

Role of social media in Promoting Community Engagement and Development in Rural Areas of Rivers State

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Abstract: *The study examined role of social media in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The area of study covered 10 Communities in Nkoro and Andoni Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The population of the study comprised 307 youths and community base organization from the selected communities in Nkoro and Andoni Local Government Area. The study adopted total enumeration method in which the entire population was studied without sampling due to the manageable size of the population. Instrument for data collection in this study was a self-structured designed questionnaire titled "role of social media in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State Questionnaire" (RSMPCEDRARSQ) The instrument was validated, and the reliability established at 0.86 using Pearson. Mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions while z-test was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze research questions while the hypotheses were tested using z-test statistical tool. A reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained through test-re-test method. The following recommendations were made: Emphasis on social media platforms used in Promoting Community Engagement and Development in Rural Areas of Rivers State should be improved on. Among others.*

Keywords: *social media, community engagement.*

Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in the way individuals, communities, and institutions communicate and interact, largely driven by the rise of digital technologies and the pervasive influence of social media platforms. Social media, encompassing tools such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter (now X), TikTok, and YouTube, has

become not only a medium for personal communication but also a strategic instrument for information dissemination, civic engagement, mobilization, and community development (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mefalopulos, 2008). In developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the emergence of these platforms is progressively reshaping community structures,

enabling broader participation in governance, social advocacy, and development initiatives at the grassroots level (Edewor, Aluko & Eyitayo, 2021; Omenugha & Ojebuyi, 2020).

In Nigeria, where traditional communication structures often exclude rural populations from national conversations and decision-making processes, the democratizing potential of social media is increasingly being recognized. According to the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC, 2023), mobile broadband penetration continues to expand rapidly, including into semi-urban and rural areas. With increasing access to smartphones and mobile internet services, even rural populations—historically marginalized in terms of development access—are beginning to participate in the digital sphere. This digital inclusion opens a new frontier for participatory community development, especially in states like Rivers, where many local government areas remain underdeveloped despite the region's resource wealth.

Rivers State, located in the oil-rich Niger Delta region of southern Nigeria, is characterized by a dichotomy between its urban centres (like Port Harcourt) and vast underdeveloped rural areas spread across Local Government Areas such as Opobo/Nkoro, Andoni, Khana, Gokana, Ahoada, Degema, Emohua and Etche and so on. These rural communities often face persistent challenges including poverty, youth unemployment, environmental degradation, lack

of infrastructure, inadequate health care, and poor educational services. While the state and federal governments have made some efforts through intervention programmes and agencies such as the Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency (RSSDA), the scale and scope of rural development remain insufficient. Consequently, there is a growing need for alternative and complementary approaches to address these development gaps—and social media presents one such opportunity.

Social media platforms offer several unique affordances that make them well-suited for community engagement and development. First, they provide cost-effective, real-time communication channels that transcend geographic barriers, enabling residents of rural communities to share ideas, organize around local issues, crowdsource solutions, and advocate for change (Akinbami & Ogunyemi, 2019). Second, they allow for user-generated content, which gives ordinary citizens—not just elites or government actors—a voice in the public space. This is particularly significant in rural settings where formal structures for engagement, such as town hall meetings or radio programs, may be infrequent or limited in reach. Third, social media enables two-way interaction, thus facilitating dialogue between community members, non-governmental organizations, development agencies, and policymakers.

Evidence from various case studies in Nigeria and other African contexts suggests that social media has been successfully used in rural areas to promote health campaigns, monitor service delivery, support electoral awareness, market agricultural products, and stimulate youth participation in local governance (Ajayi, 2020; Dauda & Salihu, 2022). For example, WhatsApp groups have been used in some communities in Northern Nigeria for early warning and response mechanisms in conflict zones, while Facebook groups in parts of the Middle Belt have facilitated community fundraising for schools and health centres. Despite this promise, empirical research focusing on how social media is used in the specific context of rural Rivers State a region with unique cultural, environmental, and developmental dynamics remains limited.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the role of social media in promoting community engagement and development in selected rural areas of Rivers State. The research aims to assess the patterns of social media usage among rural residents, identify the types of engagement fostered by these platforms, analyze the outcomes of such engagements in terms of tangible or perceived community development, and examine the challenges that limit the effective use of social media in rural settings. By grounding the analysis in empirical data drawn from local communities, this study hopes to provide actionable insights for stakeholders including policymakers,

development practitioners, NGOs, youth leaders, and community-based organizations.

Furthermore, this study is framed by the theoretical lens of development communication theory and technological determinism, which posit that access to and use of media technologies can drive social change and development outcomes. Development communication theory emphasizes the strategic use of communication tools to foster positive change in areas such as health, agriculture, governance, and education, particularly in underdeveloped or underserved populations (Servaes, 2008). Technological determinism, on the other hand, views technology as a key driver that shapes societal transformation. Applying these frameworks, this research investigates the extent to which social media serves as a catalyst for development-oriented behaviors in rural Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite growing global recognition of the transformative potential of digital technologies in facilitating grassroots development, Andoni and Nkoro Local Government Areas of in Rivers State are faced significant developmental deficits. These include limited access to quality education, inadequate healthcare services, poor infrastructure, environmental degradation, and high level of youth unemployment. Traditional methods of community engagement and information dissemination, such as town hall meetings, radio broadcasts, and interpersonal

communication, though still relevant, are often constrained by poor accessibility, low reach, and irregularity.

In recent years, the rapid penetration of mobile phones and the internet introduced new opportunities for communication through social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. These platforms offer real-time, interactive, and cost-effective channels that could potentially enable rural dwellers to express their concerns, organize around common interests, mobilize resources, and engage with both government and development stakeholders. However, the actual use of social media for community engagement and development purposes in rural areas of Rivers State remains largely under-researched.

While studies in urban centres have documented how social media contributes to political awareness, entrepreneurship, youth empowerment, and civil society participation, there is a dearth of empirical evidence regarding how rural communities in Rivers State are engaging with these platforms to drive local development. It is unclear to what extent rural residents are aware of the development potential of social media, what kinds of engagement are taking place, what impact (if any) such engagement has on local development, and what barriers hinder the effective use of these digital tools.

Moreover, challenges such as digital illiteracy, poor internet connectivity, high data costs, limited access to smartphones, and misinformation may further constrain the effectiveness of social media use in rural settings. These gaps call for a critical, evidence-based investigation into the roles social media currently plays or can potentially play in enhancing community participation and fostering development in these underserved areas.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill this empirical and practical gap by exploring how social media is used for community engagement and development in the rural areas of Andoni and Nkoro Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The findings aim to inform policy directions, guide the work of community-based organizations, and contribute to the growing body of knowledge on digital inclusion and participatory development in rural Africa.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study was to examine role of social media in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State. The specific objective is to:

1. identify the types of social media platforms commonly used in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State.
2. assess the extent to which social media contributes to local development activities

in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State

3. examine how social media is used by individual or groups in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State

Research Questions

The following research Questions guided the study:

1. What type of social media platforms are commonly used to in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State?
2. How does social media contribute to local development activities in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State?
3. How does individual or groups utilize social media platforms in Promoting Community Engagement and Development in Rural Areas of Rivers State?

Hypotheses

H₀₁. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of type of social media platforms used in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of social media contribution in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State

H₀₃. There is no significant difference in the mean rating on how individuals and groups use social

media to promote community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The area of study covered 10 Communities in Nkoro and Andoni Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The communities in Nkoro are Afakani, Ayama, Olom-Ama, Ottoni, and Job-Ama. While the communities in Andoni are Ataba, Afaradigi, Ajakaak, Asarama-Ija and Dema. The population of the study comprised 307 youths and community base organization from the selected communities in Nkoro and Andoni Local Government Area. The study adopted total enumeration method in which the entire population was studied without sampling due to the manageable size of the population. Instrument for data collection in this study was a self-structured designed questionnaire titled "role of social media in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State Questionnaire" (RSMPCEDRARSQ) comprising 12 items. It consisted of two sections, A and B. Section A generated demographic information of the respondents while section B had items addressing the research questions and eliciting Very High Extent (VHE) = 4points, High Extent (HE) = 3points, Low Extent (LE) = 2points, and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1point responses. The instrument was validated, and the reliability established at 0.86 using Pearson r. Mean and

standard deviation were used in answering the research questions while z-test was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze research questions while the hypotheses were tested using z-test statistical tool. Experts in the department of Adult Education and Community Development and Measurement and Evaluation

in the faculty of Education, Rivers State University validated the instrument of the study. A reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained through test-re-test method. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researcher together with research assistants who were briefed on how to distribute and retrieve the copies of the instrument.

Results

Research Question 1: What types of social media platforms are commonly used to in Promoting Community Engagement and Development in Rural Areas of Rivers State?

Table 1: Extent to which types of social media platforms are commonly used to in Promoting Community Engagement and Development in Rural Areas of Rivers State.

S/No	Items	Nkoro (N =178)			Andoni (N=129)		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1	WhatsApp	3.15	0.96	HE	3.12	0.98	HE
2	Facebook	2.76	0.90	HE	2.74	0.88	HE
3	Twitter/X	2.78	1.00	HE	3.19	1.00	HE
4	YouTube/ Instagram	2.02	0.88	LE	1.88	0.98	LE
	Grand Mean & SD	2.67	0.95	HE	2.73	0.9	HE

The analyzed data in table 1 showed the mean and standard deviation scores on the **type of social media platforms commonly used to in** promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State, it was observed that respondents in Nkoro and Andoni Local Government Area agreed on items 1,2 and 3 as they were on the High Extent with the mean scores greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. while they disagreed on item 4 as it is less than the criterion mean of 2.50.

Research Question 2: How does social media contribute to local development activities in Promoting Community Engagement and Development in Rural Areas of Rivers State?

Table 2: Extent to which social media contribute to local development activities in Promoting Community Engagement and Development in Rural Areas of Rivers State.

S/No	Items	Nkoro (N =178)			Andoni (N=129)		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Social media platforms	1.56	1.02	LE	1.95	1.00	LE
2	Local development initiatives (immunization campaigns, sanitation exercises, and town hall meetings)	3.06	0.96	HE	3.03	0.88	HE
3	Mobilizing Communities for Collective Action	2.93	0.88	HE	2.96	0.96	HE
4	through fundraising campaigns initiated on WhatsApp and Facebook	3.12	0.98	HE	3.04	0.88	HE
	Grand Mean & SD	2.67	0.96	HE	2.75	0.93	HE

The analyzed data in table 2 showed the mean and standard deviation scores the extent to which **social media contribute to local development activities in** promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State. From the table it was observed that respondents from Nkoro and Andoni Local Government Area agreed on items 2,3, and 4 with mean scores greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. while they disagreed on item 1 as it is less than the criterion mean of 2.50.

Research Question 3: How does individuals and groups utilize social media platforms in Promoting Community Engagement and Development in Rural Areas of Rivers State?

Table 3: Extent to which individuals and groups utilize social media platforms in Promoting Community Engagement and Development in Rural Areas of Rivers State.

S/No	Items	Nkoro (N =178)			Andoni (N=129)		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Through Sharing updates on community meetings	2.97	0.98	HE	3.07	1.00	HE
2	Post and share content about neglected infrastructure (bad roads, broken boreholes) to call attention to issues	3.08	0.98	HE	3.07	0.96	HE

3	Watching YouTube tutorials, join Facebook Live sessions, and learn ICT, farming methods, tailoring, and small business skills	2.03	0.88	LE	1.96	0.98	LE
4	building social support networks that often lead to development contributions	3.08	1.00	HE	3.02	0.88	HE
	Grand Mean & SD	2.79	0.96	HE	2.79	0.96	HE

The analyzed data in table 2 showed the mean and standard deviation scores the extent to which **individuals and groups utilize social media platforms in** promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State. From the above table, it was observed that respondents from Nkoro and Andoni Local Government Area agreed on items 1,2, and 4 with mean scores greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. while they disagreed on item 3 as it is less than the criterion mean of 2.50.

Hypotheses

H₀₁. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of type of social media platforms used in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State.

Table 4: The z-test Analysis on the extent of the type of social media platforms used in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State.

Respondents	N	X	SD	df	z-Cal	z-Crit	Ls	Decision
Nkoro	178	2.67	0.96	305	1.8241	1.96	0.05	Accepted
Andoni	129	2.73	0.95					

Table 4 above showed the z-calculated value is 1.8241 while the z-critical value is 1.96. Since the z-calculated value of 1.8241 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 305 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis is accepted. This therefore means that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of residence of Nkoro and Andoni Local Government Area on the type of social media platforms used in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of social media contribution in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State

5: The z-test Analysis on the extent of social media contribution in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State.

Respondents	N	X	SD	df	z-Cal	z-Crit	Ls	Decision
Nkoro	178	2.67	0.96	305	1.78651	1.96	0.05	Accepted
Andoni	129	2.75	0.93					

Table 4 above showed the z-calculated value is 1.78651 while the z-critical value is 1.96. Since the z-calculated value of 1.78651 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 305 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of residence of Nkoro and Andoni Local Government Area on the social media contribution in promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State.

H₀₃. There is no significant difference in the mean rating on how individuals and groups use social media to promote community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State.

6: The z-test Analysis on the extent to on how individuals and groups use social media to promote community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State.

Respondents	N	X	SD	df	z-Cal	z-Crit	Ls	Decision
Nkoro	178	2.79	0.96	305	1.8432	1.96	0.05	Accepted
Andoni	129	2.79	0.96					

Table 4 above showed the z-calculated value is 1.8432 while the z-critical value is 1.96. Since the z-calculated value of 1.8432 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 305 degrees of freedom, hence the null hypothesis is accepted. By implication, there is no significant difference in the mean responses of residence of Nkoro and Andoni Local Government Area on how individuals and groups use social media to promote community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The discussions are based on the research questions and hypotheses. The extent to which **types of social media platforms are commonly used to in** promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State showed that residence in Nkoro and Andoni where of the opinion that WhatsApp and Facebook are the best **social media platforms commonly used in** promoting community engagement and development in rural communities as social media platforms offer several unique affordances that make them well-suited for community engagement and development. The study is in line with Akinbami & Ogunyemi (2019) as they are of the opinion that provide cost-effective, real-time communication channels that transcend geographic barriers, enabling residents of rural communities to share ideas, organize around local issues, crowdsource solutions, and advocate for change.

The view of residence of Nkoro and Andoni on **how social media contribute to local development activities in** promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State showed that local development

initiatives such as immunization campaigns, sanitation exercises, and town hall meetings has been of great help to them in terms of mobilizing communities for collective action. The finding is in agreement with Kaplan & Haenlein, (2010); Mefalopulos, (2008) it supports that Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter (now X), TikTok, and YouTube, has become not only a medium for personal communication but also a strategic instrument for information dissemination, civic engagement, mobilization, and community development.

The extent to which how **individuals and groups utilize social media platforms in** promoting community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State especially in Noro and Andoni Local Government Area showed that building social support networks using WhatsApp and Facebook often leads to development contributions as contents shared about neglected infrastructure such as bad roads, broken boreholes call attention to issues. Ajayi, (2020); Dauda & Salihu (2022) noted that Nigeria and other African contexts suggests that social

media has been successfully used in rural areas to promote health campaigns, monitor service delivery, support electoral awareness, market agricultural products, and stimulate youth participation in local governance as WhatsApp groups are used in some communities in Northern Nigeria for early warning and response mechanisms in conflict zones, while Facebook groups in parts of the Middle Belt have facilitated community fundraising for schools and health centers.

Conclusion

it is worthy to note that role of social media promotes community engagement and development in rural areas of Rivers State, the researchers noted that **through** sharing updates in community meetings has helped in mobilizing communities for collective action and equally served as fundraising campaigns, building social support networks often leads to developmental

contributions in the rural areas especially in Nkoro and Andoni Local Government of Rivers State. However, regular social media updates and sensitization in line with promoting community engagement and development should be put in place engagement and sustainable community development in the rural areas of Rivers State.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. **Emphasis on social media platforms used in Promoting Community Engagement and Development in Rural Areas of Rivers State should be improved on.**
2. **Social media platforms** on local development initiatives such as immunization campaigns, sanitation exercises, town hall meetings and so on should be done on a regular basis.
3. Building social support networks that leads to sustainable development by **individuals or groups shouldn't be ignor**

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