

Social Media Advocacy, Green Awareness and Sustainability Initiatives in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of social media advocacy on green awareness sustainable practices in Ijebu North Local Government Area, Ogun State. The objectives of the study are to identify the most impactful social media platforms and content types, assess the effectiveness of social media campaigns, examine the influence on public behaviour, and evaluate the role of social media in shaping environmental policies and advocacy efforts. The study adopted survey research design with a population of 284,336 and a sample size of 380, determined using Cochran's formula at 95% confidence level. Stratified random sampling technique was employed with a structured questionnaire as the research instrument. The study found out that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most effective platforms, with videos and documentaries being the most influential content types. Social media campaigns were found to be highly effective in raising environmental awareness across various demographic groups, particularly among younger respondents. The study concludes that social media significantly impacts public behaviour and the adoption of sustainable practices. The study recommends leveraging popular social media platforms for targeted campaigns, focusing on high-quality, relevant and frequent content, and enhancing research and investments in social media's role in environmental advocacy.

Keywords: Behaviour change, Green awareness, Public engagement, Social media advocacy & Sustainability initiatives,

Introduction

Social media has revolutionized the way information is disseminated and consumed, playing a crucial role in raising environmental awareness and promoting sustainable practices globally. In Nigeria, digital media's impact is profound, leveraging platforms such as social media, blogs, and online news to inform and educate the public about environmental issues. The proliferation of social media in Nigeria has created unprecedented opportunities for environmental advocacy. Platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram are instrumental in spreading information quickly and engaging a broad audience. Social media campaigns and hashtags focusing on environmental issues have become commonplace, helping to raise awareness and galvanize public action. According to Okoye, Nwagbara, and Ogbuagu (2022), digital media campaigns have significantly influenced public perception and awareness of environmental sustainability in Nigeria.

Previous researches indicate that social media facilitates knowledge dissemination by providing a platform for environmental experts and activists to share insights and best practices. For instance, Eze, Onuoha, and Obi (2021) highlight how social media platforms have been used to share educational content on recycling, waste management, and conservation efforts. This real-time exchange of information helps bridge the knowledge gap and empowers individuals to adopt more sustainable practices in their daily lives.

In addition to raising awareness, social media supports research by enabling the collection and analysis of data related to environmental issues. Social media platforms provide researchers with access to a wealth of user-generated content, which can be analysed to identify trends and patterns in public behaviour and attitudes towards sustainability. As noted by Udoakah and Orhewere (2021), the availability of big data from social media platforms has facilitated more comprehensive and accurate environmental research, leading to better-informed policy decisions.

Moreover, Social media fosters community engagement and collaboration, essential components of sustainable development. Online fora and discussion groups allow individuals to share their experiences and solutions to environmental challenges, fostering a sense of collective responsibility. According to Adeyemi, Adedeji, and Adebayo (2023), community-based social media initiatives have successfully mobilized local populations to participate in tree-planting campaigns and clean-up drives, highlighting the power of social media in driving grassroots environmental action.

However, the effectiveness of social media in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices is not without challenges. Digital divides, misinformation, and the ephemeral nature of online content can hinder the reach and impact of digital campaigns. Despite these challenges, the potential of social media to foster a more environmentally conscious society remains significant. A study by Alade, Olawale, and Omotayo (2023) underscores the importance of digital literacy and critical thinking in navigating and utilizing social media for environmental advocacy effectively.

Furthermore, the role of digital media in influencing policy cannot be overlooked. Digital campaigns often attract the attention of policymakers and can lead to significant legislative changes. For example, the *#EndPlasticPollutionNG* campaign led to increased governmental scrutiny and the eventual banning of single-use plastics in several Nigerian States. According to Nwankwo and Ajayi (2023), such social media advocacy efforts demonstrate the potential of digital media to catalyse policy reforms aimed at environmental sustainability. It is against this backdrop that this study aims to explore the influence of digital media in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices in Nigeria with special attention to Ijebu North Local Government Area of Ogun State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the significant potential of social media in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices in Nigeria, there are notable challenges and gaps that hinder its full effectiveness. One primary issue is the digital divide, which limits access to digital platforms for a considerable portion of the Nigerian population, particularly in rural areas. There is disparity in access results in uneven dissemination of information, where urban populations are more likely to benefit from digital environmental campaigns than their rural counterparts. Additionally, misinformation and the proliferation of unverified content on digital platforms can undermine genuine efforts to promote sustainability, leading to public skepticism and confusion regarding environmental issues (Adeyemi, Adedeji, & Adebayo, 2023).

Furthermore, there appears to be a lack of comprehensive studies that evaluate the actual impact of social media on public behaviour and policy changes related to environmental sustainability in

Nigeria. Most existing researches focus on the potential benefits of digital media without critically assessing its real-world effectiveness in fostering sustainable practices and influencing policies. This gap in knowledge hinders the development of targeted strategies that can enhance the role of social media in promoting environmental awareness. This study therefore, seeks to address these gaps by providing empirical evidence on the reach and impact of social media campaigns in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices in Nigeria with special attention to Ijebu North Local Government Area of Ogun State.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. identify the most impactful social media platforms and content types for promoting sustainable practices in Nigeria.
- ii. assess the effectiveness of social media campaigns in raising environmental awareness among different demographic groups in Nigeria.
- iii. examine the influence of social media on public behaviour and the adoption of sustainable practices in Nigeria.
- iv. evaluate the role of social media in influencing environmental policies and advocacy efforts in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Digital Media and Environmental Education

Digital media platforms such as social media, blogs, and online news sites have become essential in disseminating information about environmental issues. These platforms enable environmental organizations and activists to share educational content widely and quickly. Eze, Onuoha, and Obi (2021) underscore that digital media has been instrumental in educating the public about sustainable practices, such as waste management and renewable energy. By providing accessible and engaging content, these platforms help bridge knowledge gaps and promote a better understanding of environmental sustainability.

Advocacy and Policy Influence

Advocacy through social media has proven effective in influencing environmental policies and practices in Nigeria. Campaigns like *#EndPlasticPollutionNG* have used social media to raise awareness about the harmful effects of plastic pollution and advocate for policy changes. This campaign successfully led to the implementation of bans on single-use plastics in several Nigerian states (Nwankwo & Ajayi, 2023). Such initiatives demonstrate the power of digital media in amplifying advocacy efforts and driving legislative action towards sustainable development.

Public Behaviour and Engagement

Social media's interactive nature fosters public engagement and participation in environmental sustainability efforts. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter allow individuals to share their experiences, join discussions, and organise community actions. According to Okoye, Nwagbara, and Ogbuagu (2022), these platforms have been crucial in mobilising local communities for environmental clean-ups and tree-planting activities. This collective engagement not only raises awareness but also encourages individuals to adopt more sustainable behaviours in their daily lives.

Addressing the Digital Divide

While social media has vast potential for promoting sustainability, the digital divide remains a significant challenge in Nigeria. The disparity in internet access between urban and rural areas limits the reach of digital campaigns. Alade, Olawale, and Omotayo (2023) highlight that rural populations often lack the necessary infrastructure and digital literacy to benefit from online environmental education and advocacy. Bridging this divide is essential to ensure inclusive and widespread promotion of sustainable practices across Nigeria.

Combating Misinformation

The prevalence of misinformation on digital platforms poses a threat to effective environmental communication. Adeyemi, Adedeji, and Adebayo (2023) discuss how the spread of false or misleading information can undermine genuine efforts to promote sustainability. Ensuring the accuracy and reliability of environmental content shared on digital media is critical. This requires not only vigilance from content creators but also the development of critical thinking skills among the audience to discern credible sources.

Sustaining Engagement

The transient nature of digital content can affect the long-term impact of environmental campaigns. While digital media allows for rapid dissemination, the constant influx of new information can cause important messages to be quickly forgotten. Udoakah and Orhewere (2021) suggest that sustained engagement and follow-up actions are necessary to reinforce the messages conveyed through digital media. Long-term strategies should include regular updates and interactive content to maintain public interest and commitment to sustainable practices.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two theories – the diffusion of innovations theory and the public sphere theory. The Diffusion of Innovations Theory, propounded by Everett Rogers in 1962, explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through cultures. The major thrusts of this theory include the innovation itself, communication channels, time, and the social system (Rogers, 2003). The theory is highly relevant to this study as it helps to understand how digital media can effectively disseminate environmental information and sustainable practices across different demographics in Nigeria.

The public sphere theory, developed by Jürgen Habermas in 1962, emphasizes the role of communication in forming public opinion and fostering democratic participation. According to Habermas, the public sphere is a space where individuals can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion, influence political action. This theory is pertinent to the study as it underscores the role of digital media in creating a virtual public sphere where environmental issues can be debated and addressed. In Nigeria, digital platforms serve as vital arenas for public discourse on sustainability, enabling citizens to participate in environmental advocacy and influence policy-making processes.

Methodology

This study adopted survey research design to investigate the influence of social media in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices in Ijebu North Local Government Area of Ogun State. The population of the study is 284,336 chosen from its diverse and representative mix of urban and rural settings, which provides a comprehensive understanding of social media's impact across different demographics. The sample size of 380 was determined using Cochran's formula at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across various sub-groups within the population. Structured questionnaire was used as the instrument of eliciting detailed responses on digital media usage, awareness, and sustainable practices from the respondents. Data were collected through the questionnaire distributed to respondents via online (google form) and in person to ensure broad participation. Data collected were analysed through the use of descriptive statistics to interpret the findings and draw meaningful conclusions about the role of digital media in environmental advocacy in Ijebu North Local Government Area.

Analysis and Results

The study utilised descriptive statistical methods to interpret the survey responses to provide insights into the influence of social media in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices in Nigeria.

Table 1: Social media platforms and content types most impactful in promoting sustainable practices in Nigeria

Items	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1. Which social media platform do you find most effective in promoting sustainable practices?	Facebook	112	30%
	X	51	13%
	Instagram	69	18%
	WhatsApp	117	31%
	YouTube	31	8%
2. What type of content on social media platforms most influences your adoption of sustainable practices?	Informative articles	91	24%
	Videos and documentaries	125	33%
	Infographics and images	68	18%
	Interactive webinars	37	10%
	Social media posts and updates	59	16%
3. How often do you engage with social media content related to sustainability?	Daily	74	19%
	Weekly	122	32%
	Monthly	109	29%
	Rarely	51	13%
	Never	24	6%

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The data in Table 1 illustrate the impact of various social media platforms and content types on promoting sustainable practices in Nigeria. WhatsApp emerges as the most effective platform, with 117 respondents (31%) favouring it, followed closely by Facebook with 112 respondents (30%), and Instagram with 69 respondents (18%). Videos and documentaries are the most influential content type, with 125 respondents (33%) citing them, followed by informative articles with 91 respondents (24%), and infographics and images with 68 respondents (18%). Engagement with social media content related to sustainability is highest weekly with 122 respondents (32%), followed by monthly with 109 respondents (29%), with daily engagement at 74 respondents (19%). These findings suggest that WhatsApp and Facebook are key platforms for disseminating sustainability content, with videos and documentaries being the most impactful content types, indicating a preference for visual and informative media among the audience.

Table 2: Effectiveness of social media campaigns in raising environmental awareness among different demographic groups in Nigeria

Items	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
4. How would you rate the effectiveness of social media campaigns in raising your awareness of environmental issues?	Very effective	139	37%
	Effective	93	24%
	Ineffective	61	16%
	Very ineffective	87	23%
5. Which demographic group do you belong to?	18-25 years	91	24%
	26-35 years	151	40%
	36-45 years	73	19%
	46-55 years	58	15%
	56 years and above	07	2%
6. Which factor most influences the effectiveness of social media campaigns on you?	Personal relevance of the issue	93	24%
	Quality of the content	119	31%
	Frequency of the campaign	87	23%
	Peer influence and social sharing	43	11%
	Credibility of the source	38	10%

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The data in Table 2 highlight the effectiveness of social media campaigns in raising environmental awareness among different demographic groups in Nigeria. A total of 139 respondents (37%) rated these campaigns as very effective, while 93 respondents (24%) found them effective. However, 61 respondents (16%) rated them as ineffective, and 87 respondents (23%) considered them very ineffective. The majority of respondents, 151 (40%), belong to the 26-35 years age group, followed by 91 respondents (24%) in the 18-25 years group, 73 respondents (19%) in the 36-45 years group, and 58 respondents (15%) in the 46-55 years group, with only 7 respondents (2%) aged 56 years and above. Regarding factors influencing the effectiveness of these campaigns, 119 respondents (31%) highlighted the quality of the content as most influential, followed by personal relevance of the issue with 93 respondents (24%), frequency of the campaign with 87 respondents (23%), peer influence and social sharing with 43 respondents (11%), and credibility of the source with 38 respondents (10%). These findings indicate that content quality and personal relevance are key factors in the perceived effectiveness of social media campaigns across various age groups.

Table 3: Influence of social media on public behaviour and the adoption of sustainable practices in Nigeria

Items	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
7. How has social media influenced your behaviour towards environmental sustainability?	Significantly changed my behaviour	103	27%
	Moderately changed my behavior	82	22%
	Slightly changed my behavior	73	19%
	No change in behaviour	39	10%
	Made me more aware but no behaviour change	83	22%
8. Which sustainable practice have you adopted due to social media influence?	Recycling and waste management	94	25%
	Reducing energy consumption	76	20%
	Supporting eco-friendly products	82	22%
	Participating in local environmental initiatives	96	25%
	None	32	8%
9. How likely are you to recommend sustainable practices to others based on what you learn from social media?	Very likely	117	31%
	Likely	131	34%
	Unlikely	71	19%
	Very unlikely	61	16%

Source: Field Survey (2024)

The data in Table 3 illustrate the influence of social media on public behaviour and the adoption of sustainable practices in Nigeria. Social media significantly changed the behaviour of 103 respondents (27%) towards environmental sustainability, moderately changed the behaviour of 82 respondents (22%), and slightly changed the behaviour of 73 respondents (19%). Meanwhile, 83 respondents (22%) felt more aware but did not change their behaviour, and 39 respondents (10%) reported no change. Regarding the adoption of sustainable practices, 96 respondents (25%) participated in local environmental initiatives, 94 respondents (25%) adopted recycling and waste management, and 82 respondents (22%) supported eco-friendly products. Additionally, 76 respondents (20%) focused on reducing energy consumption, while 32 respondents (8%) did not adopt any sustainable practices. When it comes to recommending sustainable practices to others based on social media, 117 respondents (31%) were very likely, 131 respondents (34%) were likely, 71 respondents (19%) were unlikely, and 61 respondents (16%) were very unlikely. These findings indicate that social media has a notable impact on behaviour change and promotion of sustainable practices, with a substantial number of people being influenced to adopt environmentally friendly actions.

Table 4: Social media contribution to shaping environmental policies and advocacy efforts in Nigeria

Items	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
10. How often do you see social media campaigns advocating for environmental policy changes?	Very often	113	30%
	Often	85	22%
	Occasionally	71	19%
	Rarely	49	13%
	Never	62	16%
11. How effective do you think social media is in influencing environmental policy changes in Nigeria?	Very Effective	124	33%
	Effective	136	36%
	Ineffective	69	18%
	Very Ineffective	51	13%
12. Have you ever participated in an environmental advocacy effort or campaign due to social media influence?	Yes, multiple times	132	35%
	Yes, once or twice	76	20%
	No, but I am aware of such campaigns	57	15%
	No, and I am not interested	69	18%
	No, because I was not aware of them	46	12%

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Based on the data in Table 4, social media appears to be a common platform for Nigerians to encounter environmental advocacy efforts. Respondents (269) representing 71% said they very often, often or occasionally see social media campaigns advocating for environmental policy changes. Public perception on the effectiveness of digital media in influencing environmental policy changes in Nigeria is mixed. While a significant number believed it to be very effective (124) representing 33% or effective (136) representing 36%, while 69 respondents (18%) said it is not effective and 51 respondents (13%) said it is very ineffective. Social media seems to be an effective channel for mobilizing Nigerians to participate in environmental advocacy efforts. Over a third (132) respondents representing 35% said they have participated multiple times in such efforts due to social media influence, with another 20% (76) participating once or twice.

Discussions

The findings of this study align closely with the research objectives, providing comprehensive insights into the role of social media in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices in Nigeria.

Objective 1 aimed to identify the most impactful social media platforms and content types for promoting sustainable practices. The data in Table 1 revealed that WhatsApp (31%) and Facebook (30%) are the most effective platforms, followed by Instagram (18%). This indicates that social media platforms with high engagement and user interactivity are particularly effective for disseminating sustainability content. Additionally, videos and documentaries (33%) were identified as the most influential content type, followed by informative articles (24%) and

infographics/images (18%). This preference for visual and informative media suggests that the Nigerian users are more responsive to engaging, easily digestible content. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Okoro, Ogbureke, and Nwankwo (2021), which highlighted the significant impact of multimedia content in environmental communication, as well as the work of Smith and Zube (2021) on the effectiveness of social media platforms in spreading environmental awareness.

Objective 2 was concerned with assessing the effectiveness of social media campaigns in raising environmental awareness among different demographic groups. The data in Table 2 showed that 37% of respondents rated these campaigns as very effective, and 24% found them effective, indicating a strong overall impact. However, 16% considered them ineffective, and 23% viewed them as very ineffective, suggesting that there is room for improvement. The demographic distribution revealed that majority of respondents belonged to the 26-35 years age group (40%), followed by 18-25 years group (24%). This demographic trend underscores the importance of targeting younger audiences who are more likely to engage with digital media. Factors influencing the effectiveness of these campaigns included the quality of the content (31%) and the personal relevance of the issue (24%), highlighting the need for high-quality, relatable content. These findings align with previous research by Adegbola, Adeniran, and Obasanjo (2022), which emphasized the importance of content quality and relevance in environmental campaigns, and by Wang and Chang (2021) on the effectiveness of targeted digital media strategies.

The concern of objective 3 was to examine the influence of social media on public behaviour and the adoption of sustainable practices. Data collected in Table 3 indicated that social media significantly or moderately changed the behaviour of 49% of respondents towards environmental sustainability. Specifically, 27% reported significant behavioural change, and 22% reported moderate change. Additionally, 25% of respondents adopted recycling and waste management practices, and another 25% participated in local environmental initiatives due to social media influence. This demonstrates the substantial impact of social media on promoting practical sustainable actions. The findings are corroborated by previous studies by Adeoye, Musa, and Lawal (2023), which documented similar behaviour changes in response to digital media campaigns, and by Taylor and Kent (2022), who found that social media effectively fosters sustainable practices among the public.

Objective 4 evaluated the role of social media in influencing environmental policies and advocacy efforts. The data in Table 4 showed that majority of the respondents frequently encountered environmental advocacy campaigns online, with 71% reporting that they very often, often, or occasionally see such campaigns. Public perception of the effectiveness of social media in influencing policy changes was generally positive, with 33% considering it very effective and 36% effective. Additionally, 35% of respondents reported participating multiple times in environmental advocacy efforts due to social media influence. The findings here suggest that social media is a potent tool for mobilizing public support and influencing policy changes. Findings here are consistent with the theoretical framework that posits digital media as a crucial element in policy advocacy and public engagement (Kariuki, 2023; Mbarika & Kah, 2021).

In summary, the findings of this study do not only meet the research objectives but also align with existing literature and theories, affirming the pivotal role of digital media in fostering environmental awareness and promoting sustainable practices in Nigeria. The study demonstrates

that social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, combined with engaging multimedia content, are highly effective in raising awareness and encouraging sustainable behavior towards positive environmental practices among respondents. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of targeting younger demographics and ensuring high-quality, relevant content to maximize the impact of digital media campaigns. These insights are valuable for policymakers, environmental advocates, and digital media strategists aiming to enhance the effectiveness of environmental sustainability initiatives in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that social media plays a significant role in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable practices in Nigeria. The findings indicate that platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, along with video and documentary content, are particularly effective in reaching diverse demographic groups and influencing public behaviour. The quality and relevance of content, along with the frequency of campaigns, are critical factors in the success of these digital media efforts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Policymakers and environmental advocates should leverage WhatsApp and Facebook for targeted campaigns, also utilising videos and documentaries to maximise impact.
- ii. Content creators should focus on producing high-quality, relevant, and frequent content to sustain investigations and drive behavioural change.
- iii. Also, further research and investments should be directed towards understanding and enhancing the role of digital media in shaping environmental policies and advocacy efforts. This will help in harnessing the full potentials of digital media in fostering a more sustainable future for Nigeria.

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