

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE N-POWER SCHEME AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS, A STUDY OF BENEFICIARIES IN ENUGU STATE**

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### **Abstract**

*Social media has become a catalyst for initiating discussions, disseminating information, and enhancing engagement among various demographics worldwide, particularly amongst the youth. This study examines the dynamics of social media in facilitating engagement among beneficiaries of the N-Power scheme, a federal government initiative aimed at tackling unemployment among Nigerian youths. The objective of the study was to analyse the role of social media in the dissemination of programme information, its influence on participants' engagement, as well as the challenges associated with social media usage. The study was anchored on Uses and Gratifications Theory which explains how individuals use media to satisfy specific needs, such as information, interaction, and engagement. The study used a survey research design, with a population of 16,546 and a sample size of 376. Questionnaires were employed for data collection, and descriptive statistical research tool such as frequency, table and percentage were used to analyze the data. The findings showed that social media is a crucial channel for information sharing, networking, and community building among N-Power beneficiaries. However, limited or poor internet access, cost of data, and delayed/lack of feedback from the N-Power officials posed significant challenges to effective social media engagement.*

**Keywords: Social Media, N-Power Scheme, Youth Engagement, Development Programs.**

### **Introduction**

The N-Power scheme, under the National Social Investments Programme of the Nigerian Federal Government launched in 2016, to address the issue of unemployment among the youth, was geared towards graduates' job creation; poverty alleviation, and empowerment initiatives through volunteering services. This initiative aims to empower young Nigerians through skill development and employment opportunities, particularly in sectors such as education, health, and agriculture. The programme is available for graduate and non-graduates, designed to inculcate in Nigerian youths the learn-work entrepreneurship culture between the ages of 18-35 years (FGN 2018). The graduate's category is divided into three areas: the N-Teach, N-Health and N-Agro. While the non-graduates' category; N-Build, N-Tech and N-Creative Scheme, is geared towards equipping its beneficiaries with necessary and meaningful skills to be self-employed (Onehi, 2023). As an employability enhancement

programme, N-power is designed to help young Nigerians to improve their income status, acquire and develop life-long skills to become solution providers in their employability and entrepreneurial skills, improve public service delivery in key focus areas and to derive social, economic and financial inclusion (Akpan, Essien & Essien, 2015).

Nigeria still remains one of the poorest countries in the world. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) released the 2019 Poverty and inequality report in Nigeria, which highlights that 40% of the total population, or almost 83 million Nigerians, live below the country's poverty line. Recently the World Bank reported that Nigeria's poverty rate has risen to approximately 46%, equating to about 104 million individuals living below the national poverty line (Punch 2024). Nigeria's poverty profile is bleak for a country endowed with humongous human and natural resources. Evidence has shown the level of abject poverty in Nigeria following the collapse of crude oil prices between 2014 and 2016. In the wake of 2016, the economy was thrown into its first recession, as the economy shrank by 1.6%. Hence, poverty stands at 33.1% in Africa's largest economy. In 2018, the rate of population growth was higher than economic growth rate which culminated into a slow rise in poverty. Likewise, World Bank (2018) reported that almost half of the Nigerian population lives below the global poverty line of \$1.90 per day with attending unemployment rate at 23.1%. The N-Power Knowledge programme is a 'Training to Jobs' initiative, essentially ensuring that participants can get engaged in the marketplace in an outsourcing capacity, as freelancers, as employees and as entrepreneurs (Federal Ministry of Youth Development, 2009). Indeed, the programme is carefully designed in such a manner that if well implemented, can help in further addressing the challenges of empowerment and subsequently, reduce poverty among the youths (Ojiakor & Glory, 2024).

In today's hyper-connected world, social media has emerged as an indispensable platform for individuals and organization to connect, communicate, and engage with their audiences. In Nigeria, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter – now X, have become essentials tools for young people to connect with others, share information, and participate in online communities (Adeyemi & Oyebamiji, 2018). Effective communication and engagement among beneficiaries are crucial for the success of the programme. Hence, social media platforms offer a powerful tool for facilitating these interactions, enabling information sharing, peer-to-peer learning, and community building. Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for influencing public opinion. It plays an increasingly pivotal role in communicating programme updates, engaging participants, and facilitating feedback mechanisms. Social media usage is highly prevalent among young people and has changed the order of interactions between persons by providing leverage for both lateral and horizontal communication capabilities (Umuze & Edih, 2022). This study examines the role of social media in enhancing beneficiary engagement within the N-Power Scheme. It explores the effectiveness of social media in improving participation, and the possible drawbacks in social media usage among beneficiaries.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The widespread adoption of social media among Nigerian youths presents a unique opportunity for the N-Power scheme to leverage these platforms for engagement, information

sharing and community building. However, despite the potential benefits, little research has been done on how N-Power beneficiaries utilize social media for meaningful interaction. This study seeks to investigate the role of social media in facilitating engagement and participation among N-Power beneficiaries in Enugu State.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the role of social media in the dissemination of programme information?
2. How did social media influence participants' engagement in the N-Power scheme?
3. What are the challenges associated with social media usage among beneficiaries in Enugu State?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Social Media and Communication**

Social media has revolutionized the communication landscape, influencing how individuals, organizations, and communities communicate, interact, and share information. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (now X), Instagram, and LinkedIn have not only reshaped personal communication but also professional, societal, and cultural exchanges, enabling connection with diverse audiences.

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), defined social media as online platforms that enable users to create, share, and interact with content, information, or other users in a virtual environment. Social media platforms include blogs, microblogs, social networking sites, photo and video sharing sites, and virtual worlds. Social media has facilitated the creation and dissemination of user-generated content, which has democratized communication and enable divers voices to be heard. Early platforms such as Myspace and Friendster paved the way for modern platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, which integrate multimedia, real-time messaging, and algorithmic personalization to enhance communication (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The growth of mobile technology and internet penetration has also amplified the reach and accessibility of social media, making it an integral part of daily communication worldwide (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Organizations leverage social media platforms, and other digital space like websites, for internal and external communication, marketing, and public relations. Platforms like LinkedIn and Twitter enable organizations to communicate effectively with their stakeholders, including customers, employees, and investors. It has also facilitated the creation and dissemination of organizational messages, which can enhance reputation, build brand awareness, and drive business results (Kelleher, 2009), and also allow for engagements from the audience. Engagement on social media refers to the interaction between users and digital content, encompassing likes, shares, comments, subscriptions, and participation in online discussions. Social media platforms have an important role in encouraging civic involvement and social movements. Social media has been a driving force behind worldwide movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #EndSARS, giving a platform to marginalised voices (Tufekci, 2017).

### **N-Power Scheme: An Overview**

Employment creation or employment generation is a natural process of social development. It often refers to the government policies, intended to reduce the unemployment rate, by increasing the number of jobs in the economy. Employment creation for full employment of labour was recognized early in Nigeria by policy makers as an important process of aligning economic growth with the developmental needs of the country (Okafor, 2016). Different administrations and regimes in Nigeria have laboured to develop specific plans, programs, and policies, all intended to solve the pressing socio-economic problems of poverty through creating employment opportunities as unemployment has contributed to Nigeria's struggle with poverty (Okogba, 2017). Youths are particularly affected by unemployment, which appears to be constantly rising in Nigeria.

The Federal Government of Nigeria under the administration of Muhammadu Buhari implemented the N-Power programme to address the issues of poverty, unemployment and lack of empowerment among the Nigerian youths. N-Power programme was launched on June 8, 2016, with the goal of reducing youth unemployment and empowerment, poverty reduction and fostering social development (Okogba, 2017). The program was created for the benefit of graduates and non-graduates who are between the ages of 18 and 35 years and are unemployed. The objective of this funded, two-year initiative was to involve beneficiaries in development of their home state (Premium Times, 2016). The N-Power programme has four major goals:

- To intervene and directly improve the livelihood of a critical mass of young unemployed Nigerians.
- To develop a qualitative system for the transfer of employability, entrepreneurial and technical skills.
- To create an ecosystem of solutions for ailing public services and government diversification policies.
- To develop and enhance Nigeria's knowledge economy (Nnaeto et al., 2023).

The N-Programme is divided into two categories:

#### 1. Graduate Category (N-Power Volunteer Corps)

The N-Power Volunteer Corps is the post-tertiary engagement initiative. It is a paid volunteering programme of two-year duration. The graduates undertake their primary tasks in identified public services within their proximate communities. All N-Power Volunteers are entitled to computing devices that contains information necessary for their specific engagement, as well as information for their continuous training and development. It has four cardinal areas of youth empowerment- N-Power Teaching, N-Power Agriculture, N-Power Health and N-Power Taxation (N-Power Information Guide 2017).

#### 2. Non-Graduate Category (N-Power Knowledge and N-Power Build).

The non-graduate category is composed of N-Power knowledge and N-Power building. The N-Power knowledge is 'Training to Jobs' initiative, essentially ensuring that participants can get engaged in the marketplace in an outsourcing capacity, as freelancers, as employees and as entrepreneurs in hardware and software ICT capacity building. The N-Power Build is training and certification (Skills to Job) programme that will engage and train young

unemployed Nigerians in order to build a new crop of skilled and highly competent workforce of technicians, artisans and service professionals (N-Power Information Guide (2017).

The N-Power programme became a sure source of job and entrepreneurial skills for qualified young people. Beneficiaries were paid regularly and at some point, the number of beneficiaries increased geometrically and government divided the programme into two streams running within one fiscal year. However, not too long into the programme, certain negative trends began to surface which ultimately led to intractable corruption in the N-Power system. As a result, the Federal Government announced, particularly to the N-Power beneficiaries its resolve to suspend the programme, and institution of financial auditing of the agency (Vanguard, 2023; Punch, 2023).

### **Youth Engagement**

As digital technology, globalization, and sociopolitical dynamics evolve, the nature of youth engagement has transformed. Youth engagement is crucial for promoting social change, economic growth, and democratic participation. It is the active participation of young people in activities, programmes, or initiatives that influence their communities, personal development, and broader societal outcomes (Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, 2003). It encompasses both individual and collective actions aimed at fostering positive change. Engaging youths is important for several reasons:

- **Civic Development:** Engaged youth contribute to democratic processes and community development.
- **Skill Building:** Participation in activities enhances critical thinking, leadership, and social skills
- **Social Inclusion:** Engagement fosters a sense of belonging and marginalization among youth.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted the Uses and Gratification Theory. The theory posits that audiences are not passive recipients of media messages but are active participants who select media based on their personal goals, desires, and expectations (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). The theory acknowledges that individuals have enormous power over their decision on what they want in a media, as opposed to the media's influence on them. The Uses and Gratification Theory is classified into some needs such as affective, cognitive, personal, integrative, and tension-free needs (Bracken & Lombard, 2001).

Affective needs address emotional satisfaction derived from media, exemplified by intense reactions to scenes in movies or soap operas or football match. Cognitive needs involve the pursuit of intellectual and academic knowledge, met through various media channels such as news broadcast, and internet searches. Personal integrative needs focus on self-esteem, with individuals using media to reinforce their status and credibility, often influenced by advertisements promoting lifestyle changes. Social integrative needs manifest in the use of social networking sites to fulfil the desire for interaction with family, friends, and society. Lastly, tension-free needs prompt individuals to turn to media as a means of escapism and

stress relief, finding relaxation in television, radio, or internet activities (Moses, 2023). The Uses and Gratification Theory offers a framework for understanding youth engagement with digital media, particularly social media platforms. By examining the motivations behind media use and the gratifications obtained, this framework highlights the dynamic relationship between users, platforms, and content.

### **Empirical Review**

Social media has significantly influenced youth engagement in Nigeria, affecting areas such as political participation, entrepreneurship, and social transformation. A study on “Youth participation in social media and political attitudes in Nigeria” by Dagona and Abubakar (2015) explores the relationship between social media usage and political attitudes among Nigerian youths. The study found that active engagement on social media platforms like Facebook is positively correlated with increased political awareness and participation among young Nigerians.

In Nigeria where unemployment rates are high, especially among young people, social media entrepreneurship offers a viable alternative. A study on “Social media entrepreneurship and youth unemployment reduction in Nigeria” by (Nwankwor et al., 2024) examines how social media entrepreneurship can reduce youth unemployment in Nigeria. The research highlights the impact of social media content creation and digital marketing on job creation, revealing that many Nigerian youths are leveraging platforms like Instagram and YouTube to create employment opportunities for themselves and other.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the survey research design. The population of the study consisted the total number of N-Power beneficiaries in Enugu state which is 16,546 according to (ref). from this population, a sample size of 376 was derived using the Australian calculator to determine the size. Snowball sampling technique was employed to identify the beneficiaries of the Npower programme in Enugu state by leveraging personal networks. Questionnaires were employed for data collection, while data analysis was carried out using frequency table and simple percentages.

### **Data Analysis**

**Table 1: Responses on the source that provided the most information about the N-Power scheme**

<b>Platform</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Radio	14	3.6%
Television	12	3.1%
Newspapers	9	2.4%
Social media	335	89.2%
Family and Friends	6	1.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table above analyses responses on the source that provided the most information about the N-Power scheme. Majority of the respondents (89.2%) selected social media as the most

important information source while radio (3.6%), television (3.1%), newspapers (2.4%) and family and friends (1.7%) were seen as less important. This implies that social media played a significant role in disseminating information on the N-Power.

**Table 2: Respondents on whether there were posts on social media that influenced them to apply for or participate in the N-Power scheme**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	338	89.9%
No	17	4.5%
Unsure	21	5.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 measures responses on whether social media posts influenced respondents to apply for or participate in the N-Power scheme. Majority of the respondents (89.9%) said 'Yes' while a few (4.5%) said 'No'. a handful of them were unsure. This indicates social media posts influenced the respondents to engage in the N-Power programme.

**Table 3: Extent to which social media contributed to respondents' decision to engage in the N-Power programme.**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very High Extent	205	54.5%
High Extent	141	37.6%
Low Extent	20	5.3%
Very Low Extent	10	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3 analyses the extent to which social media contributed to respondents' decision to engage in the N-Power programme. More than half of the respondents (54.5%) said it was to a very high extent while over a third of the respondents (37.6%) said it was to a high extent. However, only a few selected 'low extent' (5.3%) and 'very low extent' (2.6%) respectively. This shows that social media significantly influenced the respondents to participate in the N-Power programme.

**Table 4: Challenges faced by respondents in using social media to access the N-Power scheme**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poor internet access	215	57.2%
Cost of Data	141	37.5%
Delayed/lack of feedback	20	5.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table above provides analyses on the challenges faced by respondents in using social media to access the N-Power scheme. The data shows that more than half of the respondents (57.2%) are faced with the challenge of poor internet access, while about one-third of the

respondents (37.5%) are concerned with the cost of data. A few, however (5.3%), face the challenge of delayed response or lack of feedback from the N-Power officials. This indicates that the major challenges faced by the respondents are poor internet access and high cost of data.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings showed that Social media (89.2%), Radio (3.6%), Television (3.1%), Newspapers (2.4%), and Family & Friends (1.7%) are the most commonly used platforms by beneficiaries for accessing N-Power related updates, such as job opportunities and training information. This is consistent with trends showing that these platforms are popular for disseminating information and fostering community interaction in Nigeria. This demonstrates the role of social media in bridging the gap between the government and youth populations, offering real-time updates and increasing awareness of program activities. Goodman et al., (2011) and Diesing (2013) supported the ideas that social media stimulate participation in societal issues, general education, and provide forum for public debates for the young minds.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that 89.9% of the respondents stated that there were posts on social media that influenced their applying/participating in the N-Power scheme and 54.5% respondents confirmed that their decision to participate in the N-Power was influenced by social media posts to a very high extent. Hence social media has enhanced the reach of the N-Power scheme by connecting beneficiaries across urban and rural areas. Information such as job opportunities, training schedules, and eligibility requirements is disseminated in real-time, ensuring that beneficiaries are kept up-to-date. Adekunle & Tonnie (2023) highlighted that social media is an effective public relations tools for facilitating information dissemination.

Social media usage is not without its unique challenges. The finding shows that there are several challenges, including limited or poor internet access, stated by 57.2% of respondents, high cost of data by 37.5% and delayed or lack of feedback from the N-Power officials stated by 5.3%. Beneficiaries particularly in rural areas, face connectivity challenge, delayed response and lack of feedback to their inquiries on social media platforms from N-Power officials. Privacy of information is also a concern as beneficiaries may fall victim of scams if fraudulent accounts impersonate official N-Power pages.

### **Conclusion**

Social media plays a critical role on the N-Power scheme, from improving awareness and engagement to empowering youths and fostering transparency. The motivation for social media engagement includes staying informed about the scheme, connecting with fellow beneficiaries, and accessing resources and opportunities. Furthermore, social media influences awareness, engagement, and participation in the N-Power scheme across both urban and rural areas. Creating opportunities for community building, where beneficiaries can experience, provide peer support, and build networks. While the role of social media is largely positive, addressing the identified challenges will enhance the effectiveness of social media as a tool for youth development and participation in government programs.



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