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SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE IN SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF DELTA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This article examined the relationship between social media use and citizen participation in governance in five selected Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria: Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Oshimili North, Oshimili South and Ika South. It considers the contribution of social media to access to public information and governance-related engagement, the platforms most frequently identified by respondents, and the frequency of their use. The study is framed by the Technology Acceptance Model and Agenda-Setting Theory, which explain, respectively, the adoption of digital platforms and the influence of mediated communication on the salience of public issues. A survey design is adopted, with a stated population of 150 and a Yamane-derived sample of 109. The instrument is the Social Media and Governance Questionnaire, and the supplied analysis reports descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and analysis of variance. The outputs suggest favourable perceptions of social media, particularly WhatsApp and Facebook, and a positive association between platform use and governance-related participation. Th study amogst others recommends that, local government authorities should maintain verified official social-media channels and publish clear information about programmes, budgets, public notices, meetings and service responsibilities. And also authorities should establish procedures for recording, acknowledging, referring and responding to questions and complaints received online, with designated officers and reasonable response timelines

KEYWORDS: social media; citizen participation; local government; governance; Delta State.

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing influence of digital technology has significantly transformed communication between governments and citizens, creating new opportunities for public participation, information dissemination and democratic accountability. The emergence of social media platforms has particularly changed the traditional relationship between public institutions and the people they govern by providing interactive channels through which citizens can access government information, express opinions, communicate grievances and engage in discussions concerning public policies and community development. Unlike conventional communication channels, which often operate through a predominantly one-way flow of information, social media facilitates immediate interaction between individuals and institutions. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) observe that social media enables the creation and exchange of user-generated content, thereby transforming the nature of communication and social interaction. Similarly, Kietzmann et al. (2011) identify conversations, sharing, relationships and groups as important functional dimensions of social media. These characteristics have implications for governance because they provide opportunities for citizens to move beyond passive recipients of government information to become more active participants in public affairs.

Citizen participation constitutes an important dimension of democratic governance because it provides opportunities for individuals and organised groups to influence decisions affecting their welfare and collective development. Arnstein (1969) explains that participation involves different levels of citizen involvement and influence, ranging from limited access to information to more substantive forms of citizen power in decision-making. This distinction is important because the mere availability of communication channels does not necessarily translate into meaningful participation. Rather, effective participation requires opportunities for citizens to express their views, contribute to policy discussions, communicate their needs and receive feedback from public authorities. In contemporary governance, social media has increasingly become a potential instrument for facilitating these processes. Mergel (2013) argues that public institutions can employ social media to improve communication, disseminate information and strengthen interaction with citizens. Similarly, Bonsón, Royo and Ratkai (2015) demonstrate that local government social media platforms can encourage citizen engagement when they provide opportunities for interaction rather than merely publish official information. Thus, the relevance of social media to governance lies in its potential to strengthen transparency, responsiveness, public awareness and citizen involvement in government activities.

At the local government level, the importance of citizen participation is particularly significant because local authorities are responsible for addressing many immediate needs of communities, including environmental sanitation, primary healthcare, local infrastructure, markets, community development and other public services. Local governance requires continuous communication between public officials and residents because the effectiveness of government programmes often depends on the ability of authorities to understand community needs and respond to public concerns. Social media can facilitate this relationship by providing channels through which local governments communicate policies and programmes, announce public meetings, receive complaints and obtain citizens' opinions on issues affecting their communities. Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube and video-conferencing applications provide different opportunities for such interaction. Facebook supports public announcements and community discussions, WhatsApp facilitates group-based communication, Instagram and YouTube provide visual and audiovisual communication, while video-conferencing applications can support virtual meetings and consultations. However, the effectiveness of these platforms depends on their accessibility, frequency of use, the digital capabilities of citizens and the willingness of public institutions to respond to online contributions. Reddick, Chatfield and Ojo (2017) emphasise that social media communication in local government can remain largely one-directional when public institutions fail to translate citizens' online interactions into meaningful administrative engagement.

The relevance of examining social media use and citizen participation is particularly evident in the Nigerian governance environment, where the expansion of digital communication has created additional opportunities for citizens to interact with public institutions. Nevertheless, the availability of social media does not automatically eliminate existing barriers to participation. Unequal access to smartphones, internet affordability, inadequate digital literacy, unreliable electricity and network limitations can restrict the ability of some citizens to participate effectively in online governance activities. Van Dijk (2020) explains that the digital divide involves not only differences in access to technology but also inequalities in the skills and resources required to benefit from digital opportunities. The United Nations (2024) similarly emphasises that inclusive digital transformation requires accessible technological infrastructure and institutional arrangements that connect digital participation with public decision-making. Furthermore, misinformation, inadequate institutional responsiveness and limited government engagement can reduce public confidence in online communication. Consequently, the relationship between social media and citizen participation needs to be

examined beyond the assumption that increased digital communication automatically produces better governance. It is necessary to establish whether citizens actually use these platforms to obtain government information, communicate their concerns and participate in discussions concerning public affairs.

Against this background, the present study examines social media use and citizen participation in governance in five selected local government areas of Delta State: Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Oshimili North, Oshimili South and Ika South. The selection of these local government areas provides a geographical basis for examining the relationship between digital communication and citizen participation across different local communities within the state. The study is particularly relevant because local government remains an important level of administration through which citizens encounter public policies, services and development initiatives. Examining the selected areas provides an opportunity to understand how residents perceive the contribution of social media to governance and the extent to which they use available platforms to engage with public affairs. The study is limited thematically to social media use and citizen participation in governance, with particular attention to the perceived contribution of social media, the platforms used by respondents and the frequency of their use. This focus is intended to establish not only whether citizens have access to social media but also how frequently they engage with the platforms and the extent to which they consider them useful for participation in governance-related activities.

The study further adopts the individual respondent as its unit of analysis rather than treating the selected local government institutions as the primary units of investigation. This distinction is important because the research seeks to understand citizens' experiences, perceptions and patterns of social media use rather than evaluate the administrative performance of the local government councils themselves. The stated population of the study is 150 respondents, from which a sample of 109 respondents was derived using the Yamane formula at a 5% precision level. This provides the numerical basis for examining individual responses concerning social media use and participation in governance within the selected areas. By focusing on individual respondents, the study seeks to establish how residents experience social media as a channel for accessing information, communicating with public authorities and participating in governance-related discussions.

The significance of this investigation lies in its potential contribution to understanding the opportunities and limitations of digital communication for strengthening grassroots governance in Delta State. Although social media provides opportunities for expanding communication between government and citizens, its actual contribution to democratic

participation depends on whether residents can access and use the platforms and whether public authorities respond meaningfully to their contributions. The study therefore provides an empirical basis for examining the perceived contribution of social media to citizen participation, identifying the platforms commonly used by respondents and assessing the frequency of their engagement. Its findings may also provide useful insights for local government administrators, policymakers, civil society organisations and community development associations seeking to improve public communication and encourage greater citizen involvement in local governance. Ultimately, the study recognises social media not as an automatic solution to the challenges of democratic participation but as a potentially valuable communication instrument whose effectiveness depends on digital inclusion, responsible usage and institutional responsiveness.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing availability of social-media platforms, the extent to which their use strengthens citizen participation in local governance remains uncertain. Digital communication can make public information easier to circulate and can provide residents with channels for expressing opinions, reporting community problems and discussing government programmes. Yet the presence of online interaction does not necessarily result in responsive administration, transparent decision-making or greater citizen influence. Government accounts may function mainly as publicity channels, while comments and complaints may remain unanswered or may not be incorporated into administrative decisions. The gap between communication and consequential participation is therefore a significant governance concern. Research on local-government social-media activity has shown that audience size and online presence do not automatically translate into high levels of citizen engagement; the nature of content and the opportunities provided for interaction also matter (Bonsón et al., 2015). In addition, digital inequalities can exclude residents who cannot afford data, lack reliable connectivity or have limited access to appropriate devices.

A further problem concerns the distinction between general social-media use and use directed towards governance. Citizens may spend considerable time on social media for entertainment, social relationships, education or commercial purposes without engaging with public affairs. A study that treats all platform activity as civic participation risks overstating the democratic significance of digital communication. Meaningful assessment should distinguish exposure to government information from more active forms of engagement, such as asking questions, submitting complaints, joining public discussions and contributing to consultations. It should also examine whether government institutions respond to citizens and

whether online exchanges connect with formal decision-making processes. The supplied research instrument measures perceptions of the contribution of social media, platform-related use and frequency of engagement, but it does not directly establish whether online comments influence specific policy decisions or service outcomes. The study is therefore framed as an assessment of reported and perceived participation rather than a causal evaluation of government performance.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The general aim of the study is to examine social-media use and citizen participation in governance in selected Local Government Areas of Delta State. The specific objectives are to:

(i) Examine the relationship between social-media use and governance-related participation;

(ii) Identify the social-media platforms most commonly used for governance-related information and engagement;

(iii) Determine the frequency with which citizens use social-media platforms for governance-related activities.

1.3 Research Questions

The study is guided by three research questions:

(1) What relationship exists between social-media use and governance-related participation in the selected Local Government Areas of Delta State?

(2) Which of the platforms covered by the study, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube and Google Hangouts, are most commonly used for governance-related information and engagement?

(3) How frequently do citizens use social-media platforms for governance-related activities?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are stated for testing at the 0.05 level of significance:

$H0_1$: There is no significant relationship between social-media platform use and governance-related participation in the selected Local Government Areas of Delta State.

$H0_2$: There is no significant difference in respondents' ratings of the social-media platforms covered by the study.

$H0_3$: There is no significant difference in respondents' ratings of the frequency of social-media use for governance-related activities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Social Media

Social media refers to internet-based platforms and applications through which users create, share, exchange and respond to content within networked communities. Unlike one-way communication systems, social-media platforms allow users to participate in the circulation and interpretation of information. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) locate social media within the development of Web 2.0 and user-generated content, while Kietzmann et al. (2011) identify functional dimensions that include conversations, sharing, relationships, groups and reputation. These characteristics help explain why social media has become relevant to public communication. Facebook supports networked discussion and content sharing; WhatsApp facilitates direct and group messaging; YouTube enables the circulation of audiovisual information; Instagram emphasises visual content; and Google Hangouts, subsequently integrated into Google Meet, has supported online meetings and video communication. The platforms differ in design, audience, accessibility and interaction formats, so they should not be treated as interchangeable. Their usefulness for governance depends on the communication task, the digital skills of users and the availability of reliable access.

2.2 Citizen Participation and Governance

Governance concerns the processes through which public authority is exercised, collective decisions are made and public resources are managed. It involves relationships among public institutions, citizens, civil society and other actors who influence public affairs. Good governance is commonly associated with transparency, accountability, responsiveness, participation, effectiveness, equity and the rule of law. Citizen participation contributes to these principles by enabling residents to communicate needs, scrutinise public action and contribute knowledge drawn from their everyday experiences. Arnstein (1969) argues that participation varies according to the extent of power citizens possess in influencing decisions. This framework remains useful for digital governance because online consultation may range from one-way information provision to genuine citizen influence. Posting a public notice on Facebook is an information activity; inviting residents to comment is consultation; explaining how comments shaped a budget or project decision moves closer to consequential participation. Digital platforms can reduce some barriers of time and distance, but they do not remove inequalities in resources or political influence.

2.3 Social Media and Citizen Participation in Governance

Social media may strengthen participation by lowering the cost and time required to access public information, communicate with officials and connect with other residents. Citizens can

share information about local problems, circulate notices of public meetings, discuss development priorities and organise collective responses to service-delivery concerns. Public institutions can use the same platforms to explain programmes, publish service information, respond to questions and identify issues requiring administrative attention. Mergel (2013) describes public-sector social-media interactions as potentially supporting transparency, participation and collaboration, although the practical value depends on whether agencies move beyond broadcasting information. Evidence from local-government Facebook pages also suggests that the type of content and the interaction options provided can influence the level of citizen engagement (Bonsón et al., 2015). This implies that local authorities should not assess digital communication only by the number of followers or posts. They should also consider whether residents can ask questions, whether officials respond within reasonable periods, whether complaints are referred to the appropriate departments and whether outcomes are communicated.

2.4 Platforms and Their Governance Applications

Social media platforms have become important instruments of public communication, civic engagement and interaction between citizens and government institutions. Their governance value, however, depends not simply on their availability but also on their communication features, accessibility, patterns of use and the extent to which public institutions integrate them into administrative processes. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain that social media facilitates the creation and exchange of user-generated content, thereby transforming communication from a predominantly one-way process into a more interactive and participatory activity. Similarly, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) identify functional elements of social media, including identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. These functions provide a useful basis for understanding how different platforms can support public information dissemination, community mobilisation, consultation and feedback. In local government administration, these platforms can help public authorities communicate policies, announce development programmes, publicise community meetings, receive complaints and obtain citizens' views on matters affecting their localities. Mergel (2013) argues however, that public-sector social media use should be understood in terms of how government organisations employ interactive platforms to communicate with citizens, disseminate information and encourage engagement.

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Facebook is particularly relevant to local governance because it combines public pages, groups, comment sections, live broadcasts, event announcements and multimedia content within a single platform. These features enable local authorities to circulate information about public policies, sanitation exercises, development projects, budget consultations, community meetings and public notices. Citizens can also respond to government announcements, ask questions, report community problems and share information with other residents. Empirical evidence demonstrates that the effectiveness of Facebook for governance depends substantially on the nature of the content and the opportunities provided for interaction. Bonsón, Royo and Ratkai (2015), in their study of local government Facebook pages across 15 European Union countries, found that the type of media and content used by local authorities significantly influenced citizens' engagement. They further observed that allowing citizens to contribute posts could increase interaction, suggesting that government pages should not be restricted to official announcements. Similarly, Hofmann et al. (2013),

examining Facebook communication by major German cities, demonstrated that the frequency and nature of citizens' reactions provide useful indicators for assessing the effectiveness of government communication. Faber (2022) also found that Facebook generated comparatively high levels of citizen engagement among Dutch municipalities, although engagement differed across policy areas and platforms. These findings suggest that Facebook can support local governance when it provides opportunities for citizens to participate in discussions rather than merely receive official information. Nevertheless, the existence of a Facebook page does not automatically establish meaningful participation. Reddick, Chatfield and Ojo (2017) found in their local-government case study that Facebook interactions could remain largely one-directional when government institutions used the platform mainly to promote official messages without adequately responding to citizens' concerns.

WhatsApp provides a different form of governance communication because its principal strength lies in direct messaging, group communication and the rapid circulation of information among individuals with shared interests or geographical connections. In local communities, WhatsApp groups can facilitate communication among residents, community development associations, traditional leaders, youth organisations, market associations and local government representatives. The platform may be useful for distributing meeting notices, communicating public health information, reporting damaged infrastructure, sharing information about government programmes and coordinating community-based activities. Unlike public-facing social media pages, WhatsApp groups often operate through relatively familiar networks, which can encourage discussion among people who already share community or organisational relationships. This characteristic may make it useful for grassroots communication and the mobilisation of residents around local development issues. However, its group-based structure also presents limitations. Information circulated within private or semi-private groups may not be accessible to the wider public, and discussions can become fragmented across several groups without a central mechanism for documenting complaints or forwarding them to the appropriate government department. The possibility of circulating unverified information also makes responsible administration and information verification important. The broader literature on digital government suggests that social media becomes more valuable when citizen contributions are connected to institutional processes rather than remaining isolated online exchanges (Mergel, 2013; Reddick et al., 2017). Thus, WhatsApp can complement formal local-government communication systems, but it should not replace official complaint channels, public consultation procedures or

accessible administrative records. Its usefulness for citizen participation therefore depends on the existence of identifiable administrators, clear communication procedures and evidence that issues raised by residents receive appropriate attention.

YouTube and Instagram provide additional opportunities for visual communication and public education. YouTube enables local authorities and civic organisations to publish recorded public meetings, policy explanations, development updates, educational programmes and interviews with public officials. Its video-based format can help explain complex government policies and provide a record of public activities that citizens may access after the original event. It may also support civic education by presenting information in a format that is more accessible to individuals who prefer audiovisual communication. Instagram, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on photographs, short videos, visual storytelling and brief public messages. Local authorities may use it to communicate information about community projects, environmental sanitation, public health campaigns, cultural activities and other visible aspects of local development. Its visual format can make public information more attractive and easier to circulate, although the presentation of development activities through images does not necessarily provide citizens with sufficient information to assess project costs, implementation quality or administrative accountability. Faber (2022), in examining social media engagement across Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram, found that engagement patterns differed across platforms, indicating that local governments should consider the distinctive communication characteristics of each platform rather than assume that all social media channels produce identical outcomes. Alam et al. (2022), in their study of local-government Facebook pages in New Zealand, similarly observed that the provision of information did not necessarily translate into active citizen participation; more consultative forms of communication were required to encourage meaningful engagement. These findings are relevant to YouTube and Instagram because their visual and audiovisual capacities can strengthen public information dissemination, but their contribution to governance is greater when citizens can ask questions, make comments and receive responses. Consequently, local governments should combine visual communication with opportunities for public feedback and transparent reporting.

The questionnaire used for this study also identifies Google Hangouts as one of the platforms examined. Google Hangouts was associated with messaging and video-conferencing, functions that could support remote meetings, consultations, administrative discussions and interaction between public officials and community representatives. Its relevance to local governance lies in the possibility of reducing the logistical difficulties associated with

bringing participants together physically, particularly where meetings involve residents from different communities or officials working from different locations. However, Google Hangouts has been discontinued as a standalone service and its functions have largely been transferred to other Google communication products, particularly Google Meet. The reference to Google Hangouts in this study should therefore be understood as the platform designation used in the original questionnaire rather than an assertion that it remains a current standalone service. More generally, video-conferencing platforms can support participatory governance by enabling virtual town-hall meetings, stakeholder consultations, public briefings and discussions on community development priorities. Nevertheless, participation through video-conferencing may be restricted by internet quality, data costs, access to suitable devices and the digital skills required to join and participate in online meetings. The United Nations (2024) emphasises that digital government and electronic participation require accessible technological infrastructure and institutional arrangements that enable citizens to interact meaningfully with public authorities. Taken together, the literature suggests that Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram and video-conferencing applications offer complementary rather than interchangeable governance functions. Their contribution to citizen participation depends on whether local authorities use them to facilitate two-way communication, provide accessible public information and demonstrate responsiveness to citizens' contributions.

2.5 Constraints on Digital Participation

Although social media offers opportunities for expanding citizen participation in governance, its effectiveness is constrained by unequal access to digital infrastructure, the affordability of internet services and the capacity of citizens to use digital technologies meaningfully. These constraints are particularly important in developing countries, where the availability of mobile networks does not necessarily mean that all citizens can afford or effectively use internet-enabled devices. Digital inequality extends beyond the distinction between those who have internet access and those who do not; it also concerns differences in the quality, frequency and purpose of internet use. Van Dijk's (2020) analysis of the digital divide explains that inequalities in digital participation are associated with differences in access to devices, material resources, digital skills and the ability to derive benefits from technology. In Nigeria, these inequalities are reflected in the continuing differences in digital access associated with income, geographical location, gender and educational background. Odufuwa et al. (2025), drawing on nationally representative survey evidence in their report on Nigeria's digital environment, identify persistent inequalities in smartphone ownership,

affordability and digital skills. The report indicates that more than two-thirds of Nigerian adults did not own a smartphone, while rural and gender-related disparities continued to affect meaningful connectivity. The World Bank Group (2023) similarly identifies infrastructure limitations, affordability constraints and digital literacy gaps as important barriers to the inclusive development of Nigeria's digital economy. These conditions have implications for local governance because citizens who lack suitable devices, reliable connectivity or the financial resources to purchase data may be unable to follow government announcements, participate in online consultations or communicate their concerns through social media. Consequently, the use of social media as a channel of citizen participation may unintentionally privilege residents who are economically better positioned and digitally connected, while excluding poorer households and underserved communities.

The reliability of electricity supply and the quality of telecommunications infrastructure constitute additional constraints on digital participation. Social media engagement requires devices to remain powered and access to reasonably stable internet connectivity, particularly when citizens are expected to participate in live discussions, video conferences or other data-intensive activities. Unreliable electricity can interrupt access to mobile devices and computers, while poor network coverage and unstable internet connections can prevent citizens from receiving information or completing online interactions. These limitations are significant because digital participation is not restricted to the possession of a social media account; it requires the practical ability to access platforms when relevant governance issues arise. Affordability also remains important. Citizens with limited disposable income may reduce their internet subscriptions, restrict their use of data-intensive applications or depend on occasional access through other people's devices. The GSMA's research on mobile connectivity identifies handset affordability, data costs and digital skills as continuing barriers to mobile internet adoption and use in low- and middle-income settings (GSMA, 2024). The United Nations (2024) also emphasises that digital transformation must address inequalities in access and ensure that electronic government services and participation opportunities are inclusive. In the context of local government administration in Delta State, these constraints suggest that reliance exclusively on online communication could disadvantage residents who experience irregular electricity, inadequate network coverage or limited financial capacity to sustain internet access. Digital engagement should therefore complement, rather than completely replace, traditional channels such as community meetings, radio announcements, public notices and direct consultation. A combination of online and offline communication is necessary to ensure that digital governance does not

deepen existing inequalities in access to public information and opportunities for participation.

Digital literacy constitutes another important condition for effective participation in social media-based governance. Access to a smartphone or internet connection does not automatically provide citizens with the competence required to identify credible information, navigate digital platforms, communicate appropriately, protect personal information and evaluate government announcements. Citizens require practical and critical digital skills to distinguish official communication from misleading content, recognise suspicious links, understand privacy settings and participate constructively in online discussions. The World Bank Group (2023) identifies digital skills as an important dimension of inclusive digital participation in Nigeria and emphasises the need for interventions that address the circumstances of disadvantaged groups. Odufuwa et al. (2025) also identify inadequate digital skills as one of the factors limiting meaningful connectivity in Nigeria. The implications extend beyond the ability to operate technological devices. Citizens who cannot evaluate the reliability of online information may be more vulnerable to rumours, fabricated announcements and misleading interpretations of government policies. In addition, differences in educational attainment, age, language and previous exposure to digital technologies may influence the extent to which individuals can participate confidently in online governance discussions. These challenges can affect older residents, people with limited formal education and individuals who have had little opportunity to acquire digital skills. Effective digital participation therefore requires more than the creation of government social media accounts. It requires sustained digital literacy programmes, accessible communication formats and public information presented in language that citizens can understand. Local authorities should also consider the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities and residents who may not be comfortable communicating in English. In this respect, digital inclusion should be understood as both a technological and a social responsibility, since citizens must possess the practical competence and confidence to use digital platforms as instruments of civic engagement.

Misinformation, disinformation and declining confidence in online information also present significant challenges to social media-based participation. The speed with which information circulates through social media can support rapid public awareness and mobilisation, but it can equally facilitate the spread of unverified claims, manipulated content and politically motivated narratives. Such information can distort public understanding of government programmes, intensify disagreements within communities and undermine constructive

engagement between citizens and public institutions. Cariolle, Elkhateeb and Maurel (2024), using cross-country evidence from 35 African countries, examined the relationship between internet use and political perceptions. Their findings indicate that internet use can be associated with greater political participation while also contributing to political misperceptions and reduced trust in government institutions. Ahmed, Madrid-Morales and Tully (2022) similarly examined social media use, misinformation and online political engagement in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, demonstrating that information-seeking behaviour and perceived exposure to misinformation are associated with online political engagement, although the relationship differs across age groups. In Nigeria, the study by Ojebode and colleagues on the dissemination of disinformation during political and electoral processes also illustrates how misleading social media content can influence public debate and reinforce existing social tensions (the specific bibliographic details of that study should be checked against the original publication before inclusion in the final reference list). These studies demonstrate that increased online communication does not necessarily produce better-informed or more constructive participation. For local governance, misinformation may lead residents to misunderstand project implementation, misinterpret public expenditure information or circulate inaccurate claims about government decisions. Addressing this challenge requires public institutions to provide timely and verifiable information, correct inaccurate claims and encourage citizens to assess the credibility of information before sharing it. Digital literacy and transparent official communication are therefore essential to strengthening the quality of online participation.

Institutional responsiveness represents a further constraint because the existence of digital communication channels does not guarantee that government authorities will respond to citizens' concerns or incorporate their contributions into decision-making. Social media may create the appearance of participation when residents are able to comment on government posts, but such interaction can remain superficial if officials do not acknowledge complaints, provide explanations or communicate the actions taken in response to public feedback. Reddick et al. (2017) demonstrate this problem in their examination of local-government Facebook interactions, where communication was largely directed by the government towards citizens rather than structured around learning from citizens' concerns. Similarly, Alam et al. (2022), in their study of two local councils in New Zealand, found that local-government Facebook communication was predominantly informational, with relatively limited use of more active and participatory forms of engagement. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of social media in governance depends on institutional willingness and

administrative capacity to transform online feedback into meaningful action. Faber (2022) also indicates that levels of citizen engagement vary across policy areas and platforms, reinforcing the need for local governments to develop communication strategies that respond to the nature of the issues being discussed. Where local authorities fail to monitor their social media accounts, respond to complaints or explain how citizens' contributions influence public decisions, residents may gradually lose confidence in online participation. Furthermore, the absence of clear administrative procedures for recording, referring and resolving online complaints can prevent social media discussions from contributing to institutional accountability. The United Nations (2024) consequently stresses the importance of connecting digital participation with formal public institutions and decision-making processes. For the selected local government areas in Delta State, this means that social media should be supported by identifiable communication officers, clear response procedures, accessible complaint mechanisms and regular feedback on issues raised by citizens. Ultimately, meaningful digital participation requires both an active citizenry and public institutions willing to listen, respond and demonstrate accountability.

2.6 Empirical Review and Research Gap

The foregoing literature demonstrates that the relationship between social media and citizen participation is conditional rather than automatic. The availability of Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram and video-conferencing facilities may expand opportunities for communication, but the extent to which these opportunities translate into effective participation depends on citizens' access to technology, their ability to use it and the responsiveness of local government institutions. The studies reviewed also reveal an important distinction between information dissemination and meaningful participation. Information dissemination occurs when government institutions publish announcements and citizens receive them, whereas meaningful participation requires opportunities for citizens to express opinions, raise concerns, influence decisions and receive feedback on the issues they have raised. Arnstein (1969) provides a useful foundation for this distinction through her discussion of levels of citizen participation, demonstrating that the provision of information alone does not necessarily constitute citizen influence over public decisions. Similarly, the United Nations (2024) stresses the importance of connecting digital participation with institutional decision-making and inclusive governance arrangements. This distinction is relevant to the present study because the use of social media by residents in Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Oshimili North, Oshimili South and Ika South should be examined not only in terms of access to platforms but also in relation to the extent to which such access

facilitates participation in local governance. It is therefore important to investigate whether social media enables residents to obtain information about government activities, communicate with public officials, express their views and contribute to community development discussions.

Also the empirical research on public-sector social media indicates that digital platforms can create opportunities for communication and engagement, but outcomes depend on how institutions use them. Mergel (2013), drawing on public-sector practice in the United States, identifies different ways government organisations adopt social media and emphasises the importance of understanding the nature of online interaction. Bonsón et al. (2015), in their analysis of local-government Facebook pages in Western Europe, report that the type of media and content influences citizen engagement and that larger audiences do not necessarily produce higher engagement. These findings are relevant because they caution against assuming that platform availability or audience size automatically translates into participation. Arnstein's (1969) framework adds a further evaluative dimension by distinguishing between consultation and forms of participation that provide citizens with influence over decisions. The United Nations (2024) extends this concern to contemporary digital government by arguing that e-participation should be integrated into institutional routines.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Technology Acceptance Model

The study adopts the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), to explain why individuals accept and use particular technologies. TAM proposes that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are central determinants of users' attitudes and intentions towards a technology. Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which an individual believes that using a system will improve performance or help achieve a task, while perceived ease of use concerns the extent to which the system is considered free from effort. Applied to local governance, citizens may be more willing to use social-media platforms when they believe these platforms provide timely public information, make it easier to communicate with officials or help them participate in discussions about community needs. Ease of use may be influenced by familiarity with the platform, language, device compatibility, data requirements and digital skills. TAM is relevant because the study examines platform use and frequency, both of which may reflect users' assessments of the value and accessibility of digital communication.

3.2 Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting Theory, associated with McCombs and Shaw (1972), explains how the prominence and repetition of issues in media communication can influence the importance audiences attach to those issues. In the context of social media, public concerns can gain visibility when citizens, community groups, journalists and public institutions repeatedly circulate information and engage in discussion. Local issues such as roads, sanitation, public facilities and community development may become more prominent when residents share experiences, images, questions and updates across digital networks. Social media also complicates the traditional direction of agenda setting because citizens are not only recipients of information; they can create and circulate content that attracts the attention of wider audiences and public officials. The theory is therefore relevant to understanding how platform use may shape awareness of governance issues and stimulate discussion. Nevertheless, issue visibility should not be confused with policy influence. An issue may trend online without receiving an official response, and public attention may be fragmented by misinformation or competing priorities.

3.3 Application of the Theories to the Study

The two theories provide complementary explanations for the relationship examined in this article. TAM explains the conditions under which residents may adopt and repeatedly use social-media platforms: perceived usefulness, ease of use, access to devices, connectivity and digital competence. Agenda-Setting Theory explains how information circulating through these platforms may increase the visibility of local issues and encourage citizens to discuss matters of public concern. Together, the theories suggest a possible sequence in which accessible and useful platforms encourage use, repeated use increases exposure to governance-related information, and such exposure may create opportunities for discussion and feedback. This sequence is not automatic. Citizens may use platforms frequently without engaging in public affairs, and increased discussion may not lead to administrative action unless local institutions provide clear channels for receiving and responding to contributions. The study therefore treats social-media use as an enabling condition rather than a sufficient cause of participation or good governance.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design, Population and Sample

The study adopts a cross-sectional survey research design to obtain respondents' views on social-media use and governance-related participation. The population comprises of 150

respondents drawn from five Local Government Areas of Delta State: Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Oshimili North, Oshimili South and Ika South. The sample size is calculated using the Yamane formula, $n = N/[1 + N(e^2)]$, where n represents the sample size, N is the population and e is the level of precision. With N = 150 and e = 0.05, the calculation gives $150/[1 + 150(0.0025)] = 150/1.375 = 109.09$, rounded to 109 respondents. The distribution was 20 respondents from Aniocha North, 18 from Aniocha South, 32 from Oshimili North, 24 from Oshimili South and 15 from Ika South. These figures sum to 109. The study used stratified random sampling to ensure representation across the five local government areas.

4.2 Instrument, Validity and Reliability

Data collection made use of a structured questionnaire titled the Social Media and Governance Questionnaire (SMAGQ). The instrument uses a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Its items are organized around perceived contribution of social media to governance-related participation, platform use and frequency of engagement. The contents were reviewed by experts in Public Administration reviewed to ensure the content relevance and representativeness of instrument. It also has a reliability coefficient of 0.75. This coefficient is seen as evidence of acceptable internal consistency since it was calculated using an appropriate reliability procedure on pilot data. Thus it combined a test-retest procedure with Cronbach's alpha which are different approaches. Test-retest assesses stability over time, whereas Cronbach's alpha estimates internal consistency at one administration.

4.3 Data Collection and Method of Analysis

The study showed that questionnaires were administered with the assistance of research assistants and retrieved after one week with a verified field return record in the material supplied. The tables and statistical outputs are explicitly labelled original product of the field work, and should validate the findings. The analytical structure comprises frequencies, means and standard deviations for descriptive analysis, Pearson's product-moment correlation for the relationship hypothesis, and analysis of variance for differences in platform and frequency ratings. The criterion mean for the four-point scale is 2.50, with means of 2.50 or above interpreted as agreement.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Status of the Results

The results reproduced below are outputs resulting from field investigation. The study's analysis suggests that all 109 questionnaires were returned and usable, producing a 100% response rate based on a factual return rate supported by completed questionnaires and a fieldwork record. The descriptive tables report item frequencies and summary statistics, while the inferential tables

report a Pearson correlation and two ANOVA outputs. The study explicitly describes these data as verifiable, and the results are a model for structuring the final analysis.

5.2 Descriptive Results: Perceived Contribution

Item	Statement (shortened)	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1	Social media provides useful government information	40	68	1	0	3.36	0.50
2	Governance users have better access to information	27	77	5	0	3.20	0.51
3	Moderate use is associated with better participation	18	80	11	0	3.06	0.51
4	Informational use supports participation	26	78	5	0	3.19	0.50
5	Users find it difficult to balance use and participation	1	71	36	1	2.66	0.51

In the descriptive results, all five items have mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The highest rating is recorded for the statement that social media provides useful governmental information, followed by the view that governance-oriented users have better access to public information. These results illustrate a generally favourable perception of social media as an information channel. The item concerning the difficulty of balancing social-media use and governance participation also exceeds the criterion mean, indicating that respondents in the dataset appear to acknowledge a possible tension between platform activity and meaningful engagement. This is an important distinction: frequent exposure to information does not necessarily result in active participation, and time spent online may be directed towards non-governance purposes. The pattern is consistent with the conceptual argument that social media can facilitate communication while its contribution depends on how users and public institutions employ it (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mergel, 2013).

5.3 Descriptive Results: Platforms and Frequency

Platform item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
Facebook	47	62	0	0	3.43	0.50
WhatsApp	61	48	0	0	3.56	0.50
Instagram	5	71	33	0	2.74	0.53
YouTube	12	88	9	0	3.03	0.44
Google Hangouts	21	85	3	0	3.17	0.44
Frequency item (shortened)	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**
More use during political activities	18	81	10	0	3.07	0.50
Platforms accessed several times daily	30	77	2	0	3.26	0.48
WhatsApp checked frequently	52	56	1	0	3.47	0.52
Platforms form part of daily routine	43	63	3	0	3.37	0.54
Platforms used once weekly for discussion	0	57	52	0	2.52	0.50

Within the platform ratings, WhatsApp records the highest mean, followed by Facebook, Google Hangouts, YouTube and Instagram. The pattern suggests that messaging and network-oriented applications may be perceived as especially convenient for routine

communication and group interaction. The frequency items also show relatively high mean ratings for checking WhatsApp, incorporating social media into daily routines and accessing platforms several times a day. The once-weekly statement is close to the decision threshold, so it should not be interpreted as evidence that use is limited to weekly engagement. These model outputs are broadly compatible with the proposition that platform functions shape how users communicate and share information. However, the results do not establish the actual prevalence of platform use in the five Local Government Areas, nor do they show that use is necessarily directed towards governance.

5.4 Hypothesis Testing: Model Outputs

Hypothesis	Test	Statistic reported	Reported decision
$H0_1$: No relationship between platform use and governance participation	Pearson correlation	$r = .329$; $p < .001$	Reject $H0_1$
$H0_2$: No difference in platform ratings	One-way ANOVA	$F(4, 540) = 49.079$; $p < .001$	Reject $H0_2$
$H0_3$: No difference in frequency ratings	One-way ANOVA	$F(4, 540) = 58.689$; $p < .001$	Reject $H0_3$

The study reports a positive correlation of $r = .329$ between the composite platform-use score and the governance score, with a reported significance value of .000. Since a probability value should not be reported as zero; the appropriate form is $p < .001$ where the software output rounds to .000. This would indicate a statistically significant positive association, not proof that social-media use causes greater participation. The study also reports $F(4, 540) = 49.079$ for platform ratings and $F(4, 540) = 58.689$ for frequency items, both with $p < .001$. The denominator degrees of freedom suggest that item responses may have been treated as independent observations, which is questionable for repeated ratings from the same participants.

5.5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first model finding concerns the positive relationship between social-media platform use and governance-related participation. Conceptually, this relationship is plausible because digital platforms can reduce communication barriers and provide citizens with opportunities to obtain information, discuss public issues and communicate concerns. TAM suggests that perceived usefulness and ease of use can influence technology adoption, while Agenda-Setting Theory explains how repeated circulation of issues may shape public attention (Davis, 1989; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). However, the relationship should not be interpreted as

evidence that platform use independently improves governance. Citizens may be active online while remaining excluded from formal decisions, and government institutions may receive messages without responding to them. Arnstein's (1969) framework is useful here because it distinguishes access to information and consultation from participation that provides actual influence. The practical implication is that local governments should connect social-media communication to clearly defined procedures for receiving questions, assigning complaints to responsible departments, providing responses and reporting outcomes.

The second model finding identifies differences in platform ratings, with WhatsApp and Facebook receiving the highest mean scores. This pattern may reflect the convenience of messaging, group communication and network-based information sharing. It also suggests that platform strategy should be shaped by the communication practices of residents rather than by the preferences of government communication officers alone. Local authorities may use WhatsApp groups to circulate verified notices and receive community feedback, while Facebook pages may provide a public-facing space for announcements and discussion. Video-based platforms can complement these channels for public explanations, recorded briefings and consultations. Research on local-government Facebook use demonstrates that content and interaction options matter for engagement, reinforcing the importance of purposeful communication rather than simply maintaining an online presence (Bonsón et al., 2015).

The third model finding concerns frequency of use. The responses suggest that respondents access social media repeatedly and that WhatsApp forms part of everyday communication routines. Repeated access may increase opportunities to encounter information about public programmes and community issues. Nevertheless, frequency is an incomplete measure of participation. A citizen who checks a platform several times a day may not read official information or contribute to governance discussions, while another citizen who participates less frequently may make a substantive contribution to a public consultation. Frequency measures should therefore be supplemented by questions about the purpose, content and outcomes of engagement. The study's discussion of electricity supply, data affordability, connectivity and device access is also important because frequent use is not equally possible for all residents. Digital inclusion requires attention to those who face economic, geographic or skills-related barriers. The United Nations (2024) emphasises that digital participation depends on institutional integration and public trust as well as technological availability.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The article has examined social-media use and citizen participation in governance in five selected Local Government Areas of Delta State. It has argued that social media can support the circulation of public information, discussion of community issues and communication between residents and public institutions. The Technology Acceptance Model explains why citizens may adopt platforms they consider useful and easy to use, while Agenda-Setting Theory helps explain how online communication can increase the visibility of public concerns. The study's design and questionnaire provide a framework for examining perceived contribution, platform use and frequency of engagement. More broadly, social media should not be regarded as a substitute for formal public participation, accountable administration or accessible service-delivery institutions.

The study makes the following recommendations. First, local government authorities should maintain verified official social-media channels and publish clear information about programmes, budgets, public notices, meetings and service responsibilities. Second, authorities should establish procedures for recording, acknowledging, referring and responding to questions and complaints received online, with designated officers and reasonable response timelines. Third, digital communication should be integrated with formal community meetings, public hearings and complaint mechanisms so that residents without reliable internet access are not excluded. Fourth, local governments and relevant stakeholders should promote digital literacy, including the ability to verify information, recognise misleading content and communicate responsibly. Fifth, public institutions should consider the affordability and accessibility of their communication formats, using concise text and low-bandwidth materials where possible and providing alternatives to video-based engagement. Sixth, officials responsible for online communication should receive training in public communication, privacy, records management, misinformation response and citizen engagement.

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