when social media such as Facebook and Twitter are to be used.

The social marketing theory is a theory that applies to climate change communication due to an approach which is focused on influencing behaviors that benefit both individuals and society at large, rather than just commercial organizations. Brown (1986) argues that social marketing is a natural outgrowth of several developments in and out of marketing. The term social marketing was coined by Kotler and Zaltman in 1971. Social marketing draws from bodies of knowledge such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, and communication theory, with practical roots in advertising, public relations and market research (Serrat, 2010). The effectiveness of social marketing in achieving specific behavioural objectives is empirically well supported (Corner and Randall, 2011). Aryanto and Paramitadevi (2018) explain that the approach to social marketing campaign could be in terms of public education, public campaigns through social media, internet, and mass media.

The relevance of social marketing to the field of climate change communication comes from the fact that they both use communication and education campaigns that suit the audience, with the goal of achieving directed change. Social marketing is an approach that can be used for educational as well as awareness raising campaigns concerning climate change mitigation and adaptation using both social media and immersive virtual reality technology.

Review of Related Literature

Youth Engagement in Climate Talks

There are a handful of national and international organizations that have leveraged the advantages of involving children and youth in their climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. There have been campaigns by national and international organizations, aimed at engaging the public on climate issues with the goal of influencing opinions, increasing knowledge and engineering directed change by organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme amongst others. International organizations like the United Nations (UN) have shown that they recognize the crucial role that the youth play in tackling climate change as reflected by their collaborative involvement of youth-led organizations around the world through the United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change. Han and Ahn (2020) explain that international organizations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have financed various youth-led environmental projects around the world. Also, youth led as well as youth focused organizations have also applied the same approach towards youth engagement. Melissa(2022) asserts that youth participation is considered a human right because they are also citizens within society and their rights to participate in decision-making that affects them is fundamental. A good example of youth engagement in climate talks was the COP27 Youth and Future Generation Day which helped to widen the narrative around Africa as a hub of opportunities and innovative solutions, and highlighted how the youth are collaboratively driving action and change, including climate justice and intergenerational equity (COP27, 2022).Furthermore, it can be argued that youth participation through meaningful engagement, also fosters social justice.

Communication with a broad public audience is key to acting on climate change, and it has presented a significant challenge for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the greater scientific community (Moser 2010).Virtual spaces such as the internet, social media, and virtual reality may hold the key to solving the climate change communication challenge. Developing leadership skills in teens and the youth is considered an investment for the future of our society and this can be achieved by engaging them on the importance of using virtual spaces to engineer climate talks. Some of the avenues explored for youth leadership development is participation in community oriented social ventures, civic engagement or social activism (Garst and Johnson, 2003).Various non-state actors, including nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), citizens, and the private sector, have complemented governmental and intergovernmental efforts, combining their unique strengths and resources in combatting climate change both locally and transnationally (Han and Ahn, 2020).There is no doubt that young people need to be supported to engage in different dimensions of climate change

governance, so as to influence politics, policies and polity (institutional structures) as actors that share power with adults in deliberative arenas of decision-making (Melissa, 2022).It can be argued that despite the fact that the future belongs to young people, their voices have not been well integrated into global climate governance. Sanson et al (2019) explain that given the evidence that many young people feel powerless and hopeless about preventing catastrophic climate change, it is important to build their sense of self-efficacy and collective-efficacy. It can be argued that both self-efficacy and collective efficacy can be achieved when the African youth become aware of the importance of using virtual spaces for climate talks. It is however worthy of note to state that youth participation in climate and environmental issues requires decision makers to consciously create opportunities for meaningful engagement, and one of such opportunities lies in engaging them via virtual channels, using a peer to peer interaction approach.

Social Media as Catalyst for Climate Talks

The internet in general and social media in particular have democratized communication and are currently considered as strong tools for social mobilization, especially when the desired goal is directed change. Africa had an internet penetration average of 39.3 percent, which was still below the global average of 58.8 percent, Nigeria on the other hand had over 154 million internet users and a 73 percent internet penetration average, with well over 31 million Facebook subscribers as of 2021 (Internet World Stats,2022). These figures highlight the inherent potentials of the internet and social media in Nigeria and Africa at large. Ismael (2021) explains that between 1997 and 2010, there were 1.5 billion users of social networking sites, and Facebook topped the list with over 900 million users, while majority of users were between the 16 to 44 years age bracket. Vromen (2008) asserts that the internet is often portrayed as a democratizing force that facilitates new participatory practices. Anderson (2017) explains that social media platforms—such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook—have provided an opportunity for the general public to discuss and share opinions instantly with vast cross-border networks. It is also assumed that young people have been the big 'winners', even the leaders, in the advent of participation via the Internet. Furthermore, communication technologies have become an inevitable part of our daily lives. This explains why the use of social media for advocacy and youth engagement can be viewed as a contemporary approach. Sarkar and Rashid (2018) share the view that online communication has changed the way we interact with the world today. It can be argued that online communication has also given rise to social media as well as social networking sites that have subsequently evolved into platforms for the empowerment of individuals and groups. New media is a channel for dialogue and provides an arena where public discourse can take place (McQuail, 2005). Segerberg and

Bennett (2011) explain that social media can be used to promote and organize logistics for offline activities such as climate events and engagement actions. With all these converging views in mind, social media as a virtual space presents a mouthwatering prospect for climate talks. It's bad enough that climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing humanity, but another challenge is that people also find it difficult to get engaged so as to have a better understanding of the subject (Moser, 2010). Social media as a thriving virtual space, can provide a fertile ground for advocacy and awareness campaigns as well as channels of engagement.

There is no doubt that with the right approach, social media can provide an effective way of narrowing the knowledge gap on climate related events such as global warming and climate change, which can in turn lead to behavioural adjustments that are considered useful in terms of accelerating adaptation and mitigation efforts. Social media as a virtual space provides a fertile ground for youth engagement in ways that can be helpful to the youth and society at large. For instance, Mavrodieva, Rachman, Harahap and Shaw (2019) argue that social media is considered the new form of soft power which provides a platform for discussion on climate change as well as the current international political mechanisms which can be integrated into the climate change battle. This suggests that the utilitarian value of social media as a virtual space cannot be overstated.Ojala and Lakew (2017) highlight the fact that digital media provides access to more information about climate change while also facilitating different forms of engagement. Furthermore, the digital media in general and social media in particular are a good means of mobilization in the 21st century. A very valuable benefit of social media as a tool for climate talks is that it provides a means for sharing experiences that are effective for climate change advocacy. A creative way to interact with youthful people on climate change is through the use of Twitter and Instagram accounts for competitions and quizzes (León, Finkler, Bourk, Boykoff, and Davis, 2021). There is no doubt that the internet is a potential space for facilitating alternative modes of engagement for young people because it is integrated into their everyday life experiences (Vromen, 2008). Communicating about climate change on social media enables young people to develop sophisticated and complex conversationsaround these concerning issues (Andersson and Öhman, 2016). Robelia, Greenhow, and Burton (2011) explain that social networks may alsoprovide the motivation for young people to behave in more environmentally friendly ways.

The decentralized and participatory nature of social media offer novel possibilities to promote climate change engagement as peer attitudes can influence individual perception about this phenomenon (Kahan, Peters, and Wittlin, 2012).The purpose of these communication efforts include engaging citizens, changing citizen behavior and other goals such as explaining

scientific results (or sow doubts about them) and urging policy solutions (or slow decision-making down) (Segerberg, 2017).Social media can bring climate change psychologically closer to citizens, since information exchanged across the various platforms can help to personalize and concretize a topic that, in principle, is perceived as abstract and remote (Anderson, 2017). Considering the fact that the youth are adept users of social media, using it for information dissemination about climate change as well as for participatory purposes such as webinars, workshops and conferences can be beneficial towards narrowing the psychological distance challenge to climate change communication. Furthermore, social media platforms can become important communication channels for climate change especially when it comes to highlighting COP27 challenges such as the present financing gap, issues of loss and damage as well as the adaptation gap. Through social networks, many citizens receive information (Painter, Erviti, Fletcher, Howarth, Kristiansen, León, and Schäfer, 2016). Within climate change communication, images (including photographs, graphics, and videos) are important for raising awareness about this phenomenon towards fostering citizen engagement in mitigation and adaptation actions (O'Neill and Smith, 2014). The internet in general (blogs, websites, and forums) and social media in particular (Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp) are therefore relevant tools for engaging citizens in the discussion about climate change, since they can encourage knowledge, mobilization, and discussion about the phenomenon (Anderson, 2017). Furthermore, the sharing of images on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter amongst others can be an effective strategy for engineering climate talks as well as activism.

Virtual Reality as Catalyst for Climate Talks

The concept of immersive virtual reality games and documentaries as a tool for youth engagement is presently gaining momentum and attracting the attention of scholars from various fields. Virtual reality is a communication medium that leads an individual to perceive experiences and environments as if they were not synthetic (Lombard and Ditton, 1997). Immersive virtual reality technology has been used for environmental education purposes in developed countries. Through scientific investigation and inquiry of in-site field trips, students are able to identify and experience environmental issues and enhance their understanding on a firsthand basis (Cho and Park, 2023). It can be argued that immersive virtual reality and augmented reality present a cheaper substitute for in-field trips to distant locations like the Arctic and Antarctica, which in essence helps to narrow the psychological gap created by such distant and almost inaccessible environments where the effects of anthropogenic climate change are very visible and yet difficult to reach. For instance, affordable android mobile virtual reality educational games such as EarthHero have been used to help young people learn

about saving the environment from the dangers of pollution (Mawsally and Sudarmilah, 2019). It can be argued that there is a need for the African youth to be aware of the opportunities that such technologies present, and this can also be achieved by engaging them about the utilitarian value of virtual spaces such as immersive virtual reality towards engineering climate talks and activism. Kurkovsky (2004) explains that games have evolved from 2-D to virtual reality, with mobile games being a powerful tool to reach out to a larger audience and deliver equal opportunities for engagement. Cho and Park (2023) explain that affordable immersive virtual reality, augmented reality and mixed reality technologies, such as Oculus Rift, HTC VIVE, and Microsoft HoloLens, have been popularized. There are various immersive virtual reality simulations such as EcoMUVE, EcoXPT and EcoMobile amongst many, which all provide a potentially effective means of educating and engaging the African youth on climate issues. Kamarainen, Reilly, Metcalf, Grotzer and Dede (2018) explain that EcoMobile is an extension of EcoMUVE, where students go on field trips to real pond environments and use augmented reality devices.

The domain of virtual reality for youth engagement in the context of environmental sustainability and climate talks can go beyond the realms of virtual reality games, documentaries and simulated field trips, as this technology can also be used for the purpose of hosting workshops, seminars and conferences that are targeted at young people who may be too far away from live venues. Cho and Park (2023) explain that in general, the use of immersive virtual reality and augmented reality applications for education accounts for a large proportion of its usage. This suggests that virtual reality can be used for climate change education as well. In terms of engagement, simulating an experience has the potential of eliciting a stronger emotional engagement to issues as compared to social media or traditional media. Capilla (2010) argues that virtual community memberships may vary depending on the purpose of the social network or smaller sub-community. This indicates that people with common interests are likely to find themselves in the same virtual community, which in turn provides a higher potential for peer to peer interaction. Teenagers and younger people are expected to spend more time playing multimedia online games rather than medium-age and older users. It can be argued that virtual spaces have the potential to attract youth and young people in general. Lo and Tsai (2022) explain that virtual reality is going to become popular and widespread as the metaverse ushers in a new era of digital connectivity. Virtual reality can be effectively used for various purposes, such as education, business, gaming, medicine, new employee training, entertainment, social networking, tour guiding, amongst others. It is possible to realize an environment that transcends time and space through virtual reality, as environmental problems that take decades or hundreds of years to come to fruition in the real

world can be directly experienced within five minutes (Cho and Park, 2023).Though the effects of climate change occur over many years, virtual reality provides an immediacy that places people in environments that are too distant, or difficult to visit, with the goal of showing them the effects of climate change, thus narrowing the psychological gap and eliciting the kind of emotional engagement that is likely to spur them into action. Its undeniable qualities make it a veritable tool for engineering climate talks and activism, especially when the youth and young people are the intended targets. It is therefore pertinent to engage African youth on the utilitarian value of virtual reality for climate talks and climate education.

A Cross Section of COP27 Challenges

The battle against climate change requires both ambition, collective action, and inclusivity, without which the world will face insurmountable barriers in terms of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some of the obvious COP27 challenges that can be considered as subjects for youth climate talks via virtual spaces include the following:

Financing Gap: Driving up the scaling of financial mobilization and the reform of financial systems to support climate-aligned transitions can be helpful in terms of increasing finance for climate action (Global Climate Action, 2022). The COP26 commitment to double the adaptation budget are far below the resources required (Wyns, 2022). Ugle (2022) explains that progress on an annual delivery of USD 100 billion will build more trust between developed and developing countries, showing that actual commitments are being fulfilled. Developed countries have made financial pledges towards climate finance to developing countries. This target has not been met, and there is a need to increase the amount so as to improve the trust and predictability of climate finance. Mugeere et al (2021, p. 345) explain that "the poorest and most vulnerable young people are the most exposed to climate shocks—despite their negligible role in driving climate change." Climate talks (whether virtual or in flesh) in the area of climate financing can be a key factor. Poverty constitutes a major barrier to the adoption of technologies such as virtual reality headsets and other necessary information and communication technologies needed for engagement via virtual spaces. There is no doubt that the world is still falling short of the financial commitment needed to tackle climate change holistically. Kabel and Bassim (2020) assert that there are legal, financial and technological limitations for the production and use of renewable energy and the knowledge gap in the use of renewable energy. The Marrakech Partnership action event on finance brought to the forefront a call for a global acceleration by business, investors, governments, and communities to collaboratively implement a common plan in line with 2030 goals (Global Climate Action, 2022).

Issues of Loss and damage: It is not an overstatement to assert that climate impacts along with related losses and damages caused by climate change seem to be escalating at a worrying pace(Wyns, 2022). There is a need to address the impacts of climate change that cannot be avoided, such as sea level rise, extreme weather events, and loss of bio diversity. The shocks and underlying stressors associated with climate change—drought, floods, heat stress, fires, sea level rise, storm drainage, pests, and other impacts—are expected to become more frequent and intense (Karen, 2019). The psychological gap can be reduced through climate talks via social media, as well as immersive virtual reality. For instance, through the sharing of pictures on social media, more people can become aware of the damages brought about by climate change. The images used to communicate climate change,whether on social media or elsewhere, are of great importance, since they can help raise citizen awareness (León, Negredo, and Erviti, 2022). Furthermore, immersive virtual reality can be used for field trips, and visits to museums, which will expose young people to the damages caused by climate change. Closing the financial gap can help speed up the transfer and adoption of technological gadgets such as virtual reality headsets for such purposes.

Adaptation Gap: While adaptation remains a high priority on the global climate agenda, severe climate impacts are still being faced by vulnerable communities (Wyns, 2022). One of the adaptation goals as stated at COP27 was that of elevating adaptation and resilience to become the foundation of sustainable development pathway implementation in a manner that builds non-Party stakeholders' contributions to address loss and damage through equitable, holistic, and collaborative efforts (Global Climate Action, 2022). The pace of the development and implementation of adaptation plans to address the impacts of climate change can be accelerated through climate talks via virtual spaces, especially when the youth as well as all other stake holders are collectively involved. The same can be said about the pressing need to implement the Paris agreement and the Katowice Rulebook. This includes reporting on emissions and progress towards targets, and implementing policies and measures to reduce emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Barriers to Youth Engagement using Virtual Spaces

Poor Power Supply: One of the unquestionable barriers to youth engagement using virtual spaces is that of poor power supply. Africa's developmental issues are often echoed by an obvious shortage of reliable energy sources, which, in some cases, are totally unavailable, especially in the rural areas. Sanusi and Owoyele (2016) assert that the high level of poverty in developing countries is also manifested through access to energy. The poor access to energy in less developed countries and Sub-Sahara Africa in particular, is ominous. Nigeria's obvious

energy gap is a daunting factor with a potential to limit the success rate of climate change campaigns using virtual spaces.

Poor Tech Savviness: One of the unquestionable barriers to youth engagement using virtual spaces is that of poor tech savviness. Dyikuk and Rotshak (2022) assert that many people are still learning how to operate smartphones, and sometimes end up sending messages to unintended recipients due to un-savvy tech skills. It can be said that while young people tend to be more tech savvy than the generations before them, it is not beyond imagination to think that there will always be people who are not good at using the social media, smartphones as well as much more advanced technologies such as virtual reality headsets due to poor tech savviness amongst other reasons.This can be seen as a factor with a potential to limit the success rate of climate talks using virtual spaces.

Poor Internet Connectivity: It is reasonable to infer that underdevelopment is to a large extent all-encompassing in most parts of Africa due to its overbearing consequences on infrastructural development, of which internet connectivity is considered a vital component. Poor service, lack of infrastructure to support hardware and software technology, scarcity of financial resources, and an unreliable electric supply in Nigeria hinder ICT usage (Akanbi and Akanbi, 2012; Nwabueze, Nwabueze, and Egbra, 2013). Issues such as poor internet connectivity and the high cost of accessing and maintaining internet facilities are common challenges in Nigeria. Adeoye, Adebo and Olakulehin (2011) affirm that factors contributing to the ineffective use of internet in Nigeria include difficulties with internet connectivity, socio-economic factors and internet phobia. These factors have the potential of limiting the success rate of climate talks using virtual spaces.

Conclusion

The paper has provided an important perspective regarding the idea of engaging African youth on the potentials of climate talks using virtual spaces vis-à-vis the challenges of COP 27.It can be concluded that virtual spaces have a potential to play the fundamental role of cultivating public awareness and commitment towards climate change. Active youth participation in climate governance through the adoption and use of virtual spaces such as social media and virtual reality for the purpose of engineering climate talks can help accelerate the pace of climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. It can be concluded that the future of these channels (social media and immersive virtual reality) in the context of youth engagement for climate talks provide potentially rewarding prospects for both the youth and society at large, if well harnessed.

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