

## Social Media and Youth Engagement in a Dynamic World: The Nigerian Perspective

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### Abstract

*Effects of globalization are reverberating across human endeavours in modern times and the social media being drivers of globalization are serving as veritable channels for transmitting information and communication from person to person, group to group and nation to nation as well as continent to continent. The unrestrained attitude of youth in the use of social media is rather contagious. It seems to demonstrate the indispensability and high premium placed on social media networks, maybe, due to the rewardable exercise derivable from social networking. Hence, the study seeks to examine social media and youth engagement in a dynamic world: the Nigerian perspective. The main objectives are to demonstrate the indispensable significance of the social media networks in a dynamic world and to secure or devise profitable measures of engaging the youths through the social media. The study is therefore, structured into six perspectives; introduction, general significance of the social media, effects of social media networks, the Nigerian perspective on the use of the social media, engaging the youth through social media, conclusion and recommendations.*

### Keywords

dynamic world;  
globalization; Nigerian  
perspective; social media;  
youth engagement



## I. Introduction

The concept 'social media' is severally regarded or rephrased as 'new media', 'citizen media', 'digital media', or 'internet media' as well as 'social networking'. It may also be regarded simply as the internet, websites and applications that enhance the creation, sharing of contents (messages) and participation in social networking by users (Diesing, 2013). In New Zealand, facebook has monopolized the social networking landscape with 96% of online users are registered facebook members or users. It has been observed that over 80% of New Zealanders are connected to the internet and New Zealand is the 11th most connected in the world. Facebook has become the leading social media or networks with 132.1 million active users in 2008 and the company's statistics showed that Facebook's active membership is over one billion users on the 14th of September, 2012 (Zuckerberg, 2012). Social networking has carved a new niche and peculiar communication environment for its users across the world. This new communication era is largely driven by the internet and has rapidly transform the hitherto economic, social, political landscapes and diverse orientations (DiMaggio et al., 2001). According to Davis (1999), the use of internet services has risen to appreciable height within a short period of time. Social media users rose by over 500% since 2000 with 2.3 billion internet users world-wide, representing 33% of world's total population in 2011 (World Statistics, 2011 as cited by in Diesing, 2013).

Social networking sites usage is highly prevalent among young people and has changed the order of interactions between persons by providing leverage for both lateral and horizontal communication capabilities. Internet can be channelled to reawaken the declining interest, growing apathy and increasing cynicism displayed by the youth in civic and political engagement (Samuel, 2016). According to Samuel (2016), social media are tools that can be manipulated to supplement and support offline efforts and engagements. In 2008, the United States election was dubbed the social election with candidates connecting with and engaging young Americans through the use of the social media which produced a higher voter turnout compared to previous years (Fraser & Dunya, 2008).

Gaskins and Jerrit (2012) contend that young people use social media instead of the traditional media since old technologies are replaced by new media which seems to fulfill consumer's needs. The internet is therefore, seen as a potential instrument for individual's education, stimulate participation in national discourse and assignments, measure public opinions, create access to government officials, offer public forum for public debates and analyses, simplify voter's registration exercise and enhance voter's mobilization and eventual voting (Goodman et al., 2011 ; Diesing, 2013 ; Davis, 1999). The internet is fundamentally different from the traditional media because an individual person can communicate with a global audience and receive seemly immediate responses unlike the traditional medium which is basically interpersonal on a fixed forum. However, feedback on online communication can be immediate and direct which is similar to feedback on interpersonal communication unlike feedback in mass communication that can be delayed (Baran, 2007).

Considerable body of studies are in support of cyber optimism while others argue that information technologies are no solutions for decreasing demand for political information. skeptics are of the view that consumers appreciate engaging pursuits like online shopping, dating and keeping touch with beloved ones, which may likely discourage them from considering new and non-beneficial programmes (Iyengar & McGrady, 2010). McNamara (2010), however, dissociated from the views of such skeptics by classifying them as pessimistics, dystopian views that results to dysfunctional use of the internet and constantly gazing at the problems of digitalization rather than proffering solutions. Diesing (2013) revealed that the youths in Dunedin, New Zealand see the social media as just for social purpose, not as a political tool. In that case the social media networking may not make any difference to young people who are disinterested or disenchanting with politics. It was stressed that the use of the social media to raise the tempo of youth activism in politics have so far produced mixed results. The author suggests that to boost youth engagement in politics there should be increase in dissemination of political information through the social media. International social media research provide examples of powerful new internet tools such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter among others (McNamara, 2010).

The uncontrollable use of the social media have manifested mixed results. There is high propensity to misuse or misapply the social media against established societal norms. In order to downplay the negative effects of the social media, youth have to be properly engaged in their use. The more reason, this paper is apt and timeous in these days of cybercrime, internet fraud, facebook marriages, excessive pornographies, moral degradation, prevailing juvenile delinquencies, cultures devaluation etc(Edih et al., 2022). The study is therefore divided into six perspectives. Sequel to the introduction is general significance of social media, and section three dwelt on the effects of social networking. Discourse on the Nigerian perspective was treated in section four while section five harped

on engaging the youth through social media. Section six dwelt on the conclusion and recommendations.

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **2.1 General Significance of the Social Media**

Social media are potential mechanisms for civic engagement (Julie & Anne, 2015). Social networking media are more useful during times of dwindling enthusiasm for democratic ideologies and poor or bad governance problems (Dahlgren 2009 as cited in Julie & Anne, 2015). This would help to strengthen democratic accountability both at the local and international realms of governance (Castels, 2013 as cited in Julie & Anne, 2015). The term 'civic engagement' as used in Julie and Anne (2015) was to address the multi-farious components of extra-parliamentary political participation. This has necessitated different evaluations of the outlook for empowering potentials of social media. Julie and Anne (2015) tried to distinguish between formal participation such as voting on election days and civic engagement such as voluntary action and participation in community development programmes. In this context, civic engagement or engagement simpliciter, means engagement with political and social issues.

According to Jorg (2022), social media is the centerpiece of young adults' lives. The advent of smartphones have increased the impetus in the use of social media for 24/7 duration (Vorderer & Kohring, 2013). Young adults are frequently glued to digital platforms or messenger services, for instance, facebook, tiktok, twitter, youtube, instagram, whatsapp, weChat etc to get trending news and events. Binder et al., (2021) supported the idea expressed by scholars regarding young adult's engagement through social media. In Jorg(2022), it was argued that the use of social media can foster democratic engagement of young adults, however, the author had a contrasting conclusion, that social networking can be twisted to dampen political engagement, because social media are primarily and largely devoted to non-political purposes.

In similar vein, it has been demonstrated that internet media can build new relationships between political actors and young persons, facilitate social talks about political issues, connect diverse populace, energizes political revolutions and expression of opinions. The new media also equalize engagement and foster participation in societal discourse, boost voter's turnout and corroborate societal cohesion (Boulianne, 2011). However, if citizen's media are misused or misengaged in a plural and complex society, they can smartly circulate hate speech, seditious statements or messages, incitements among others that may generate dislocations and disrupt existing fragile peace and unity between or among ethnic nationalities. Also, researchers have observed a positive correlation between the frequency of social media use and protest participation among youths (Valenzuela et al., 2014). Such protest was experienced in Nigeria, namely, the EndSARs revolution championed by Nigerian youths was executed through social media mobilization in 2020 and the University student's protests against the Federal government of Nigeria due to the seven/eight consecutive months of ASUU strike. The influence of social media on politics is currently yielding massive results as being utilize by the Obidient's Political Movement ahead of 2023 general elections.

### **2.2 Effects of Social Media Networks**

The study considered the effects of social media in two major dimensions. A purposeful x-ray of the positive and negative effects of social media as they affect young people in the society was considered in Edih et al., (2022a). The positive effects represent

the appreciable strength of the new media in social transformation and engineering. The media serve as tools for social orientation and socialization. Some useful effects of the internet media according to Edih et al., (2022a) are listed as follows;

1. Social media platforms are veritable channels for campaigns during elections. The current campaigns ahead of the 2023 general elections are gathering momentum through the use of the social media than previous elections in Nigeria.
2. Social media are open access for teaching, training and dissemination of educational knowledge among tutors and students
3. Young people create unique identities and fraternities and communicate with peers through digital media

However, according to Edih et al., (2022a), the social media networks are floodgates for peddling misinformation and other nefarious activities. This has led to the pronounced abuse among young persons and adult youth through use of new media. Among the varied negativities arising from applying the citizen's media are,

1. Social media demonstrate the degree of moral decadence and juvenile delinquencies that are widespread and cancerous to societal order. The uncontrollable nature of the social media has made it so porous and pervasive for easy manipulation by vile youths.
2. They serve as drivers of rumours, fake and incisive news and also cause delusions, distractions and pollute the minds of young persons with irritating stuff.
3. They are channels for exhibiting laziness in the name of surfing or browsing the internet. Unrepentant addiction, cheating and relationships problems are common with the use of the internet or social websites.

### **III. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 The Nigerian Perspective of the Use of Social Media**

Nigerian youths are part of the global youths connected together by the several internet networks. In such context, there can't be peculiar or totally distinct experience in the use of the social media by these young people. However, the Nigerian perspective of the use of social media is aptly captured in Edih et al., (2022a). A common denominator (hasty decisions, amoral affairs, internet frauds, deceptions, fool's paradise syndrome, disrespectful attitude, engagement with unknown faces, etc) span across discussions and relationships made through social media by youths. There is that common mentality of arrival and fool's maturity exhibited by majority of young persons in Nigeria. This may not be uncommon among youths across the world. The crazy race to become rich has taken over the social media. Both boys and girls are involved with similar fervour in order to maintain a utopian high class, or the reigning class and short-lived independent lifestyles from parental control and the likes.

The common and rampant problems of prostitution, unwanted pregnancies, abortions and yahoo business are highly propelled by digital networking and smartphones that are within the reach and control of young people. This kind of loose life status is becoming the new normal because society has lost its savour, principles, norms and values. Another possible factor is bad government and crazy political elites who have forgotten the purpose of governance and people's representation in government. The youth are frustrated due to massive lawlessness pervading the streets and arrogant display of unwarranted impunity by the so-called rich class and greedy politicians. It is driving most of them mad. Fundamentally, the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria is a hydra-headed monster before Nigerian youths and the only way out according to their current undertaking is to misbehave and look for the shortest route to stardom since education is now a scam.

Nigerian youths are idle and their behaviours and declarations are confirmations of the old adage that 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop'. It is therefore, high time for the youth to be meaningfully engaged.

### **3.2 Engaging Young People through Social Media**

The question is how do we engage young people through social media in this dire situation? What must be done by the government, NGOs, religious bodies, well-meaning Nigerians, maybe companies as well as the family? We shall consider answers to these questions by looking at some recommendations proffered by scholars and fill the necessary gap if any.

Fraser and Dunya (2008) argued that youths could be engaged in voters registration exercise and voting in elections through the social media. Diesing (2013), also opined that young people could be mobilized and engaged in political or democratic process through digital networking. In similar vein, Goodman et al., (2011) and Diesing (2013) supported the ideas that social media stimulate participation in societal issues, general education, provide forum for public debates for the young minds. Julie and Anne (2015) also recommended that civic engagement is possible for the youths through social networking for democracy, and accountable government. It is clear that social media are avenues or platforms for mobilizing and engaging young adults. They can also be engaged in the form of protest participation (Valenzuela et al., 2014).

Companies and NGOs can engage young people by championing profitable programmes and symposia on regular basis. Before now, MTN organized a programme tagged 'who wants to be a millionaire' that was anchored by Frank Idowu. Who wants to be a millionaire programme ought not to be discontinued but, should be resuscitated and sustained to task their brains and make legitimate wealth. This will be a desirable corporate social responsibilities programme to the society.

## **IV. Conclusion**

The study has successfully dissected the research on social media and youth engagement in a dynamic world: the Nigerian perspectives. The study was structured into six detailed sectional discourse. Inferences from the theoretical permutations showed the following situations or factual events;

One, social media have come to stay with us and they are indispensable in this dynamic world. It is one of the many products of globalization that have revolutionized the world in several dimensions.

Two, social media is predominantly use by young people all over the world. The wide spread use of the internet media seems to be contagious. In this vein, it is regarded as infectious since the manifest effects of the new media are experiential in every household in Africa and beyond.

Three, the youths are highly and easily swayed towards misapplying and absorbing the distractions occasioned by the negative elements and tendencies abundantly associated with the social media.

Four, the social media can easily be manipulated by disgruntled groups to promote their ill-fated motives in the society. It therefore entails that, the use of the internet networks is rather pervasive, unrestrained and seems to be uncontrollable. This is where the huge problem or what may be referred to as ' social media disease, SMD or new media syndrome, NMS' lies. Hence, the dire need for youth engagement with the use of the social media is very apposite now than ever.

Considering the foregoing, the following suggestions are recommended;

1. Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across the world should collaborate on devising institutional structures and legal framework to control the use of social media so as to curtail the misapplication and misinformation peddling to perpetrate and perpetuate nefarious activities that are inimical to societal cohesion. This point may sound as a tall order but is do-able by seeking international cooperation.
2. Social media networks should be appropriately mobilized to regularly and constantly educate the youths on the positive and progressive ideas that would better their lives and the entire society. Such practical initiatives and relevant strategies are; organizing online workshops and seminars, business and entrepreneurial schemes, online agricultural development schemes that can provide gainful employment for thousands or millions of young people.
3. In order to strengthen political democracy and accountable government in a pluralistic polity like Nigeria, social media platforms are available weapons for social orientation, engineering and development. Government, political parties and NGOs should therefore harness these composite avenues to propagate their vision and mission, programmes and manifestoes for the enhancement of good governance.
4. The family and religious bodies should harness internet media as a viable alternatives to propelling and preaching godly tenets, principles, practices and doctrines to assuage the common boisterous youthful exuberance. Godly or gospel songs could be promoted and spread to vast majority of users of the internet websites and such songs/messages can serve as measures for healing and entertaining the human soul.
5. Educational institutions are also advised to utilize the avenues created by the social media to teach, research and circulate knowledge beyond the four wall of the classroom/lecture hall.
6. Youth conferences and symposia should be organized by government, NGOs and religious institutions to enlighten young people on the positive and negative effects of using the social media networks. Such articulated strategies will help them refrain from delving into the common problems associated with internet websites.

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