GOVERNMENT ADOPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

This paper explores the challenges and opportunities associated with the government's adoption of social media in Nigeria. In recent years, the rapid growth of social media platforms has altered communication/media landscape, offering governments new avenues for citizen engagement, transparency, and information dissemination. However, the adoption of social media by the Nigerian government has encountered various impediments, including technological constraints, cybersecurity concerns, and cultural nuances. This paper aims to explore and analyze these challenges while also highlighting the prospects and benefits that effective utilization of social media can bring to governmental functions. The research methodology involved a two-phase approach: an extensive literature review and empirical exploration through netnographic analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding the adoption of social media in the Nigerian public sector. By identifying key barriers and proposing strategic solutions, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on leveraging social media for improved governance, public participation, and overall socio-political development in Nigeria. The paper recommended that governments various levels should invest in upgrading technological infrastructure to overcome technological constraints. This may include improving internet connectivity, enhancing data security measures, and providing training programs to government officials on using social media platforms effectively.

Keywords: Social Media, Adoption, Challenges and Prospects, Nigeria

Introduction

The mass media landscape in Nigeria has undergone significant transformations in recent times, with technological advancements, globalization, and societal changes shaping new patterns. These changes have profound implications for leaders in the country who must navigate an increasingly complex environment to ensure effective communication of their activities and policies. With the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web, along with the introduction of converging technologies which include the mobile "smart phone" and multiple digital platforms, the media and communication industries, in the words of Albarran, (2010) are not only in the process of transforming themselves, but are being transformed by many external factors. As a result, Mass Media and communication industries not only in Nigeria but globally, are undergoing unprecedented transformation which is directly affecting the Government-Media relationship. This paper is set out to examine this transformation process and how such changing media landscape is posing as a threat to leaders, both at states and Federal levels in the promotion of their sustainable development agendas.

Media, being a very important source for reform and integration of the society and a tool that government at various levels used extensively is undergoing rapid transformation. "The emergence of new ICT based media like social media has opened-up a plethora of developmental opportunities to the masses" (Prasad 2018; p.6). Cost-effectiveness, availability and connectivity have served as the main drivers of growth for these ICT based media. Interventions in community engagement, social development and reforms have been seen across the world, where mobile media and social media have proved vital. Along with

this, these new media have helped in bringing citizen centric services to the masses and contributing in the democratic development. However, the large-scale proliferations of these new media channels have put-up another set of challenges in terms security and privacy (Kumar & Gupta; 2016). The purpose of this paper is to examine the benefits and challenges of the Nigerian government's use of social media, emphasizing its potential advantages for governance while addressing obstacles to effective implementation.

Literature Review/Conceptual Clarifications

The affiliation between media and government has a bearing on the information to which the public has access. Traditionally, governments have relied on media to communicate with citizens, and stakeholders, ensuring that they receive the information that will shape their day-to-day decisions, from what to do, where to live, which school to attend to issues surrounding their health, safety and political views. Conceptually therefore, this paper view Mass Media beyond that simple definition by Hoynes and Croteau (1992) which viewed it as a technological device that facilitate communication between a sender of a message and the receiver of that message.

The concept that needs clarification is the word 'technology' which mostly is used to refer to Newspaper, Magazine, Radio and Television and very recently, the internet. Thus, for this paper, I will adopt Potter's synthesis of Mass media using four step process. In his synthesis, Potter (2013; p.12)

> look at the sender as a complex organization that uses standardized practices to disseminate messages while actively promoting itself in order to attract as many audience members as possible, then conditioning those audience members for habitual repeated exposures. Audiences members are widely dispersed geographically, are aware of the public character of what they are seeing or hearing, and encounter messages in a variety of exposure states but most often in a state of automaticity. Channels of message dissemination are technological devices that can

make messages public, extend the availability of messages in time and space, and can reach audiences within a relatively short time.

Even though Potter's synthesis is all-inclusive, this paper is more concerned with the third step which features an examination of the current media environment where the universal digitization of messages allows them to move seamlessly across media and platforms, overwhelms audiences with message choices on every conceivable topic area, allows (and often requires) interactivity between message producers and consumers, and fragments previously large audiences into smaller and smaller niches (2013; 3). Porter further warned that,

> We now find ourselves in a media environment unlike any we have ever experienced before. The newest technological developments of personal computers, the Internet, cell phones, and other handheld portable devices for connecting to messages and other people have not just changed society but have changed the older, more traditional media themselves. This new media environment is characterized by four interrelated features: technological convergence, interactivity, information saturation, and a shift in marketing perspective (2013; p.7).

Similarly, Ayedun-Aluma (2017; 5) that, "In conjunction with the two categories of social formation, the properties of the media network determine the ways in which technology impacts society". It is within this context that this paper adopts Pate's media definition as "technologies that are able, regularly and reliably, to transmit or preserve meanings across space and time" (upcoming).

Challenges Facing Nigerian Mass Media

The mass media in Nigeria faces a range of challenges, including corruption, poor communication channels, illiteracy, inadequate

infrastructure, and political instability (Santas & Ogoshi, 2015). These challenges are further compounded by the selectivity of the media in its agenda-setting role, which is influenced by regional, geo-political, and ethnicism imperatives (Ojo, 2003). Ownership of the mass media also plays a significant role in shaping their use for political communications, with factors such as ethnicity, religion, literacy, and language further influencing their impact (Olayiwola, 1991). The globalization of the media has brought about a revolution in information dissemination, but the Nigerian media still faces challenges in fully leveraging these opportunities to contribute to democratization (Adesoji, 2008).

The relationship between media governance and technology is a complex one, with technology being a key part of regulatory constellations (Katzenbach, 2013). However, the current media content regulation system often overlooks the role of users and the context of platforms, leading to a need for a stronger theoretical model of civic media governance (Crawford, 2013). This is further emphasized by the democratic deficit in media policy and politics, which can be addressed through a participatory approach to governance (Rossi, 2009). The impact of mass media on executive leadership in contemporary democracies is also a significant factor in the challenges of governance, with the media often acting as a constraint on leaders and leadership (Helms, 2008).

The challenges of government media relations in today's ICT-driven media landscape are multifaceted. Falco (2018) identifies the need for a shift from one-way communication to more dialogic governance, with a focus on the requirements for effective two-way social media communication. Ikpe (2009) highlights the impact of ICT on public affairs reporting, emphasizing the need for capacity building and practical training for media professionals. Hasnawati (2017) discusses the ethical dilemmas and challenges faced by government public relations in the new media era, particularly in the context of interactive features. Garland (2018) introduces the concept of mediatization, suggesting that media impacts are becoming institutionalized within state bureaucracies, with a shift in the relationship between government, media, and citizens. These studies collectively underscore the complex and evolving nature of government media relations in the digital age.

In Nigeria, just like the rest of the world, the challenges of government media relations in ICT-driven media landscape are also complex. Ikpe (2010) underscores the transformative impact of new media technologies on media relations, despite challenges such as cyber crises and low technology penetration. Bashir (2020) identifies a gap in media regulation, particularly in the use of algorithms, and proposes a framework for algorithmic media governance. Idiong (2021) emphasizes the need for a symbiotic relationship between the government and the media, underscoring the potential consequences of an adversarial relationship. These studies collectively underscore the need for improved infrastructure, effective regulation, and a balanced relationship between the government and the media in Nigeria's ICT-driven media landscape.

Changing Pattern of Mass Media Landscape

Technological advancements and media convergence have significantly shaped the way people consume and interact with information and entertainment. These advancements and convergences have not only transformed the media and entertainment industry but have also influenced the way people communicate, collaborate, and access information in the digital age. Key aspects of these developments include:

i. Digital Transformation: The rise of digital platforms and online media has significantly altered the traditional media landscape. Newspapers, radio, and television now coexist with websites, social media, and streaming services. The increased in internet penetration has changed how people consume news and information, with a growing reliance on digital sources.

ii. Citizen Journalism: Social media platforms empower individuals to contribute to news dissemination, leading to the rise of citizen journalism. This has both positive and negative implications for information accuracy and reliability.

iii. Diversification of Content: The proliferation of online platforms has led to a diversification of content. Audiences can now access a wide range of perspectives and niche content tailored to their interests.

iv. Challenges to Traditional Media Outlets: Traditional media outlets face challenges

such as declining revenue, changing audience preferences, and the need to adapt to the digital landscape.

Research Design

In the realm of conceptual exploration, this paper undertakes a dual-phase approach to delve into the multifaceted landscape of utilizing social media as a tool for effective leadership, fostering accountability, and actively engaging the public in the intricate process of policy formation. The first stage of this academic pursuit begins with a thorough examination of existing literature. This review forms the basis for understanding the obstacles and requirements involved in maximizing the effective utilization of social media in leadership, accountability, and public engagement in shaping policies. The first phase sets the stage by meticulously synthesizing existing academic works, empirical studies, and theoretical frameworks that shed light on the complexities surrounding the integration of social media into the domains of leadership, accountability structures, and participatory policy-making. By systematically examining the existing body of knowledge, the paper aims to distill key insights, identify gaps, and provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and nuances associated with leveraging social media in the aforementioned contexts.

Transitioning seamlessly into the second phase, the paper pivots towards a more hands-on and empirical exploration. Adopting a netnographic approach, which according to Kozinets (2015), is a specific approach to conducting ethnography on the internet. It is a qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts traditional ethnographic techniques to the study of social media, the research looked at the intricate interplay between social media platforms and the coverage of political and social issues within the Nigerian context. The core objective here is to dissect and scrutinize how these platforms challenge and reshape narratives propagated by mainstream media outlets.

In this analytical phase, the paper strategically selects and evaluates texts from systematically chosen news stories sourced from online platforms. These stories serve as empirical artifacts, offering a tangible lens through which to observe the real-time dynamics of social media's impact on the narratives surrounding political and social issues in Nigeria. Through the application of netnographic analysis, the paper seeks to uncover patterns, trends, and disruptions in the information flow, highlighting instances where social media platforms contest or diverge from mainstream media narratives.

By engaging in this dual-phased exploration, the paper not only contributes to the theoretical discourse surrounding social media, leadership, accountability, and policy formation but also provides valuable empirical insights into the evolving landscape of media dynamics in Nigeria. Through a nuanced examination of the challenges posed by social media to established narratives, the paper endeavors to enhance our understanding of the complex interplay between traditional and emerging media platforms in shaping public discourse and perception.

Challenges to application of social media by government

This segment examined existing literature concerning the obstacles that hinder governments from effectively participating in interactive communication initiatives with citizens. Poba-Nzaou et al. (2016: 4011) characterize these challenges as "any issue an organization may face that could impede their adoption of social media." Different categorizations of challenges have been already attempted in the literature. For instance, Funmilola and Mathew (2020) believed that, the application of social media by the government in Nigeria is associated with various challenges. These include a lack of control over user activities, power failures, high internet access costs, and poor connectivity. However, Falco (2018) emphasizes the need to differentiate between challenges and risks in the use of social media by the government, while Nepal (2015) highlights the challenges specific to government services, such as assessing benefits, usability of tools, governance policies, and integrating social media with organizational processes.

The application of social media by government entities can present various challenges, ranging from issues related to communication and transparency to concerns about privacy and security. Some of these challenges associated with the use of social media by governments as highlighted by Bertot, Jaeger and Hansen (2012; p.176) are:

i. **Security challenges:** Governments need to ensure the security of their social media accounts and platforms to prevent unauthorized access or hacking. There may be concerns about the potential for cyber-attacks or the spread of misinformation through government social media channels.

ii. **Privacy Challenges:** Governments must navigate the balance between transparency and the privacy of citizens. Posting sensitive information or tracking citizens' online activities can raise privacy concerns. Collecting and using personal data for targeted communication may be perceived as intrusive.

iii. **Misinformation and Disinformation Challenges:** Social media platforms are prone to the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation. Governments need to actively address false information and rumors to maintain public trust. Combatting fake news and propaganda can be challenging, requiring effective strategies for fact-checking and correction.

iv. **Communication Challenges:** Governments may struggle to effectively communicate their messages in the vast and diverse landscape of social media. The brevity of posts, the prevalence of visual content, and the speed of information dissemination can make it challenging to convey complex ideas. Responding promptly to emerging issues and crises on social media requires efficient monitoring and response mechanisms.

v. **Accessibility and Inclusivity Challenges:** Not all citizens may have equal access to social media platforms, potentially excluding certain demographics from government communication efforts. Governments need to ensure that information is disseminated through multiple channels to reach a diverse audience.

vi. **Legal and Ethical Considerations:** Governments must operate within legal frameworks and ethical guidelines when using social media. This includes respecting freedom of speech, avoiding censorship controversies, and adhering to relevant laws regarding data protection. Balancing the need for transparency with legal constraints can be a delicate task.

vii. **Public Trust and Perception:** The public's trust in government can be influenced by how social media is utilized. Inaccurate or poorly managed communication can lead to a loss of trust. The perception of bias or manipulation on social media platforms can erode confidence in government communication.

viii. **Resource Allocation:** Managing social media accounts effectively requires resources in terms of personnel, technology, and time. Governments may face challenges in allocating these resources efficiently. Keeping up with evolving social media trends and technologies can be resource-intensive.

ix. **Regulatory Changes and Platform Policies:** Governments must stay informed about changes in social media platform policies and regulations. Adapting to new rules and guidelines can be time-consuming and may impact the government's online presence.

x. **Ensuring Accountability:** Governments need mechanisms to ensure accountability for their social media activities. This includes tracking the impact of communication efforts, addressing public feedback, and learning from mistakes.

Poba-Nzaou, Lemieux, Beaupré and Uwizeyemungu (2016) distinguish between challenges directly associated with social media and challenges not related to social media themselves. We will call these direct and indirect challenges, respectively. These direct and indirect can further be classified as external or internal.

External challenges arise from factors outside the organization's control. Hence, the organization lacks the ability to proactively address or significantly impact the causes and extent of these challenges. Picazo-Vela, Gutierrez-Martinez & Luna-Reyes (2012) provides categorization and conceptual framework which highlighted issues such as general context, institutional framework, inter-organizational collaboration and networks, organizational

structures and processes, information and data and technology. What can be inferred from these categorizations is that external challenges are grouped into general context, institutional framework, data, and technology categories.

Within the literature, the primary external challenges identified include the broader context of digital accessibility, digital illiteracy, and the digital divide within the population. However, this is normally considered not to be a major issue in the Western World where the majority of people have access to the Internet (Falco & Kleinhans; 2018). Expanding spectrum of countries and contexts, people and age groups, limited access to the internet by the wider population and their low ability to use social media can constitute a problem for government and complicate the use of social media for the dissemination of information, provision of services, collaboration with citizens (Burkhardt et al., 2014; Bertot et al., 2012; Picazo-Vela et al., 2012).

In contrast to challenges originating from external sources, internal challenges are contingent upon factors intrinsic to the organization and its structure (Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers 2015). These factors are directly within the organization's sphere of influence. The literature outlines various internal challenges, and by referencing the classification proposed by Picazo-Vela et al. (2012), the paper can link these obstacles with organizational structures and processes, as well as information, data, and technology. It is noteworthy that we exclude "inter-organizational collaboration and networks" from consideration. This exclusion is based on the belief that challenges within this category are encompassed by the three aforementioned internal categories, such as data uniformity, technological consistency across government agencies, and the dynamics of relationships between agencies in terms of functions and hierarchy.

The initial internal obstacles within an organization involves crafting a clear strategy and setting policy directives for integrating social media. This entails outlining objectives, pinpointing goals, deciding on content, frequency, and timing of posts, and promoting the organization's social media endeavors. Without a well-defined strategy and guidelines, a subsequent set of internal obstacles arises concerning organizational structure and culture. As noted by Curtis et al. (2010), organizations with robust public relations departments are more inclined to embrace and leverage social media platforms.

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	Direct challenges Indirect Challenges	Direct challenges Indirect Challenges
Internal challenges	• Availability of social media strategy and policy guidelines. • Data management, technology and proper understanding of benefits. • Organizational reputation	• Organization structure and culture. • Availability of trained personnel, expertise, cost justification.
External challenges	• Digital divide and inaccessibility • Complexity and speed of social media change (data protection, privacy and ownership). • Accuracy, completeness, and format of social media data coming from the public	• Institutional framework, laws and regulations.

Organizational and Technological Requirements

Drawing upon the insights gleaned from an extensive examination of literature, the multifaceted dynamics between citizens and government, particularly in the context of social media's role in facilitating two-way communication, the challenges confronted by governments in embracing and leveraging on social media, It is important to focus and understand the requisite actions, processes, and conditions essential for governments to foster meaningful two-way communication with their constituents through social media applications.

While the e-government literature predominantly employs the term "capabilities" to describe the necessary attributes (as seen in works by Lee and Kwak, 2012; Khan, 2015), this paper contend that the term 'requirements' more rightly summarizes the role of these conditions. Unlike 'capabilities,' which implies elements intrinsic to the government's abilities, skills, and expertise, "requirements" conveys a sense of indispensable preconditions that need not necessarily align with the government's inherent capabilities. Some requirements, such as analytics and metric utilization, may even be outsourced, highlighting their distinct nature. Hence, a requirement represents any essential condition necessary for effectively utilizing social media to enable two-way communication and potentially elevate the government-citizen relationship to the level of co-production.

Addressing these requirements through deliberate actions is pivotal, enabling the government to proactively tackle, alleviate, or navigate the previously delineated challenges that may arise. It is crucial to acknowledge that meeting these requirements is a gradual process, unfolding in successive stages over time. Consequently, we are inclined to explore stage models prevalent in e-government literature that conceptualize the evolving capabilities (requirements) essential for transitioning from less mature to more advanced stages of social media utilization by governments. These models offer valuable insights into the incremental steps governments can take to enhance their social media engagement capabilities over time.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been a notable emergence of widely embraced social media platforms, accompanied by a prevailing belief in their effectiveness for enabling novel modes of citizen engagement in governmental affairs (Linders, 2012).

Despite the twofold window of opportunity presented by social media platforms, a prevailing one-way communication model persists, where citizens are primarily receivers of public policy (Mergel 2013; Kleinhans, Van Ham & Evans-Cowley, 2015).). This lack of progress is cannot be solely attributed to technological issues; instead, the evidence suggests that governments' organizational and human resources serve as a bottleneck. Other factors hindering the government's effective application of social media include technological divides, lack of training and above all, corruption.

The study therefore concludes that clearing up confusion requires, first of all, integrating various definitions and intensities of interaction between citizens and governments into a relatively 'simple' but comprehensive typology of social media-based citizens-government relationship with four levels: information-sharing, interaction, co-production, and self-organization. With each level, the complexity of relationships increases, creating both challenges and requirements for governments to facilitate appropriate two-way communication. Secondly, confusion can be reduced if we distinguish between challenges and risks, and focus on challenges on the part of government that may prevent a transition to social media-supported interaction and dialogic governance with citizens.

The study also considered challenges as situations or tasks that test governments' abilities to adopt, use and optimize social media for two-way communication and collaboration strategies with citizens. Challenges are not to be confused with risks, which usually arise as a consequence of not properly addressing challenges. While establishing 'requirements' as essential conditions for utilizing social media to facilitate two-way communication and enhance the co-production aspect of government-citizen relationships. The paper classified requirements by differentiating between organizational and technological aspects, as well as direct and indirect elements. In essence, requirements signify prerequisites for fostering

two-way communication, while challenges represent scenarios testing governmental capabilities in utilizing social media for this purpose. Key organizational requirements encompass social media strategies, guidelines, organizational structure, and governance, while key technological requirements revolve around ICT infrastructure, data management, and technological proficiency.

Finally, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study. Rooted in literature reviews, the findings necessitate contextualization based on specific settings, ranging from national contexts to local organizational cultures.

Based on the above therefore, this paper recommended the following:

1.	Technology Infrastructure Improvement: Government at various levels should invest in upgrading technological infrastructure to overcome technological constraints. This may include improving internet connectivity, enhancing data security measures, and providing training programs to government officials on using social media platforms effectively.

2.	Cybersecurity Measures: There should be a policy of implementing robust cybersecurity measures to address concerns related to data privacy and security on social media platforms. Policies and protocols on cybersecurity must be tailored to the specific needs of the government to safeguard against potential threats and vulnerabilities.

3.	Capacity Building and Training Programs: Governments at various levels should put in place a capacity building and training programs aimed at enhancing the digital literacy skills of government personnel. This includes training sessions on using social media for citizen engagement, crisis communication, and effective information dissemination.

4.	Policy Framework Development: There should be an advocacy for the development of a comprehensive policy framework governing the use of social media in the Nigerian public sector. This framework should outline guidelines, protocols, and ethical standards for government officials engaging on social media platforms, ensuring accountability and transparency in their interactions.

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