THE FUNCTIONALITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

National development is a representation of the growth level of any nation. One platform which Nigeria can leverage upon to achieve development is the social media also known as the Web. 2.0. Social media gives policy makers in government the opportunity to aggregate the needs of the people, while acting as a tool for national development. This study therefore examines the functionality of the social media and its implication for national development in Nigeria. In achieving the objective of this study, the study is guided by the following research questions: what are the functionalities of the social media for national development? and to what extent has the social media contributed to national development issues in Nigeria? Thus, we employed the documentary research method and the correlational research design while relying on content analysis. The study adopted the Technology Determinism Theory as its theoretical framework. The findings of this study among others shows that; social media is a tool for national development, and that to a large extent social media has influenced key national and social issues in Nigeria. The study conclude that the government can leverage upon the use of social media in its governance process. Therefore, it is recommended that the use of social media should be domesticated in Nigeria and that the government put in place technological infrastructures that will enhance the smooth usage of social media in Nigeria.

Keywords: Social media, National development, Policy, Functionality, Nigeria

Introduction

The growing penetration and usage of social media as a tool for both democratic development

and public policy formulation all over the world is one to be appreciated. Social media over the

years has proven to be a positive tool which has contributed in the formulation and articulation of

different national policy issues all over the world. As a framework and platform, social media has

the ability to contribute both positively and negatively in the build up to democratic development in any society, this is because it has the capacity to provide a mechanism for the regular connection of public opinion and public policy. Social media can be seen as the new technologies which has the ability to connect different individuals through interaction from different locations and cities while at same time influencing decision making process. Leavey (2013) defined social media as social cum network structure which is made up of nodes of individuals or organizations connected by one or more specific interdependencies such as values, ideas, financial exchange, friendship, kinship, dislike, conflict or trade. What this entails is that social media is an interconnectedness of different active networking individuals who are bounded by their beliefs and ideologies all of which guides their actions and inactions online. In the same vein, Oginni, and Moitui (2015) sees social media as a web-based tool which make use of user-generated content to connect geographically dispersed people on virtual platforms. Deducing from the above, it becomes clear that social media has the functionality of influencing and impacting public policy and national development as well as governance process in any nation when properly used and adopted because it connects people together.

As the digital age continues to simplify the activities of both man and institutions, social media has become more simplified with the advent of the digital age. This paradigm shifts and innovations brought by social media, Oginni and Moitui (2015) notes, has reduced the efficacy of the traditional public policy instruments like television houses, radio stations, and newspaper houses. As a result, traditional media is gradually becoming ineffective and fizzling out, thus, giving way to social media, an evolving digital means of connecting public opinions in the formulation of public policy for national development in Nigeria. Social media allows for the

inclusion of various spectrums of opinions or choices during policy and governance processes, whereas the traditional media usually control the messages that are broadcast. The infrastructure of newspapers, radio and television stations is controlled by the organisations behind these outlets. In contrast, Coleman and Shane (2012) state that Web 2.0 also known as the social media are available for individual users, given the low costs of participating in a social network or setting up a blog. The social media statistics according to Mushin (2024) shows that there were about 4.59 billion social media users worldwide in 2022 and this number equates about 57.5% of the world population, and this data will continue growing over the next few years. Moreso, according to a survey conducted between March and June 2022, 77 percent of global internet users felt that social media effectively raised awareness about political and social issues (Statista Research Department, 2024), with an overall, 65 percent respondents stating that social media was effective when it came to changing people's minds and belief pattern about political or social issues.

Reasoning *a priori*, the question left to be answered is how has the social media contributed to, or influenced the Nigerian civil space over time especially with regards to issues bothering on social, political and policy development. As the country continues to face different social, economic, policy and development challenges, the social media presents itself as a positive tool for both government and other stakeholders to leverage upon in an effort to get the nation working effectively. Steibel and Estevez (2015) note that online interactions offer opportunities for knowledge sharing, and devising innovative policy designs that would not have been developed without the involvement of lay people all of which can bring about national development. What this means is that the government can gather citizens opinion and feedback

on national issues all of which can assist stakeholders in the policy making process especially for a multi-faceted nation as Nigeria. Dorsman *et al.* (2015) revealed that both the government and other public stakeholders can leverage the social media in exploring and organizing new forms of policy alternatives and knowledge from the policy beneficiaries who in this case constitutes the citizens.

It is against this backdrop that the sole objective of this study is to examine the functionality of social media as a civil participatory tool for political, social and policy development in Nigeria. To achieve the objective of this study, the study set for itself the following research questions; what are the functionalities of the social media for national development? and to what extent has the social media contributed to national development issues in Nigeria?

Conceptual and theoretical review

National Development

Development covers the social, political, and economic growth of a society. This is because it gives interpretation about the total growth and development of a state or a community. To Lane and Ersson (1997) development is a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty. On the other hand, national development can be seen as improvement of a country in all ramifications, including the political, economic, social, cultural, scientific, and material sectors.

National development therefore constitutes all strategies, programmes, efforts and actions put together by the government of any society in a bid to reduce poverty, conflict, insecurity, social

inequality and any other arising social issue within such nation. Countries often have national development plans that outline strategies to achieve their development goals some of which could be long term or short-term development plan. This study therefore examines the functionality of social media as a strategy for national development in Nigeria.

Social Media

Social media technology is increasingly becoming a requisite for social inclusion, economic growth, and political mobilization all over the world. Social media can be defined as a platform which guarantees social inclusion and community development both for individual and public good. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) are of the view that social media is a connection of internet-based applications which function on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content and responses. No doubt Kaplan and Haenlein's definition focuses on the technological aspect of social media, however social media is characterized by the following: participation, openness, conversation, community engagement and connectedness.

As the traditional media (*television, radio, and newspaper*) gradually becomes obsolete, these collaborative features of social media become relevant while fostering public participation**,** with a tendency for national development. In similar narrative, Hunt Platform (2016) defines social media as a platform which connect different groups and derive benefits from others participating in the platform. As an interactive network, the social media facilitates or encourages participants to share similar beliefs or ideology all of which shape the development of the state. This participatory feature of the social media gives both citizens and government the opportunity to develop, articulate and formulate development strategies. According to Ellison *et al.* (2016)

there are at least eight kinds/forms of social media: social network sites or social networking sites; blogs; wikis; podcasts; forums; content communities; microblogging; and messaging. Example includes Facebook, X (Twitter), Linkedin, personal blogs, podcast actionsetc.

Methodology

The documentary research method and the correlational research design were used in this study to collect data in order to correlate the functionality between social media and national development in Nigeria. This is because the documentary method gives the researcher the opportunity to assess and review documented information from secondary sources such as journals, newspapers, reports etc. about the variables under investigation while also presenting same through thematic analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Technological Determinism Theory

Our theoretical framework for this study is anchored on the Technological Determinism theory, which is a variant of societal development. The technological determinism theory is basically a reductionist theory that presumes that a society's technology drives the development of its social structure, political, and cultural values. The theory is believed to have been coined by Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929), an American sociologist. According to Jacques (1964) the theory postulates that technical developments, media, or technology as a whole, as the key mover in history and social change. More so, this theory sees technology as part of a larger spectrum of human activity and also the basis for all human activity which is a key governing force in every society.

With regards to this study, we see technology as a key driver of social media platform through which both the government and citizens can articulate their opinions and ideas together for the development of the country. With the understanding that technological development drives and determines social change which supports national development, the government can leverage the social media in the formulation of national policies and development plans. This is because the social media works with internet-technology and at same time accommodating a larger part of the world population. According to Mohsin (2023) over 91 per cent of all social media users access social channels via mobile devices. Likewise, almost 80 per cent of total time spent on social media sites occurs on mobile platforms, thereby giving room for ideological and development discussion to a large extent. This study therefore sees social media as a veritable tool for the government in Nigeria to leverage upon in the search for national development which covers the areas of education, economy, justice, conflict, and politics. Hence, we recommend that the government should as a matter of necessity put in place technological infrastructures (cheap data, gadgets, and other devices) and also domesticate the use of social media in Nigerian states as it gives room for citizen participation and involvement in the policy making process.

Thematic Data Analysis

The functionality of social media and its implication for national development in Nigeria

As prominent entities in the socioeconomic and political sphere, government and other actors in the public sector all over the world seek to leverage the use of emerging technologies such as the social media in their daily operations. The potential benefit of using social media technologies in meeting the information needs of the public, especially in policy communication and national development can never be over emphasized this is because of the participatory role it plays.

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Chapman *et al.* (2014) are of the view that social media has created audiences with demands for information that go beyond the traditional forms of information dissemination like television, radio and newspaper. This is because of the level of interconnectedness of its usage through internet technologies. Chapman *et al.* further states that access to traditional means of information in the public space does not assure public participation, the present dynamic nature of social media environment offers not just access to information, but a collaborative opportunity which helps both government and citizens to contribute to of policy and development programmes, unlike the tradition one way media platforms (television, radio and newspaper).

National development is an encompassing effort which the government put together to solve social problems. It covers the efforts and strategies which the government uses to meet the needs of the people at different levels. As a strategy, the social media can help government in the formulation and articulation of different development programmes. Moreso, as an increasing contributor to social and political inclusion, social media technology is gradually increasing the economic, political and social growth of different countries of the world in a rapid pace (Dalberg, 2013), while also acting as a catalyst for social change.

As part of its functionality, the Nigeria government and policy stake holders can leverage on the use of social media in the fight against poverty and hunger. According to a report by Tanimonure (2025), Nigeria suffers from heightened food security challenges which needs attention. This is as over 26 million people out of an estimated population of 229.5 million faced acute hunger in the period June to August 2024 and around 84 million Nigerians – 37% of the total population are currently leaving below the poverty line. Ranking 109th out of 125 countries, Nigeria's food prices have risen dramatically over the past three years. At 40.7%, food inflation in

Nigeria reached its highest level in the past 25 years (Global Hunger Index, 2024). With the use of social media, the government can help citizen access novel opportunities such as jobs, innovative ideas and other networking access all of which can help them over come both poverty and hunger. Krejci (2017) is of the view that social media's unique role in poverty reduction is giving a voice to those who have lived in poverty by creating public platforms to spread experience and ways to fighting poverty. More so, social media can help reduce hunger and poverty by enabling the sharing of resources (i.e. time, expertise and support) and information (i.e. job opportunities, benefits advice and influence) providing mutual support and opportunities to learn or develop skills (support to start a business, for example) creating strength in numbers and enabling collective action or voluntary effort (improving a local area, for example, or social campaigning, or ensuring a voice in local affairs) (Krejci, 2017). In addition, social media allows for transparency and accountability by giving citizens the opportunity to scrutinize public service holders thereby making them accountable for their actions.

Again, as a critical tool for national development, social media can be used for the promotion of educational development in Nigeria. The government at both federal and state levels can leverage on the availability and accessibility of social media to reduce the rate of out of school children in Nigeria while also engaging them in vocational activities. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has decried the increasing number of out-of-school children in Nigeria, saying it is now 18.3 million, with this alarming figure, Nigeria as a country has the highest number of out-of-school children globally (Agwam, 2024). However, with the use of social media, students at different levels of education can communicate and collaborate effortlessly. A student can connect with anyone at any point in time via Kids Messenger or

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WhatsApp and other available educational online channels. They can use such platforms via their smartphone, tablet or computer, and learners can exchange questions, make phone calls or video calls while learning. The social media can also serve as a means for gathering information online. This is because various websites and social media networks are providing plenty of information that can be helpful to students, while being monitored by their parents. Social media can give students in rural community the opportunity to read news, articles, and books online thereby breaking infrastructural barriers to learning. Another great advantage of social media is that it gives room for distance learning opportunities as many disadvantaged students who cannot access or acquire formal education by attending regular classes in an educational institution can do so via social media platforms.

Sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all are key indices for national development. Before Nigeria can record adequate national development, there must be a working population whose labour and activity can improve the economy of Nigeria. No doubt Nigeria's unemployment rate dropped to 4.3 per cent in the second quarter of 2024 according to a report released by the National Bureau of Statistics (Izuaka, 2024), withNigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growing by 2.98% (year-on-year) in real terms in the first quarter of 2024. However, with the use of social media both big business and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will benefit and increase in sales. According to PwC Australia (2018), in Australia, Facebook provides a platform for small businesses to grow their market reach and sales, consequently employing more people and generating an increase in economic output. Facebook supported the generation of approximately $16.8 billion of economic value in

Australia in 2017 by enabling SMEs to grow and create additional employment (PwC Australia, 2018).

Furthermore, in Nigeria today, the issue of corruption is one which has eaten deep into our fabric as a nation thereby leading to underdevelopment of our country. Corruption is a cancerous monster which has the ability to cripple the economic life of a nation thereby leading to the heightened poverty, unemployment, injustice etc. In a report by Business Day, Oyedokun (2024) state that Nigeria is ranked 140th out of 180 countries in the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released by Transparency International (TI). This shows that corruption is a dangerous problem which hinders the growth and development of the country and hence, there is need for the government to adopt different strategies in an effort to curb corruption in Nigeria. In August 2022, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) arrested former Anambra State governor, Willie Obiano barely 24 hours after handing over power to his successor, Charles Soludo. Sanni (2022) reported that the former governor was invited by the commission to explain his alleged involvement in a suspected N42 billion fraud case and misuse of public funds. In a similar narrative, Gbadamosi (2025) revealed how the immediate past Akwa Ibom State governor, Udom Emmanuel was arrested by the EFCC over the alleged diversion of N700 billion from the state government's coffers during his eight-year tenure as a governor. The arrest came as a result of the anti-corruption commission's investigation into a petition written by the Network Against Corruption and Trafficking (NACAT) against the former governor. These cases of corruption at different levels across the nation contributes to the underdevelopment of the nation, leaving the citizenry with so much to worry about. Corruption is as old as politics itself; however, the Nigerian government can leverage on the social media to fight corruption. Today,

anti-graft institutions like EFCC and ICPC have new tools powered by technology which can help in the fight against fraud and corruption. Theses corruption fighting agencies can conduct online podcast, where issues about the negative effects of corruption can be discussed thereby enlightening the citizens about the effects and consequences of corruption. More so, the social media can be used as a means for citizen reorientation in Nigeria, where morals and ethics will be talked about continuously. Thus, social media can be a useful antidote against corruption in Nigeria. Posts, likes and retweets are all things that tell ordinary citizens not only that their voices are being heard, but that their fellow citizens are marching alongside them.

The social media can also function as a tool for peace, injustice, and building of strong institutions in Nigeria. Social media gives citizens the opportunity to network and connect together with people from different ethnic group, culture and creed. It also has the capacity to ensure justice while also acting as a medium for building strong institutions in Nigeria. This is because, as people network together, ideas are shared online and credible belief systems are built and sustained with the help of the social media. Betz (2017) is of the opinion that as social media bring together different groups to discuss issues; it helps to improve governance. Citizens have the opportunity to fact- check government officials by holding them accountable and transparent. More so, social media can play a role in the fight against militia groups in Nigeria like the Boko Haram insurgents. In Israel and the Palestinian territories, Sher and Sturm (2018) reports that social media has been used in connection with peace-building and anti-violence efforts. It can be used to stimulate peace-building, and to seal the discrepancies occasioned by differences within the nation.

It is therefore apt to note that social media play critical role and function in the world today and Nigeria can leverage on it in the build up to national development. For national development to be achieved, every sector of the country must be working smoothly and simultaneously with each other.

Social media and its contribution to contemporary national issues in Nigeria: An assessment

Nigeria is a multicultural entity housing people of different culture, creed and ethnic group. The country has continued to witness different social issues some of which has had both positive and negative effect on the county's image internationally. Social media as a critical tool for global development has to some extent influenced or impacted some national issues over time in Nigeria. As a platform, the social media has given citizens the voice to cry out for good governance, justice, respect for human rights, equality and respect for citizens by the police. According to Khan*et al.*(2014), social media enables nearly instant access to a greater spectrum of viewpoints and topics than traditional media thereby giving citizens, the opportunity to publicly express themselves by sending a short message through microblogs (X formerly Twitter, Facebook and Me2day). In the year 2020, Nigerian youths leveraged on social media to fight against police brutality and injustice. This was in response to the impunity enjoyed by the notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), an arm of the Nigeria Police Force who were known for using torture and other ill-treatment to execute, punish and extract information from suspects. In a report by Amnesty International (2021), on 4 October 2020, a video went viral on different social media handles like Facebook, X formerly Twitter, Instagram showing how some SARS officers were seen dragging two men from a hotel and shooting one of them outside the

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building at Ughelli, Delta State.These continuous police brutality and torture led to the #ENDSARS hashtag part of which created the awareness for the rebranding and reevaluation of the operations of the SARS group, thereby leading to erupted protest across Nigeria and disbandment of the group on 11 October, 2020.

Social media has also promoted the fight and call against injustice and child bullying. In April, 2024, Nigerians were seen expressing their anger and outrage over a viral video in which a female student was bullied by her classmates at Lead British International School, Abuja, thereby seeking justice for her on social media. In a report captured by Daily Trust Newspaper (2024), an X user, @mooyeeeeeee shared a video on X formerly Twitter showing a student named Maryam Hassan being bullied by her classmate at Lead British International School, Abuja. Within some hours, the post with the hashtag #JusticeforNamtira attracted more than 1,000 comments, as Nigerians condemned the incident and called on the school authorities to investigate the matter. Some X users made the following tweets: @Adegboyega37098 said, *"Maryam Hassan justice for her I cannot imagine my daughter going through all this, this almost bring tears."* @knownso1 tweeted *"This is so sad to watch, don't care what happened but she's doesn't deserve such treatment from these rascals.* In an immediate reaction,Daily Trust Newspaper immediately conducted an investigation into the case while also helping the victimized student overcome the emotional and psychological impact. More so, in 2014, the social media played a huge role in the fight against Boko Haram. The X (formerly Twitter) was used to create both national and international attention and awareness over the 200 abducted Chibok girls in April 2014 thereby calling for their freedom. According to a report by Participedia (2014),

#BringBackOurGirls was a social media movement founded on X (Twitter) to bring worldwide awareness and attention to the girls abducted in Chibok, Nigeria by Boko Haram.

Again, in January 2024, the then Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, Dr Betta Edu came under public scrutiny over several allegation of corruption and diversion of public funds meant for humanitarian activities. Balarabe (2024) reported that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in reaction, suspended the minister from office after public outcryfrom different social media handles for an investigation overthe financial activities of her ministry. The president had ordered a prior investigation into her indictment in the alleged transfer of N585.189m meant for vulnerable groups in Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Ogun and Lagos states into a private account. Balarabe further reported how a leaked memo dated December 20, 2023, exposed another multimillion-naira scandal involving Dr Edu where she allegedly approved funds for flight tickets and other expenses, all amounting to N72.3m (Balarabe, 2024).The suspension of the minister came in January2024 and was confirmed by the official handle of the Nigerian Television Authority on X @NTANewsNow tweeted *Breaking News: President Tinubu Suspends Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, Betta Edu from Office.*

Also, as a means of checkmating the actions and inactions of public office holders, the social media has been used over time to checkmate the excesses of public office holders. Recall that in July 2024, the Senate President, Senator Godswill Akpabio came under social media "*judgment*" when he tried to shout down on Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan during a plenary session. In a reaction to the above, Ogundapo (2024) reports how social media handlers were seen criticizing and condemning his action on X, Facebook and Instagram alongside a women's group, Voices for Inclusion and Equity for Women (VIEW). As a result of the pressure from social media and

other online platforms, Mr. Akpabio tendered an apology to the Senator Natasha. On July 23, 2024, an X handle with the name Samuel Ajayi NG (@SamdGreat01) twitted *Akpabio bowed to social media pressure and apologized to Senator Natasha".* Ogundapo (2024) further reported how the Senate President reacted to the incident, stating that he did not intentionally degrade the female senatoras being circulated on social media. Also, in a similar trajectory, in April 2024 Nigeria online users used the social media to call the attention of the Federal Government and the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) to the claims of discrimination against Nigerians by an Abuja-based Chinese supermarket. In a Channels Newspaper report, Buruje (2024) revealed how Nigerians had expressed outrage via different social media platform especially on X (Twitter) over a discriminatory policy implemented by the Chinese supermarket which barred Nigerians from shopping inside their supermarket. This social media awareness led to the sealing of the Chinese supermarket by the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) thereby proving that the social media can be a veritable tool for national development.

Conclusion

The social media no doubt has its challenges, however its role in national development can never be over emphasized. This is as Nigerian in recent years has employed the use of the social media for political mobilization and campaigns, crowdfunding for indigents Nigerians, demand for public sector accountability and transparency from government officials with all of these calls influencing government actions and responses. The social media is seen as a platform which connects individuals who share similar ideas and belief and therefore has the capacity to aggregate national development. With the use of social media platforms like; Facebook, X and

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Instagram, the federal government can penetrate the rural areas while also putting together development plans for national development.

Again, policy makers and other government representatives can adopt the Social-Media Strategic Plan (SMSP) during the formulation and articulation of social programmes as it gives room for a wider reach and at same time promotes participatory citizenship. This study therefore concludes that social media is a functionable tool which Nigeria can leverage upon to further entrench national development and that indeed, the social media has to a large extent contributed to the national issues all of which has helped shaped the country.

Recommendations

Arising from the conclusion above, this study proffers the following recommendations:

- ✓ The government at different levels, should domesticate the use of the social media as a tool for national development. The government should not just see the social media as a fun or entertainment platform but rather a veritable tool which can entrench national development.

- ✓ In a bid to avoid and curb online challenges, the government should promulgate a cyber security law which will clearly monitor social media activities and at same time protect online users from dangers.

- ✓ There should be an orientation about the dangers and benefits of using social media. While the benefits abound, citizens should be educated on how to effectively use the social media as a tool for national development rather than as a tool for political propaganda and false narrative.

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✓ The government should as a matter of necessity build technological infrastructures that can enhance the smooth usage of social media. The government should build technological hubs, reduce the prices of data, make smart gadgets affordable and accessible as all these can promote the usage of social media**.**

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