

Social Media: An Effective Tool for Social Mobilization in Nigeria

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Abstract: *The explosion of social media in recent times, has dramatically transformed the way information is created, disseminated and distributed. In an age when information equates to power, a diversity of opinion can actually lead to more creative problem solving and more equitable outcomes in a society. This paper examines how social media technologies could be deployed for transformational mobilization and development. It describes the potential role of the social media in promoting social mobilization as a means for sustainable development in Nigeria. Possibilities of using the social media in a way that will benefit the agents of social mobilization were analyzed within the wider framework of actual needs and existing challenges in the country. Among the issues the paper touches upon are the extents to which the social media is being used and can be adapted to improve the social mobilization process. The paper also explored the theoretical framework for the application of these new media tools in communication. The authors argued that social media can become an effective and alternative tool for social mobilization, within the context of the unique multiple platform of new forms of engagement it offers to the audience. Social mobilization here refers to a means of inspiring people to active action and engagement concerning social issues for development purposes. Accordingly, the different social media tools were analyzed extensively and ways to harness the potentials were also discussed, while recognizing the challenges of using these new media forms in a developing economy such as Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Social media, Social mobilization, development, civil society, internet.*

I. Introduction

In Nov. 16, 2013, Anambra State South East Nigeria concluded its gubernatorial elections. However, the result of the election was widely protested by different political parties on the basis of irregularities witnessed during the election. High in the list of the criticism was the disenfranchisement of many voters during the election. This was as a result of the omission of many registered voters' name in the voters register. Reacting to these complaints the independent electoral commission (INEC), charged with the responsibility of conducting elections in the country, maintained that the disenfranchisement of many voters was the voters fault, since most of them failed to participate in the registration verification exercise conducted by the commission in August and October prior to the election. In the light of INEC's response one then asks, why did the voters not participate in the exercise that will ensure that they exercise their franchise? Were they adequately sensitized and mobilized by INEC to participate in the exercise? Most schools of thought suggest that the failure of the exercise centers on the media channels used in sensitizing the electorates to participate in the registration verification exercise since INEC admitted to having mostly used the traditional media of communication and little of the social media. In consideration of these challenges is it possible that the use of social media would have yielded a better result? If so why? Given the above development this paper therefore explores the use of social media in social mobilization.

II. Setting the Scene: Social Media Development in Nigeria

In the recent past, the internet has changed not only people's relationships by creating new platforms for social engagement, but also people's ability to contribute in the development process in the society by creating a space for more diverse political opinions, social and cultural viewpoints and a heightened level of audience participation. The spaces created by the internet have engendered wide opportunity for engaging the public concerning different issues in Nigeria. That is why these days it has become a common occurrence to see different people contribute in political discourses going on in the country. This was also visible in the way the country officially utilized social media tools for the first time in its political history in the 2011 election, thus, demonstrating the increasing use of the internet by the Nigerian population. In the election campaign process in some part of Nigeria (Anambra state South Eastern Nigeria for example, during the 2013/2014 gubernatorial election, it appeared that the different political parties made extensive use of the social media in reaching different segments of the population). In the present dispensation regarding the 2015 elections INEC has resorted to a wide use of social media: in communicating with the voters; disseminating information about its programmes but more especially in recruiting members of the public as ad hoc staff for the March 28 polls.

This paper in part attempts to examine the diverse social media channels utilized in the 2013 gubernatorial election in South East Nigeria and in the 2015 elections.

In 2008, the BBC programme "Superpower", placed the Nigerian internet population at about twenty four million people (ITU), positioning Nigeria as Africa's biggest internet market (audience), dwarfing South Africa and Egypt. However, recent statics (Internetwordstatics.com) show that as at Dec, 31 2011, Nigeria has 45, 039, 711 internet users and 4,369,740 facebook users. A significant range of penetration considering the technological connection challenges in the country. This growth rate suggests that some form of value or meaning is derived by the users and that the social media network in Nigeria has become dynamic with more people engaging in online conversations. This evidence also suggests that it could be a potential tool for mobilizing the public's regarding specific issues. There have also been suggestions that although policy makers and other professionals continue to be a major news source concerning social issues and development in Nigeria, online sources, have also, become a significant source of social information and development in the country. As Idakwo (2011) notes, "the internet offers a great platform to reach millions of Nigerians with amazing targeting possibilities including age, gender, interest and behavioral targeting".

It has been suggested that the use of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Blogs and other social media tools as a new means to disseminate messages and engage the audience in participatory communication has created a new dimension in social mobilization making it easier to organize and disseminate ideas. It is instructive to point out that despite its various strengths as an interactive media, different schools of thought have argued against the credibility of most of the contents. Available statics demonstrate that the prevalent and most subscribed social media in Nigeria are Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, in that order. Given this development this paper examines the potentials and challenges in the use of social media by civil society and government as a tool to promote positive developmental trends in the society. The objective is to add to the growing body of theoretical knowledge of social media and examine the theoretical framework supporting the use of social media networking apparatus for social mobilization and development. The end point of this study is to discover how social media can be used as a tool for social mobilization in Nigeria, thereby providing new possibilities to the problem of ineffective and aborted social campaigns and development efforts. Specifically this discourse has three fold objectives to;

1. Provide a definition of diverse range of social media in Nigeria context.
2. Discuss the use of different social media networking, in Nigeria political process using the Anambra State gubernatorial election as a case in point.
3. Present a discussion of current challenges, opportunities and potential future directions related to the use of social media as a tool for social mobilization for development.

In order to put this in proper context we are now going to examine social mobilization in Nigeria.

III. Setting the Context: Social Media and Social Mobilization

Earlier definition of the concept of social mobilization simplified it as the process of dialogue, negotiation and consensus building for action by people, communities, and organizations etc. to identify, address and solve a common problem (UNICEF, 1997). However, more recent definition broadened the concept as; a broad scale movement to engage people's participation in achieving a specific development goal through self-reliant efforts. It involves all relevant segments of society: decision and policy makers, opinion leaders, bureaucrats and technocrats, professional groups, religious associations, commerce and industry, communities and individuals. It is a planned decentralized process that seeks to facilitate change for development through a range of players engaged in interrelated and complementary efforts. It takes into account the felt needs of the people, embraces the critical principle of community involvement, and seeks to empower individuals and groups for action. (UNICEF, 2002).

Social mobilization is borne out of the need to organize people into groups to ensure their involvement and participation in development programmes. Available literature shows that social mobilization's goal is the provision of a continuum of activities in a broad strategic framework to facilitate change. The process encompasses dialogue and partnership with a wide spectrum of societal elements with an outcome which are people's active involvement in the process starting with identifying a need to implementation, and achieving the development objective and evaluation effort. There are different parts to social mobilization such as: the motivation and organization of different groups that results in the successful transformation of development goals into societal action; involving the people in taking part actively and freely in discussions and decisions affecting their general welfare; a process that engages and motivates a wide range of partners and allies at national and local levels to raise awareness of and demand for a particular development objective through face-to-face dialogue. In all these efforts, social mobilization process ensures that, members of institutions, community networks, civic and religious groups and others work in a coordinated way to reach specific groups of people for dialogue with planned messages (Wikipedia, 2011). In other words, social mobilization seeks to

facilitate change through a range of players engaged in interrelated and complementary efforts. In fact, social mobilization aims at increasing people's level of awareness or cognition of political and other issues so that they can apply their energies positively and participate actively in the social and political life of the country. In the present political dispensation, social mobilization now occurs most frequently through these three main social media; the face book, text messages and twitter. In fact it seems as if the traditional media primarily responsible for calling people into action for meeting and other social activities have been overtaken by the social media especially block text messages, face books and emails.

From the above explanations, social mobilization could be defined simply as a means of inspiring people to active action and engagement concerning social issues. The key for mobilization is to inspire and motivate individuals to go from the comfort of their homes to engage in development actions. The development of the internet has provided an alternative means for mobilizing the public. Social media allow organizers such as professionals, civil society and government who are recognized as key agents of social mobilization to involve like-minded people in a particular desirable activity at a very low cost, to action. Instead of attending meetings, workshops and rallies, un-committed individuals can join a Facebook group or follow a Twitter feed at home. The following examples are some of the concrete evidence of how social media have been utilized in mobilization efforts in the UK

- The recent post-riot clean-up Twitter campaign was one example of how social media can be used to inspire people to get involved in community life in UK organized by voluntary sector network group.
- Keep Britain Tidy organization by Fran Hayes used Twitter and Facebook to help change people's habits on local litter pickups by taking photos of litter in their areas and sharing them as a Twitpic.
- Paul Twivy's Your Square Mile, an organization that is building communities both on and offline in 16 UK locations, has worked with some heavy users of Facebook who have failed to realize its potential for community action. "He has inspired them to have their own neighborhood Facebook Group for their street.
- Hugh Flouch's Network Neighbourhoods, sites that play a consolidating role in helping to raise debate on local issues transparency and provide a channel and encouragement for people to get involved in civic and community issues.

These examples demonstrate the possibility that local websites can both stimulate and reflect a latent demand for informal opportunities for collective involvement. In the United States apart from politicians, most celebrities have also become adept at using social media for mobilizing fans. For example, Lady Gaga have the highest number of followers, or fans, on Facebook, at over 33 million, and the highest number of followers on Twitter, at over 9 million, and has skillfully and successfully used social media to mobilize her fans around various activist efforts, most notably the repeal of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy. Civic engagement of fans was also targeted by musician Donnie Wahlberg, who drew on his Twitter following to find a kidney donor for a fan, urging others to help. After reading his tweet, many fans contacted the hospital, and a suitable donor was quickly found (Graceley, 2011). In Nigeria, the "occupy Nigeria saga" of 2011 which drew the highest number of following from the masses is a clear testimony of the effectiveness of the social media tools for mass mobilization. What these examples show is that social media could be an effective tool for social mobilization. What are social media tools?

IV. Defining Social Media

The development of various means of communication continues to emerge as the society develops. Different eras of development in the society, were marked with forms of communication suitable to the period. For instance, earlier forms of communication did not need any technology or skill but as the need to communicate with a wider audience grew, so did the channels, bringing writing and printing forms in its wake. That era introduced theories like the Bullet theory that dwells on the strong, direct effects of the media on people. The theory was based on the "push" model concept of the mass media, where the gatekeepers who decide what the audience will have, simply push the information to the receiver. With the advent of new technologies today, the focus has shifted. The Uses and Gratification Theory has actively displaced the Bullet theory in the sense that people, when they are not seeking out media to subscribe to, can/have become the media themselves. The 'audience' has moved from being just consumers to producers of their own media. The internet media is based on the "pull" model where receivers pull only the information they want. Tools like blogging, podcasting, video blogging allow the average citizen the ability to pull what is relevant and also participate in producing content. The evolution of the internet provided the technological framework for the emergence of the social media platform. The Internet has been described as a global system of interconnected computer networks that use the standard Internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) to serve billions of users worldwide. This extended definition by Omojuwa (2012) captures the essence and function of the internet;

It is a network of networks that consists of millions of private, public, academic, business, and government networks, of local to global scope, that are linked by a broad array of electronic, wireless and

optical networking technologies. The Internet carries an extensive range of information resources and services, such as the inter-linked hypertext documents of the World Wide Web (WWW) and the infrastructure to support email. Most traditional communications media including telephone, music, film, and television are reshaped or redefined by the Internet, giving birth to new services such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and Internet Protocol Television (IPTV). Newspaper, book and other print publishing are adapting to Web site technology, or are reshaped into blogging and web feeds. The Internet has enabled or accelerated new forms of human interactions through instant messaging, internet forums and social networking

The new media of communication as the internet is commonly referred to, through the pervasiveness of web 2.0 has broadened and substantially increased public participation in the media. Web 2.0 is a term referring to myriad web applications that provide for interactive information sharing and collaboration via the internet using a variety of means such as texts, images, audio and video (Addison, 2006). The World Wide Web brings the internet into the realm of mass communication and also enables the development of the Social media tools for audience engagement. Social media has been defined in various ways by different scholars, some of these definitions will now be highlighted. Weber (2009) defined social media as an online place where people with a common interest can gather to share thoughts, comments and opinions. Weber further described social media as a new world of unpaid media created by individuals and companies on the internet. According to B&C (2010) social media is an online technology tool that allows people to communicate easily utilizing the internet to share and discuss information. In this capacity, it allows users to create content, interact and collaborate in a user generated visual community. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Other definitions see social media as elements of the new media that has the highest activity on the internet which use web-based technologies that transform and broadcast media monologues into social dialogues, support the democratization of knowledge and information while transforming people from content consumers to content producers.

Social media are also perceived as tools that help to reach people when, where and how they want to receive messages; it improves the availability of content and may influence satisfaction and trust in the messages delivered. Likewise, social media equally provide the opportunity to tap into personal networks and present information in multiple formats, spaces, and sources which helps to make messages more credible and effective. Additionally, many social media channels facilitate social engagement, viral sharing of information and trust. It is obvious then that integrating social media into different communication campaigns and development activities will allow the government, civil society and other professionals to leverage social dynamics and networks to encourage participation, conversation and community – all of which can help spread key messages and influence informed and positive decision making.

Deriving from the above definitions, it could also be argued that the social media tools could be suitable for mass mobilization of the Nigerian society, though with the recognition of certain challenges to the effectiveness of this tool, due to the socio economic development context of Nigeria. There are three key attributes of social media channels that are believed to make them highly effective as social development communication tools.

- **Personalization** – content tailored to individual needs
- **Presentation** – timely and relevant content accessible in multiple formats and contexts
- **Participation** – partners and the public who develop and contribute content in meaningful ways.

Many authors believe Social media and other emerging communication technologies to be useful tools for social development and mobilization, because of the following characteristics:

- Social media can connect millions of voices to, increase the timely dissemination and potential impact of trends and issues as they evolve in the society.
- Leverage audience networks to facilitate information sharing.
- Expand reach to include broader, more diverse audiences.
- Personalize and reinforce development messages on several issues that can be more easily tailored or targeted to particular audiences.
- Facilitate interactive communication, connection and public engagement.
- Empower people to make better informed decisions.

Of the many mass media theories, the Uses and Gratification theory appears to capture the paradigm shift in audience use of the media enabled by the social media. This shift can best be described as a shift from ‘one-to-many’, to ‘many-to-many’ communication. The Uses and Gratifications theory is a model that could be used in understanding the different ways the audience now applies the media to satisfy personal needs and gratifications via the internet web based technologies. Uses and Gratifications Theory (a limited effects theory)

places more focus on the consumer, or audience, instead of the actual message itself by asking “what people do with media” rather than “what media does to people” (Katz, 1959). It assumes that members of the audience are not passive but take an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. The theory also holds audiences responsible for choosing media to meet their needs. The approach suggests that people use the media to fulfill specific gratifications.

This theory would then imply that people when they engage in online conversations and other online platforms perform a deliberate and conscious exercise. In this case, the media become a means of satisfying specific gratifications. Blumler and Katz’s, postulate that individuals mix and match uses with goals, according to specific context, needs, social backgrounds and so on. Thus, they are seen as active participants in the media consumption process. Uses and gratification theory suggests that media users play an active role in selecting and using the media. Users take an active part in the communication process and are goal oriented in their media use. The theorists believe that a media user seeks out a media source that best fulfills the needs of the user. Uses and gratifications assume that the user has alternate choices to satisfy their need and explore these choices in the course of seeking gratification. Uses and Gratifications have been useful in understanding consumers’ motivations and concerns in the context of traditional media such as radio and TV. However, only a few researchers have explored uses and gratifications applications in the Internet context (Chen and Wells, 1999; Eighmey and McCord, 1998; Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999). Looking at the framework of the theory one could argue its effectiveness and relevance to the social media.

Manuel Castells’s network theory is another theory that can be effectively used to explain how the characteristics of social networks can be valuable for social mobilization, through the creation of weak ties, and the egalitarian nature of online communication. “Weak ties are useful in providing information and opening up opportunities at a low cost. The advantage of the Net is that it allows the forging of weak ties with strangers, in an egalitarian pattern of interaction where social characteristics are less influential in framing, or even blocking communication” (Granovetter, 1973, P. 1361.). The strength of a tie is based on a “combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie.” Social media networks are based on these weak ties- acquaintances with other people whom one might share common outlooks.

The New Media Theory is another theory relevant to social media. It investigates the traditional media and new media as a complex ecological and rhetorical context. The merger of traditional media and new media creates a global social sphere that is changing the ways we work, play, write, teach, think, and connect. Because this new context operates through evolving arrangements, theories of new media have yet to establish a rhetorical and theoretical paradigm that fully articulates this emerging digital life. Having looked at the theoretical conception of the social media, let us now identify the social media tools.

Zeralla (2010), grouped social media into the following broad categories: Microblogs (Twitter), Social networks (Facebooks), Media sharing sites (You tube), Social Bookmarking and voting sites (Digg Reddt), Review sites (Yelp), Forums and Virtual worlds (Second Life). However, more recent and comprehensive classification include the following; Buttons and Badges, Image Sharing ,Content Syndication, RSS Feeds, Podcasts, Online Video production, Widgets, eCards, Mobile Technologies/texting, Twitter, Blogs, Facebook, micro blogs, virtual worlds and social networks (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). We are now going to define these social media tools with more emphasis on those once that are prevalent among the Nigerian public.

V. Social Media Tools

Buttons and Badges; Buttons are graphic elements that usually include an image, a short call-to-action message, and a link for more information. They are often created to be shared, and include HTML code that allows them to be posted on a website. **Badges** are also small graphic images that include a message and link to a web page. However, badges are often posted on an individual’s social network profile or personal blog to show support for or affiliation with a cause or issue, and may include messages that show a personal action was taken e.g., ‘I now know my HIV status’ (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010a). Looking at this definition one can see the opportunity these tools could offer in recruiting people for action and in inspiring people individually for a specific positive activity. For instance, Button and Badges could be explored as an alternative tool for creating personalized health messages for target groups in the country.

Image sharing: This involves posting images (photos, artwork, etc.) to public websites where they can be viewed, tagged, categorized, and even used by others. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010b).This also is another beautiful method for public mobilization. This method was actually widely used earlier this year during the ‘occupy Nigeria’ fuel subsidy saga. Image sharing provides value to communication activities by providing public images on development that users can easily place on websites, blogs or other social media sites. The widespread use of mobile phones with cameras makes it easier than ever to take photos. As Odio (2011) explains, mobile applications for photos and exploding participation in social networks like Facebook

and Twitter have contributed to a surge in the popularity of online photo sharing. More than 100 million photos a day are uploaded to Facebook. Civil society organizations, government policy makers and other development professionals can take advantage of this trend by providing visual images to fans and followers that show development 'in action', across the different states and reinforce development messages, or simply present existing information in a new, visually interesting format. There are several online communities that provide image sharing services such as, Flickr and Shut which could be of help in this regard.

Content Syndication is a technical application that enables partner organizations to display current contents dedicated to specific issues such as health, agriculture, politics etc and allows visitors to the public partner's website access to content without leaving the partner website. This tool, if provided by government professionals and civil society organizations, allows the communication and management of the latest science-based information online on emerging development activities and initiatives. The advantage of this tool is that it allows government, civil society organizations the opportunity to develop a wide range of content on development related topics that could be syndicated to different partners website.

RSS Feed

RSS stands for **Really Simple Syndication**. RSS feeds provide an easy way to stay updated on information that is important and helps reduce the time it takes to browse or search for new information on web sites. RSS feeds provide updated news headlines, blog posts or selected website content. RSS feeds enable participants to personalize the information they receive by subscribing to the topics of greatest interest to them. Development partners and civil society organizations have the option of posting the feeds on their websites to allow their users access to up-to-date information. To utilize this content, an RSS-enabled browser or an RSS news reader must be subscribed to. These tools help you view the content and will let you know when there is new content on.

What is a Podcast?

A **podcast** is a digital audio or video file that can be saved for playback on a portable media device or computer. The term 'podcast' refers to both the actual content of the media file and the method by which the content is syndicated. Podcasts help to deliver information in a convenient and enjoyable format, and can be played 'on the go' from an iPod, mobile device, or other portable player. Podcasts can also be viewed on websites. Podcasts can be provided to increase access to development messages and deliver information in a convenient format. To actualize the potential provided by this tool, development agencies and civil society organizations should provide extensive library of podcasts that includes topics directed to target groups, professionals, public practitioners and the general public. Partners can easily download podcasts from these groups mentioned earlier. Partners can also create their own podcasts relatively easily and without much investment in technical resources.

Video Sharing: Online video sharing can be a great way to exchange information, share personal stories and engage audiences. Video sharing is becoming immensely popular because anyone with internet access can upload, view, share and comment on video footage. Using video sharing sites like YouTube or Google Video help provide an engaging experience for consumers to view and share information on several issues. As online video viewing continues to increase on both traditional and mobile sites, these sources can be a powerful mechanism to assist government and civil society organizations in distributing current and accurate development messages on different issues.

Widget: A widget is an application that can be utilized by partners to display featured development content directly on their desktop, website or social media site. Widgets can also generally be shared with friends. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010e). Made popular by Google, Facebook, Widget box, and now cell phone operating systems such as Android; widgets provide interactive information and fresh content with minimal user maintenance. The content in a widget can be updated automatically, ensuring access to up-to-date and credible content

eCards are electronic greeting cards that are sent to people's email accounts. Government and civil society organizations for instance, can develop Health-e-Cards to encourage healthy behavior by communicating programs, products and other activities. This could also be done for other development programme, apart from health. Another benefit of using eCards is that they are an effective and inexpensive way to reach individuals with personalized and targeted information. People can use eCards to send a personal message as well as development messages to their friends and family. An eCard often opens with a colorful greeting, and includes a message that encourages healthy living, promotes safe activities, or celebrates an important event.

Mobile Technologies is a term used to describe the practice of using mobile technologies – mobile phones, text messaging services or applications – to distribute information to the public. The three unique characteristics of mobile applications are:

- 1) **Simplicity** -- making the application suitable for regularly scheduled tasks using a minimum number of steps/clicks,

- 2) **Immediacy** -- providing the capability to instantly deliver pertinent content to users who carry phones with them literally on a constant basis, and
- 3) **Context** -- delivering services relevant to a customer's location and circumstances. (Johnson and Wannemacher, P. 2011).

Mobile technologies include the following:

- **Mobile websites** – A website that has been optimized for mobile viewing. The number of mobile websites has grown consistently over the years due to Smartphone technologies, mobile browsers and cellular networks. To simplify the user interface, mobile sites are optimized for viewing on smaller screens by displaying less content that is more targeted and have minimal number of user controls for easy navigation.

- **Downloadable applications** – An application that runs on smart phones and other mobile devices that makes optimum use of the handset's native functions, such as the camera, gyroscope, offline usage and push notifications. CDC has released an eCard mobile application, based on the popular eCard website, which allows users to view and send electronic greeting cards to family and friends. A large collection of eCards are available on health topics such as asthma, diabetes, heart health and emergency preparedness and response. Applications are typically platform specific and certain ones may only be available for iPhones, Androids or other specific platforms.

- **SMS text messaging:** This is the initial and simplest mobile delivery method. SMS messages are the most common type of mobile data service. Text messages, limited to 160 characters, can be utilized to send daily health tips, positive behavioural messages, intervention messages and medication reminders. MMS, multimedia messaging service, which is an enhancement to SMS text messaging, allows the transmission of images, audio and video files along with the text message. Recent research indicates that interventions delivered by text messages have positive short-term behavioral outcomes. Important features of SMS delivery include dialogue initiation, tailoring of content, and interactivity (Fjeldsoe, Marshall & Miller, 2009).

Twitter is an information network made up of 140-character messages called tweets. It is used by millions of people, organizations, and businesses to discover and share new information. Twitter users subscribe to receive tweets by following an account. Followers receive messages in their timeline that includes a feed of all the account they subscribed to. **Twitter** has become an important tool for connecting people interested in specific health and safety information. Twitter's information network has grown at a fast pace, with 460,000 daily sign-ups and over 200 million registered users (Twitter, 2011).

Twitter is more than a platform to disseminate information; it also provides opportunities to listen to conversations and gather information in real-time. Twitter's search engine (<http://search.twitter.com>) is a great tool for monitoring conversations on any given topic on Twitter – it is generally limited to the past two weeks of public tweets of all the accounts they have subscribed to. These short, easy to read, public messages make Twitter a powerful, real-time way of communicating (Twitter, 2011). These messages can be submitted by a variety of means, including text messages, mobile websites, or the website hosting the micro-blogs.

Twitter events:

- **Twitter Chat:** Scheduled events allowing organizations or programs to communicate with their followers. Chats include free flowing discussions, question and answer sessions and the dissemination of information to a large audience through sharing or re-tweeting of content.

- **Twitter view:** This scheduled event is a type of interview in which the interviewer and the interviewee are limited to short-form responses of 140 characters per message.

- **Twitter Town Hall:** A scheduled forum that allows followers to submit questions on a specific topic. Responses can be delivered through live tweets, video or live stream.

- **Live Tweeting:** Tweeting live from an event to highlight key points of a presentation, audience engagement and comments, and play by play moments. Live tweeting is often utilized for conferences to allow followers not attending to follow the events. Looking at the different varieties of twitter events available it becomes obvious the incredible opportunities this social media can offer for social mobilization.

Blogs, or web logs, are regularly updated online journals that almost anyone with an internet connection can use. Some blogs target a small audience, while others boast a readership comparable to national newspapers. They may have only one author or a team of regular authors, but most blogs share a similar format in that the entries are posted in a reverse chronological order and may allow readers to comment on posts (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010j). Blogs often focus on a specific topic or type of topic. A blog can be used to discuss a topic that may be too complex for other channels and to give your topic or program a more personal and engaging presence than a website allows. Different civil society groups usually can develop messages on HIV and AIDS for instance or child abuse and other such development issues.

Facebook

The most popular social networking site is Facebook, which has over 750 million users. Social networking sites provide an immediate and personal way to deliver programme, products and information. The average user creates 90 pieces of content every month, and 50% of active users log on to the site on any given day (Facebook, 2011). Other popular sites include LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube and Foursquare. There are also several niche social networking sites that target audiences or address different topics. In Nigeria, available data indicate that Facebook is the most popular network site. The implication is that it will offer tremendous opportunity for social mobilization.

Social networking sites are online communities where people can interact with friends, family, coworkers, acquaintances, and others with similar interests. Most social networking sites provide multiple ways for their users to interact such as chat, email, video, voice chat, file-sharing, blogging, and discussion groups. This ability to provide multiple platforms to engage the audience makes social networking sites a great means for social mobilization. The table below shows a listing of the various social media tools and the resources needed to use them for social mobilization engagement.

Table 1: Social media tools and resources needed to implement social development activities

Social Media Tools	Cost Implication					
	Time/Staff Requirement			Cost		
	Low	Moderate	High	Low	Moderate	High
Buttons/Badges	*			*		
Content Syndication		*		*		
RSS Feeds	*			*		
Image Sharing	*			*		
Podcasting Posting	*			*		
Online video Sharing	*			*		
Widgets	*			*		
eCards	*			*		
Micro Blogs		*		*		
Podcast Creation		*			*	
Online Video Production		*			*	
Blogs		*			*	
Mobile Technology/Texting		*				*
Virtual Worlds		*				*
Social Networks			*	*		

❖ Adapted from Health Communicators Social Media Tool, 2011

VI. Social Mobilization in Nigeria in Perspective

In the past decades, great success have been achieved globally in development programmes in the areas of health , eradicating illiteracy; empowering the weak and the underprivileged etc. One of the key elements responsible for these successes have been the concept of social mobilization- the process of bringing together all feasible and practical inter-sectoral social allies to raise people’s awareness of and demand for a particular development programme, to assist in the delivery of resources and services and to strengthen community participation for sustainability and self-reliance (Prasad, 2003). In Nigeria, such success stories were also evident in areas such as the National Child Immunization, control of Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) and Control of Diarrheal Disease programmes, and the successful eradication of the Ebola Virus. Another area where social mobilization effort has been significant is in the area of political mobilization of the citizenry to participate in the political process. All these demonstrate effective mobilization of the various elements of society as the central element for achieving common developmental goals in the society. Social mobilization could therefore be seen as the primary step of any development effort and crucial to the success of such programmes. The various strategies of realizing an effective social mobilization effort deserves serious consideration in view of the significance of social mobilization in realizing the goals of development programmes. Let’s take the realization of the MDGs goals as an example. That is why it becomes pertinent to explore all the possible dimensions of achieving effective social mobilization especially for countries such as Nigeria with its many developmental programmes. At the heart of this is communication in all its forms.

Communication has been recognized as the most important tool of social mobilization but to be effective, the various communication channels used for mobilization must be participatory. However, the effectiveness of using traditional communication channels to mobilize the different segments of the Nigerian publics to ensure their participation in developmental programmes and in adoption of positive behavioural change have always been a case of worry for the Nigerian development continuum. A ride down history lane will reveal that over the years, Nigerian government has tried several means to mobilize the public into adopting positive actions for development. Development in this context is defined as improvement in human welfare,

quality of life and social well being. Some of these developmental programmes that were previously not too successful in Nigeria include: the Jaji Declaration, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, National Orientation Movement, Reconstruction, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation programmes of Nigeria's post-civil war. Other examples of mass mobilization of Nigerians for specific social programmes include the currency change-over (1971), National Census (1973), and Ethical Revolution and War against Indiscipline. There is also the recent mobilization attempt to rebrand Nigeria and the campaign of war against corruption.

Among these efforts, what has clearly become obvious is the inability of the campaigns to successfully motivate the public into becoming active participants in the development and the networking of these mobilization attempts. Moreover, the channels used to reach the target audience were not such that the audience could use at will and also contribute in the development of the content. In fact, audience participation in such channels was almost near absent, no wonder its inability to carry the public along and elicit the expected response. Although many scholars argued that the previous programmes were fundamentally flawed because each addressed just one part of a multifaceted problem. However, other possible reason for the failure could also be in the area of the nature of the mobilization strategies adopted.

In the light of these challenges, this paper argues that given the plethora of advantages inherent in social media it could also be deployed strategically as a tool for social mobilization especially in achieving the communication objectives of the MDG goals, vision 2020 of the federal government, political mobilization and other development programmes. This assumption is supported by the view that, the internet has led to new patterns of interaction between people and organization, creating new forms of social involvement and relationships. This in turn creates new technology enabled public sphere of communication which facilitates social discourses unconstrained by geography, time and political interest (Mason and Hacaer, 2003). As Castells (2007) maintains, the Internet can constitute an alternative to classic forms of civic engagement. Ester and Vinken (2003, p.669) suggest that the Internet, is regarded as the new space, the "alternative public sphere where, for instance, politics and the people can meet again and finally start communicating". Although participation in social movement has traditionally been the domain of professional activists, technology has provided an opportunity for ordinary non-activist people to get involved in issues of social importance. It is this involvement of the ordinary citizen in issues of social importance that defines the new era of social mobilization, which can successfully ensure not only the sustainability of such campaigns but its success.

VII. Potentials of Social Media for Social Mobilization and Development

The Internet is one of the most important developments in communication technology and the advantages that it offers to citizens are innumerable. Traditional mobilization effort depends on physical interaction of the public's, in contrast, mobilization with the use of social media no longer depend on direct physical interaction of the public often constrained by such factors as time, finance, space and bureaucracy. Rather, it offers the flexibility of the virtual space which grants anonymity to participants to freely engage in providing the ideas that will help motivate change and development. Perhaps, more importantly social media can empower those who have the skills and ability to use new technologies by helping them as Bryant (2006) notes to break away from traditional command and control models. The following are some of the other numerous potentials of social media for social mobilization:

- Social media breaks the monopoly of communication that was previously confined to traditional elites, such as the government, church or political parties. It empowers each individual to become a political broadcaster and voice his/her opinions on an equal footing with any other user. It fosters pluralism because in cyberspace there are no set answers in the form of dominant ideologies. Communication is characterized by informality, which may in turn encourage further freedom of expression. Moreover, social media creates an area that is difficult for the government or other entities to control - an important advantage in states where media are centrally controlled.
- Another strength of the social media lies in its accessibility. The users can access the network in their own time and be in instant contact with whoever is connected. The Internet can potentially connect the sender to an unlimited number of users. It enables the creation of new networks such as chat rooms, web forums and mailing lists. It helps not only challenge the official ideologies but also furthers dialogue and shapes opinions. The Development of democratic values can occur through 'processes of diffusion and through practice at democratic discussion' (Gibson, 2002, p. 189).
- Given these advantages, the social media is a powerful tool that can change the face of societies in Nigeria. A number of scholars have emphasized that social media has increasingly resulted in a global network of interactive communication which allows users to identify and publicize target issues at a faster pace. Social media encourages social networking which primarily is used as a means of personal communication, social interaction, group linkages and promotion of ideas.
- Social media could mark a turning point in the trend by empowering common citizens. It can potentially have an enormous impact on young generations. However, technology is not sufficient in itself to provide

for social activism. Political reforms undertaken in recent years have also an impact on development of civil society.

- Social media also offers the advantage of allowing individual members the possibility of documenting and possessing facts and information concerning relevant issues and development which traditionally are reserved for those in authority. In this sense, social media and social networking can level the playing field by allowing a larger segment of the population to access information and influence outcomes.

VIII. Using Social Media for Social Mobilization

Undoubtedly, social media just like the traditional media tools, can raise awareness, increase a user's knowledge of an issue, change attitudes and prompt behaviour change in dynamic, personalized and participatory ways. However, like traditional communication, social media alone may not be able to meet all of the communication goals of any mobilization campaign and address all of the target audiences' needs. However, the following points can enhance the effectiveness of social media tools in mobilization campaign:

1. Define Target Audience

In any communication campaign the first task is a clear definition of the segment of the population being targeted. To do this effectively, there is need to describe the person(s) to reach with the communication; there is need to be as specific as possible, more than one audience may be listed, primary and secondary influencers may be included where necessary. Examples of definition of target audience include: Mothers of children younger than two years old living in Onitsha, Anambra State, and Local Government workers in Enugu State.

2. Determine Objective

The next logical and perhaps most important step is a clear concise definition of the campaign goal. This is stated in terms of what is to be achieved through the social media outreach and communication? This could include something the target audience is expected to do as a direct result of experiencing the communication. Objectives may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Provide information
- Highlight a campaign
- Encourage a health behaviour
- Reinforce health messages
- Encourage interaction
- Obtain feedback/exchange ideas
- Collaborate with partners

Examples: Increase awareness of immunization campaign in South East Nigeria, Increase awareness of hand washing practices among nursing mothers.

Having done that there is also need to restate the objectives in SMART terms:

- **Specific** – state in concrete, detailed and well-defined terms – What exactly the campaign is going to do and for whom?
- **Measurable** – means it should be quantifiable and that the source of measurement has been identified.
- **Attainable/Achievable** – can the objective be achieved in the proposed time frame with the resources available?
- **Relevant/Realistic** – is the objective directly related to the overarching communication goal from your communication plan?
- **Time-bound** – have deadlines been set? (Example: By October 2015 (time-bound), there will be a 75% increase (measurable) in recognition of the roll back malaria campaign (specific), as measured through survey, by moms of children under two in South-East Nigeria (specific).

3. Message Development

The next crucial step is the development of the key messages based on the target audience and identified objectives. (Example: Developing message content for mothers of young children to encourage late season immunization vaccination, 'It is not too late to immunize your child').

4. Identify Social Media Tools

Determine what tools will effectively reach your target audience. Match the needs of the target audience with the tools that best support the objectives and resources. (Example: Because Facebook has a large population of young people, it is free, and requires minimal technical expertise, it may be a good tool for a youth-centered programme while only requiring a small amount of funding for social media activities.) Mobile

technologies are also another popular social media tools that are prevalent among many Nigerians today which are relatively cheap and can be used for programmes targeting different groups of the population.

5. Define Activities

Based on all of the elements above, list the specific activities that will be undertaken to reach the communication goals and objectives. (Example: Develop and promote Facebook fan page for diabetes education programme). Other steps necessary to ensure effectiveness of using social media tools for the campaign include: Identification of key partners and their roles and responsibilities, and the definition of the various techniques to be used for evaluation.

IX. Challenges

There are a number of challenges and limitations that inhibit the use of social media to its full potentials in Nigeria as a tool for social mobilization. Some of these constraints include the following:

The cost of some of these technologies and the attendant expensive service can prove prohibitive for the Nigerian citizen whose earning has been estimated to be below one dollar per day. Technologies that provide easy access to social media and networking sites can be beyond the means of majority of Nigerian citizens.

The skills required to operate social media can be overwhelming and complex therefore limiting the number of people that will have access to social media networking sites.

Thirdly, in Nigeria the advancement of high speed internet connectivity is limited to major urban cities therefore those in the rural areas have difficulties in having broadband access. As a consequence, social networking tools may be more accessible or more appropriate application in urban and literate context.

It would seem that for many Nigerians, especially people in the rural area this type of computerized interaction would feel not only odd but perhaps also highly undesirable, especially when considering the highly sophisticated nature of the technology.

Finally the social media provision of easy access to the development of ideas and content by every user who have access represents its greatest drawback. There is no denying that social media represent an important tool for civil society and government to effectively mobilize the public and communicate their message. As noted above, however, the effectiveness of the tool depends on its user, and an overreliance can become a serious detriment.

X. Conclusion

The reality of a computer mediated age demands a shift in the ways of dealing with the society, and the increasing popularity of social media, one of many outgrowths of the Internet clearly demonstrates the reality of this new development. The rapid growth of social media activities that has been observed over the last two to three years is indicative of its entry into mainstream culture and its integration into the daily lives of many people, even within developing societies such as Nigeria. Social media tools have demonstrated the capacity to allow for the participation of the public in the social mobilization effort in ways that were not possible with other means of communication. It lowers the costs of sensitization, participation, organization, recruitment and training of different groups for mobilization. But like any tool, social media have inherent weaknesses and strengths, and their effectiveness depends on how effectively civil society, government and the public use them and how accessible they are to people who know how to use them. In Nigeria, access and use of these tools are clearly limited to urban areas and the elites, with majority of the users being young male adults. This demonstrates a serious constraint in its effectiveness in reaching the large sector of Nigerians in the rural areas who are the target of most development effort. Other technologies like short-wave radio, and other traditional channels of communication which can also be used to communicate and mobilize, have been available to civil society groups and governments for a long time, unfortunately, the success rate in the use of these traditional modes were not very encouraging. Social media tools appear to be the latest development in building civic engagement and sensitization of the public by helping to raise and debate local issues transparently and provide a channel and encouragement for people to get involved in civic and community issues. That is why at this critical period, in Nigeria, when government has set goals and targets to achieve in its development agenda, social media tools become a necessary asset to the effective realization of these set of development goals.

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