

Interrogating the Role of Social Media in Civic Engagement and Development Administration in Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The research examined the impact of social media on citizens' civic engagement and the impact on government's development administration. The aim was to find out if the information on social media actually influences voters' preferences during elections and the impact on government administration. The survey research method was adopted to gather primary data from the field. A structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview were administered to civil servants and business men/women, respectively. In addition, secondary sources of data were sourced from published academic materials, news reports and other relevant internet materials. Data from the questionnaire were analysed using simple percentage analysis, while the interview responses were analysed thematically in line with the research objectives. It was discovered that government activities on social media influence the choices of voters during elections. In addition, the study observed that information and activities on social media also influence development administration by the government. The paper recommended, amongst others, that since social media has been observed to be a good tool to demand accountability and transparency from government, it is therefore important for government to create platforms that can be easily accessible, understandable and usable by the citizens.

Keywords: Social media engagement, development administration, survey, influence, civic responsibility

Introduction

One of the problems facing democracy in Nigeria is the decline in citizens' participation in politics and civil discourse. However, with the advent of internet technology and the new media system, including online news and social media platforms, the space of the traditional media has been replaced by these alternative centres of civic discourse (Carpini, 2004). People increasingly prefer engaging in political and civic discourse through social media. Social media has emerged as a pivotal mode of communication within contemporary governance. Globally, governments are increasingly embracing digital communication tools to bolster transparency, enhance citizen engagement, and promote democratic participation. E-governance refers to the use of information and communication technologies to improve the delivery of public services and the

communication of policies (United Nations, 2022). Through digital media, citizens transition from being mere recipients of information to becoming active participants who question, share, and shape public policy discussions online (Chadwick, 2017). In Nigeria, social media platforms now enable citizens to access crucial information concerning governance. Moreover, governmental bodies at both federal and state levels have progressively adopted digital platforms to convey policy-related information (Olufemi & Adebayo, 2021).

In Anambra State, social media has become a vital instrument for communication in governance. The state government employs platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Websites, and mobile applications to disseminate information regarding reforms in critical sectors such as education, infrastructure development, and socio-economic policies (Anambra State, 2023). These platforms are designed to promote transparency and enhance citizens' comprehension of governmental actions.

Despite the growing use of social media to promote public awareness of government actions, there are always opinions from the public either in favour of or against the government. The question of whether social media appeals to citizens' sense of government support becomes germane. This paper is centred on investigating the ability of government to secure public legitimacy through social media. Specifically, the study examined the role of social media in civic engagement and the impact it has on development administration.

Statement of the Problem

The active role of social media has made it possible for government and politicians to spread their political messages or agendas to the public. This is because social media has the capability to reach a larger audience with political content via platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Weibo (Moffitt, 2016). This audience can now be reached at greater speeds and within a short time span (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2013). The feedback in terms of support for government administration after receiving government input to the system shows that the government is leaving up to expectation. It also directs the government on how to direct its actions for further development. Despite the good pictures the government shows on social media about their development activities, there is hardly one standing opinion about governmental actions. The way people perceive governmental actions still differs. These perceptions flow into their willingness to either support or not support a particular government administration.

This research finds a gap in trying to find out if the information and activities of government on social media can actually appeal to the citizens to either support or not support the government. Moreover, the paper examined whether the support or lack of support for government administration has any impact on development administration. To achieve this, the paper examined the role of social media on civic engagement in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To find out if information on social media appeals to the choices of voters during elections
- ii. To examine if the activities on social media have an impact on government administration.

Operationalisation of Terms

For the purpose of this study, it is important to explain the use of the following concepts as they apply to this research.

Development

It is a process of bringing about fundamental and sustainable changes in society through bureaucracy. It encompasses growth, embraces aspects of quality of life such as social justice, equality of all citizens, equitable distribution of income and the demonstration of the development process.

Development Administration

For this study, development administration would also be focused on the administration of development. It refers to the administration of development programmes and the methods used by governments to implement policies and plans designed to meet developmental objectives.

Civic Engagement

In the context of this research, civic engagement is viewed as the active participation of citizens in the politics and administration of their society. Put differently, it is the process whereby citizens choose who gets the political power to pilot the administration of their society.

Conceptual Underpinning and Literature Review

Concept of Digital Media

Social media fosters real-time and interactive communication, allowing citizens to engage directly with governmental bodies (Castells, 2015). Social media platforms include social media (Facebook, Twitter/X, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok), blogs, government websites, online news portals, and mobile applications. It has the advantage of building immediacy, interactivity, and huge reach at low cost (Chadwick, 2017). For example, while a traditional newspaper can publish a government policy announcement once a day, a government Twitter handle can post multiple updates in real time, respond to queries, and deny false information simultaneously.

In the public sector, social media continues to increasingly become a central tool for citizen engagement and policy dissemination. According to Omede (2018), the application of social media platforms by the Nigerian government has increased transparency with improved accessibility of policy information for citizens, albeit with the presence of fake news and poor internet penetration. Similarly, Eze and Nwankwo (2020) note that Nigerian young people now use digital media as their go-to source for policy information, over radio and newspapers.

Access to Information

Access to information is defined as the entitlement and ability of citizens to receive, process, and utilise relevant information in decision-making and active participation in society. It is commonly regarded as a fundamental human right under international conventions such as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2015).

Information access in government promotes accountability, transparency, and trust between citizens and the government. Citizens are better positioned to keep track of implementation, engage in well-informed debate, and hold the authorities accountable when they have access to reliable information about government policy (McNair, 2011). Denial of access to information is likely to lead to misinformation, public distrust, and poor citizen participation in government programs.

In Nigeria, the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) of 2011 was put in place to guarantee citizens' access to public information and documents. Notwithstanding, bureaucratic, corrupt, and poor ICT infrastructure challenges in practice impair its application (Okoro & Nwafor, 2019).

Digital media, therefore, presents a secondary channel of policy communication, characterised by immediacy and wider reach.

Social Media and Citizen Engagement

Digital media has profoundly altered the conventional governance model, shifting from a one-sided communication approach in which governments simply provided information to citizens. The rise of social media platforms, websites, and online forums has created a more interactive governance framework, enabling two-way communication and feedback between government bodies and the public (Chadwick, 2017). Features such as comments, likes, live discussions, and content sharing enable citizens to articulate their opinions on public policies, political choices, and societal matters.

This interactive landscape promotes political awareness by presenting citizens with a variety of viewpoints and immediate policy updates. As a result, it encourages transparency, accountability, and democratic engagement, as individuals seek justifications and proactive actions from public officials (Aiyede, 2016). Furthermore, digital media bolsters civic mobilisation—online petitions, advocacy initiatives, and virtual town halls empower citizens to collectively sway governmental actions and advocate for social reforms. In this regard, digital media functions not merely as a communication medium but also as a participatory platform that enhances democratic governance and inclusivity, particularly among the youth who are notably active online.

Moreover, governments have progressively embraced digital media strategies for public consultations, service provision, and emergency communications, indicating a transition towards more citizen-focused governance frameworks (Mossberger, Wu & Crawford 2018). In summary, digital media acts as a catalyst for active citizenship by narrowing the divide between the governed and those who govern.

Social media is now one of the major platforms for creating awareness among the public concerning government activities. However, the information being supplied to the public concerning government administrative activities tends to differ. Some items of information seem to favour a particular administration by showing the public the developmental projects they are involved in. Other pieces of information tend to discredit the activities of government administration. In view of these discrepancies, this study tried to observe if these items of information have an impact on the choices of voters during elections in choosing a new government and if the support a particular administration receives during elections influences their political will to administer the much-needed development in society.

In line with the foregoing, this study examined the views of other researchers related to the subject matter. Asuquo (2024) evaluated the role of political advertising on social media and its influence on candidates' selection in the 2024 Ondo State governorship election by exploring the extent, effects, and challenges associated with candidates' use of social media for political advertising in the election. The study adopted the quantitative survey research design to gather data from 384 respondents and concluded that despite the opportunities presented by social media for political advertising, politicians have persistently utilised it to escalate political tensions during election periods. The study thus recommended that politicians and their supporters should use social media responsibly during election-related matters. However, the study only viewed the effect of the use of social media for civic engagement from the angle of finding out its impact on security.

Another study by Igbinedion & Ajisebiyawo (2023) assessed how social media influences voters' decisions during the presidential elections held on February 25 2023, among Nigerian voters and concluded that social media not only boosted voter participation but also shaped

electoral outcomes during the 2023 presidential elections and that the influence cut across distinct demographic, social, economic and cultural spectrums.

Adams et al. (2024) reviewed the role of social media in generating political awareness, discussion and strategies for better elections. The study was drawn from the framework of Social Media Engagement Theory and combined qualitative analysis of relevant literature on how social media influence generates political civility and awareness. It was discovered that it has contributed to the development of citizens' participation in politics, as it has the potential to create public awareness, mobilisation and interactions between people in a simple form and through different means.

Flowing from the idea of checking the impact of social media in creating political awareness, which will in turn impact on civic engagement, Macnamara & Zerfass (2012) research in relation to corporate use of social media shows that social media use by government departments and agencies is still largely at a nascent stage, and often experimental in nature. This raises the question of the extent of social media communication and engagement between citizens and government and the level of access and engagement of citizens via digital media platforms in Nigeria, particularly social media. Results showed that Nigerians use online media actively to engage with the government on social and leadership issues (Desmond et al., 2024). Citizens use social media for political engagement by sharing beliefs, mobilising grassroots movements, and organising protests. They participate in online debates, follow campaigns, and pressure decision-makers. However, while platforms foster rapid civic mobilisation, they also risk spreading misinformation and creating polarising echo chambers. This view is in line with Asuquo's (2025) view that political engagement of citizens can lead to political tension during elections. However, the focus of this study is to determine how the use of social media influences voters' choices during elections and how these choices affect administration eventually.

Igbinedion and Ajisebiyawo (2023) established an association between the frequency of social media interactions involving political content and voters' preferences during the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria and discovered that social media not only boosted voter participation but also shaped electoral outcomes during the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria, and that the influence cut across distinct demographic, social, economic and cultural spectrums.

Upon scrutinising the influence of digital networks on the conduct of elections in contemporary electoral battles, Basak (2024) made a variety of pivotal revelations that online communal platforms notably mould public notions and views related to politics among the electorate through well-aimed adverts, widespread posts, and precise audience targeting, catapulting political dialogues to vast audiences with unmatched promptness and adeptness. In addition to this phenomenon, it's observed that digital forums escalate both the reinforcement of pre-existing biases and phenomena where users are encased within informational bubbles that mirror their prior convictions (Basak, 2024). In addition, it is alarming how social media platforms can also be used as a medium for spreading unverified information to the public, especially during election periods. Some people can easily believe what they see or hear on social media about a particular electoral candidate. This study thus tried to find out if the information on social media actually influences the choices of voters during elections. Moreover, the study also tried to examine if this information on social media can affect the pattern of government development administration. These objectives were achieved by interrogating selected respondents in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This research was based on the Social Media Engagement Theory. It was propounded by Di Gangi and Wasko in 2016 (Di Gangi & Wasko 2016). The theory posits that social media platforms create, connect, and share content through the engagement processes that users undergo on social media, which include activities such as commenting on others' posts, liking those posts, redistributing content, and contributing their thoughts or opinions. Social media engagement theory explains that users have a sense of social presence through interaction with content and other users on the platform. This can lead to a sense of community and belonging among users, and can also foster a sense of trust and credibility in the information being shared.

Another key ideology of social media engagement theory is the role of social influence. Research has shown that individuals are more likely to engage with content that is popular or has been shared by others they trust (Hayford et al., 2026). This can lead to the spread of information and ideas through networks of connected users, and can also contribute to the formation of "echo chambers" where users are exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs and perspectives. However, there are several limitations of social media engagement theory. They include: Limited understanding of user behaviour, limited ability to predict outcomes, limited ability to measure engagement, and limited understanding of the impact of Artificial intelligence and automation on social media engagement and other factors. Based on these limitations, this study examined the impact of social media on citizens' civic engagement, specifically to find out whether social media information can be used to appeal to citizens' engagement during elections and if social media activities also impact the government's administration.

Methodology

Research Design

The survey research method was adopted to gather primary data from the field. A structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview were administered. In addition, secondary sources of data were sourced from published academic materials, news reports and other internet materials.

Study Area

The study area was Anambra State, where seven out of the 21 local government areas were selected. This covers one-third of the study area. Nnewi South, Nnewi North, Onitsha North, Onitsha South, Idemili North, Awka South, and Njikoka local government areas are some of the biggest communities in Anambra State. The reason for choosing this area is that Anambra State is one of the states in Nigeria that just conducted its gubernatorial elections. During the election period, there were a lot of social media engagements for and against the leading administration at that time.

Population/Sample Size

The population of the study consist of civil servants and business men/women. These groups consist of citizens who are eligible voters by age, and they make up the major group by occupation in the selected local governments in Anambra State.

For the purpose of this research, 15 civil servants from each of these Local Government Areas were drawn as the sample size for this research. That is an estimated value of 105 civil servants. This brought the total sample size for civil servants to 105 civil servants who were to respond to the structured questionnaire designed for this study. On the other hand, a random selection of 10 businessmen and 10 businesswomen from the Nkwo Nnewi market, which happens to be one of the biggest markets in Anambra State and Nigeria at large, was made. The aim was to

administer an in-depth interview to the 20 selected business men/women, which was meant to provide additional information to that of the responses from the questionnaire.

The total sample size for this research is therefore 125 respondents for both the questionnaire and the in-depth interview.

Technique of Data Collection

The questionnaire was administered to the civil servants, drawn from seven local government areas in Anambra State: Nnewi South, Nnewi North, Onitsha North, Onitsha South, Idemili North, Awka South, and Njikoka local governments. The in-depth interview, on the other hand, was conducted with selected business people in the Nkwo market of Nnewi, which is one of the major markets in Anambra. Both the civil servants and business individuals were randomly selected.

Method of Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaire were analysed using simple percentage analysis. The interview responses were analysed thematically in line with the research objectives.

Result of Findings

Response Rate and Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Distribution and Retrieval of Questionnaires by Local Government

Local Government		Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Retrieved
Nnewi north	15		15
Nnewi south	15		15
Onitsha north	15		15
Onitsha south	15		15
Idemili north	15		15
Awka south	15		15
Njikoka	15		13
Total	105		103

As indicated in the study methodology, 105 respondents were sampled, and the same number of questionnaires were distributed to the targeted respondents of the study. In the retrieval process, the study observed that, out of the 105 questionnaires sent to the study's sampled respondents, 103 were retrieved, thus changing the study's total sample to 103, which has a 93.6% retrieval rate. Table 1 above shows the rate of retrieval from the seven local governments in Anambra State. It can be observed that out of the 15 questionnaires distributed in Njikoka Local Government, the researcher was able to retrieve only 13.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	62	60.2
	Female	41	39.8
Age Group (Years)	Less than 21	11	10.7
	21-40	44	42.7
	41-60	38	36.9
	61 and above	10	9.7
Highest Educational Qualification	Others	3	2.9
	Primary education	7	6.8
	Secondary education	16	15.5
	Tertiary education	77	74.8
Marital status	Single	45	31.1
	Married	58	68.9
Staff Cadre Breakdown	Senior staff	87	84.5
	Junior staff	16	15.5

Table 2 shows the socio-demographic information of the respondents. The gender metrics demonstrate a male-dominated distribution within the sampled cohort, with males accounting for 60.2% (n = 62) and females making up 39.8% (n = 41) of the total population. The age distribution indicates a highly mature workforce, where cumulatively, 50.5% of the respondents are between 31 and 50 years old, representing the mid-to-senior career spectrum. A substantial majority of the respondents are married (56.3%). The sampled cohort shows high educational attainment, with over 74% of the respondents with tertiary-level education. Reflecting the educational profile, the institutional hierarchy is dominated by Senior Staff (84.5%), with the largest concentration located at Grade Levels 12–14 (39.8%). This signifies an experienced administrative workforce. In addition, the table also shows that more staff with 11 – 20 years of experience participated in this study.

Table 3: Responses on the Role of Social Media on Civic Engagement

S/N	To find out if information on social media appeals to the choices of voters during elections	Frequency (N) of Disagreement	Percentage (%) of Disagreement	Frequency (N) of Agreement	Percentage (%) of Agreed	Total (%)
1	I can access government information on social media	33	32	70	68	100
2	I am pleased with government activities shown on social media	42	40.7	61	59.3	100
3	I agree with information about government development activities shown on social media	60	58.2	43	41.8	100
4	Government administrative activities shown on social media propel me to go out and vote during elections	34	33	69	67	100
5	These activities influence my perception about a particular administration	39	37.9	64	62.1	100
6	This perception influences my decision on who to vote for during an election	39	37.9	64	62.1	100

To examine if the activities on social media impact administration.

7	Government tends to meet the needs of the people if the people post the government's activities on social media	37	35.9	66	64.1	100
8	The impact of government administration is largely felt in areas with social media support for the government	41	39.8	62	60.2	100
9	Developmental activities displayed on social media are not different from reality	65	63.1	38	36.9	100
10	Leaders chosen based on social media information turn out to be the best in administration	68	66	35	34	100

This research is focused on finding out if government activities on social media influence voters' choices during elections and if the government's activities on social media also have an impact on how well or poorly the government performs in administration. The responses from the respondents on items in line with finding out if information on social media influences the choices of voters during elections in Table 3 show that the majority of the respondents (68%) can access government information on social media. More of the respondents (59.3%) are also pleased with the government activities they see on social media. However, the majority of the respondents (41.8) did not agree with the development activities of the government shown on social media. Many of the respondents (67%) agreed that government administrative activities shown on social media propel them to go out and vote during elections. Moreover, (62.1%) of the respondents also agreed that what they see on social media influences their perception of a particular administration and their decision on who to vote for during elections. The implication of these responses is that despite not being satisfied with all government activities on social media, social media still has a huge influence on citizens' civic engagement. Social media is a very useful tool to motivate citizens to participate in elections. It also serves as a very effective means of appealing to voters' choices during elections. It is also important to find out if social media has any impact on leaders in performing their administrative tasks and ensuring development across society. These findings

corroborate Edewusi's (2022) assertion that digital communication has revolutionised the dissemination of policies and civic participation in Nigeria.

Flowing from the above, the research went further to find out if the activities on social media have an impact on subsequent administration. Still on Table 3, the majority of the respondents (64.1) observed that government tends to meet the needs of the people if the people post government's activities on social media. They (60.2) also agreed that the impact of government administration is largely felt in areas with social media support for the government. However, the response from a larger percentage of the respondents (63.1) revealed that developmental activities displayed on social media are different from reality. Moreover, the respondents (66%) did not agree that leaders chosen based on social information turn out to be the best in administration. The implication of these findings is that governments tend to act better when there is information about their administration on social media, especially in areas that gave their support during the election and where their impact during the election was felt. However, leaders chosen based on information seen on social media have not proven to be the best, especially as development activities on social media do not equate with what is in reality. That is to say that social media also has a reasonable impact on government development administration. In order to make government effective both on social media and in reality, the same social media can be utilised to make government accountable. Social media can be used as a means to always remind government of what the people saw before choosing their leaders and how to bring social media development to "real life" development. These findings support the assertion of Akinola & Adeyeye (2021) that social media can also fortify transparency and communication between citizens and the government.

To further understand the above findings, the study conducted in-depth interviews with selected businessmen and women, and these were their responses.

Table 4: In-depth Interview Responses on Interrogating the Role of Social Media on Civic Engagement

Items	Agree	Disagree
To find out if information on social media appeals to the choices of voters during elections	Some of the respondents agreed that it was the good works they have seen on social media about a particular candidate that made them come out and vote for him. Some others also agreed that it was social media that made them aware of other eligible candidates they could vote for other than the popular one everyone knows. They explained that social media allowed them to compare the qualities and characters of contestants because their good works were present on social media, likewise their flaws or shortcomings.	On the other hand, the other respondents did not agree that social media influenced their choices of candidates during elections. They explained that, regardless of social media, they have seen what the candidate they have chosen has done in reality, and they will vote for him again, regardless of what is broadcast about their choice of candidate.

To examine if the activities on social media impact subsequent administration.	Virtually all the respondents interviewed agreed that activities on social media have an impact on government administration. Some of them explained that it was social media that influenced their choice of candidate during the last gubernatorial election, and the leader who later emerged as the winner of the election has been doing well in terms of infrastructural development. They even cited some major roads in Nnewi South that have been reconstructed and that these new roads are now making conveying their goods from their warehouses easier. However, some respondents also claimed that because the present administration got more support from some particular local governments, it is obvious that more development activities are ongoing in these local governments than in the others. Some of the traders cited Nnewi South and other local governments like Njikoka and others are getting more attention from the current administration because the present governor got more votes from these areas during the election. They explained that not much is happening in areas where the governor lost during the election. Some also said that these observations are also present on social media.
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The responses from Table 4 explain that social media influences voters' choices during elections, as well as evidence of development activities in reality. This is evident in the respondents' responses, where some agreed that they were influenced by what they saw on social media, while others were influenced by what they have seen in reality. Furthermore, the respondents also explained that they have observed that areas that gave support to the government during the elections and on social media tend to get more development administration from the government than others. That is to say, social media also has an impact on development administration. This observation is consistent with Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which posits that access to communication technologies accelerates the awareness and adoption of novel ideas (Rogers, 2003).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research tried to find out if the information and activities of government on social media can actually appeal to the citizens to either support or not support the government. Moreover, the paper examined whether the support or lack of support for government administration has any impact on development administration. To achieve this, the paper examined the role of social media on civic

engagement in seven local government areas in Anambra State, Nigeria. The social media engagement theory was adopted to explain how social media can be used to influence people. In order to achieve the objectives of this research, the study adopted the survey research method and also consulted several secondary materials. It was discovered that government activities on social media influence the choices of voters during elections. In addition, the study also observed that information and activities on social media influence development administration by the government. The findings of this research confirm the observations of other researchers that were reviewed in this work and further add that social media is a vital tool for the government to get the citizens' support during elections. Moreover, the government can understand the people's needs through their activities and information on social media, and the people can also monitor the government's administrative activities through social media.

Based on these discoveries, this research recommends the following:

- i. The government should ensure that what it posts on social media is equal to what is obtainable in reality. This will help the government earn more trust from the citizens.
- ii. The government needs to observe public opinion on social media and find a way to balance its actions with what the people think about its system of administration
- iii. Social media has been observed to be a good tool to demand accountability and transparency from government. It is therefore important for government to create platforms that can be easily accessible, understandable and usable by the citizens.

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