

Assessment of Selected Digital Media Usage and Public Perception of Volunteer Activism for Vulnerable Groups in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study was intended to assess the use of selected Digital Media in democratic and social engagements of vulnerable/ minority groups in Nigeria in terms of how they fair and how the public perceive and subsequently provide the space to accommodate them. The theories of Critical Thinking and the Public Sphere served as theoretical framework. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. A sample of 35 volunteers were selected through census technique for the assessment of digital media usage for volunteer activism for vulnerable groups while 12 key informants selected through purposive sampling technique from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria were selected to determine the public perception of volunteer activism for vulnerable groups. The instruments for data collection consisting of a questionnaire and interview guide were validated by experts in tests and measurements. The reliability estimate of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha with the coefficient range of .72 to .79. The data were analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient and Anova. The result of the analysis indicated that there is a significant relationship between the use of digital media for democratic activism and participation of vulnerable/ minority groups in democratic/ social engagements. The result also revealed that digital media usage significantly influenced public perception of the engagement of the vulnerable/ minority groups. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended among others that volunteers should increasingly employ the use of digital media for the democratic and social engagements of vulnerable groups.

Keywords: Digital Media, Democracy and Social Engagement, Public Perception volunteer Activism and Vulnerable Groups.

Introduction

The adoption of digital media-from social network sites ranging from Facebook to cell phone cameras are today intended to help to organize and document most social movements including voluntary activism for vulnerable and minority groups . This can contribute directly or indirectly to democratic social engagements that can improve the lots of these vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria. In order to provide a political voice to vulnerable and/ minority groups in Nigeria or elsewhere, there is need for a purposeful selection of digital media that may, promote that task. The selection of digital media for volunteer activism depends on the purpose of the activism. The purpose may be to give a voice to a voiceless group; or to raise funds or to embark on advocacy towards changing existing government policies. Consequently, this may first involves the creation of platforms for the social movements that can in turn, create that desired social change. Volunteer activism as a social movement may today, start by activating people’s support or views as well as the digital media which can provide ample opportunity for realization of a goal. Through the digital media, one may be asked to tweet, friend, like, or donate online for a cause that may improve the lots of vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria. For instance, in 2010, over \$3 million was raised in relief efforts for Haiti through cell phone text donations. (<http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history>). Through the digital media, it is possible to promote a voluntary cause through Twitter and retweet of charity messages through following. One may “liked” a local nonprofit on Facebook, prompted by one of one’s neighbours or friends liking it too. With these sort of ideal type of digital media stages mentioned above, one can see that digital media have the potential to dramatically transform how people may perceive or get involved in voluntary activism for vulnerable and minority groups not only in Nigeria, but everywhere globally.

Statement of the Problem

Communication for social activism may achieve the purpose of positive change in favour of the social cause for which it is meant or invoke negative reactions or simply reinforce different positions, attitudes or behavior held before the communication endeavour. The problem of this study is premised on the assumption that the increasing popularity of the digital media may not simply mean that the adoption and use of all or selected forms of these digital media will ensure greater or less success for volunteer activism in Nigeria or elsewhere. This is because the success of any social engagement through the digital media or traditional media depends on several factors including accessibility of the selected media to the target audience. One cannot therefore, simply conclude without reliable statistics or research that messages of volunteer activism meant for social change in favour of vulnerable/minority groups will achieve more or less, the purpose through the digital media. However, the question one may ask is, do statistics or results of research endeavours exist to guide on the better selection of digital media for messages of volunteer activism for vulnerable/minority groups from which interventions for social and democratic engagements for such vulnerable/minority groups can be drawn?

Attempt to answer this question motivates this study.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to **Assess the role of Selected Digital Media Usage and Public Perception of Volunteer Activism for Vulnerable Groups in Nigeria.**

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Ascertain how the public perceive the selected digital media used for social and democratic engagements.
2. Determine how the public perception of selected digital media used for social and democratic engagements influences volunteer activism and give a voice to vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria.
3. Determine how selected digital media usage helps activists to influence public perception towards fund raising for volunteer activism for vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria.
4. Find out how the digital media are used by volunteers for social and democratic engagements for vulnerable/minority groups towards shaping the public perception towards advocacy for changing existing government policies in Nigeria.
5. Ascertain the role of the digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements and how vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria are involved.

Research Questions

In attempt to solve the problem of this study and to achieve the specific objectives of the research, the following research questions were posed to direct the study:

1. What is the public perception of the selected digital media used for social and democratic engagements?
2. How does the public perception of the selected digital media used for social and democratic engagements influence volunteer activism and give a voice to vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria?
3. How does the selected digital media usage help activists to influence public perception towards fund raising for volunteer activism for vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria?
4. How are the digital media used by volunteers for social and democratic engagements for vulnerable/ minority groups in shaping the public perception for advocacy towards changing existing government policies in Nigeria?
5. What role do the selected digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements play in the involvement of vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study:

1. Public perception of the volunteer activism in the selected digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements does not significantly influence fund raising, advocacy towards changing current government policy and the giving of a voice to vulnerable/ minority groups in Nigeria.
2. The selected digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements do not play significant role in the involvement of vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria.

The aim of this study was to assess how public perception of volunteer for vulnerable/minority groups is influenced by the choice and usage of selected digital media in Nigeria. Since it is not possible in this circumstance to study all the digital media, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, You-Tube and Instagram were studied to enable the researcher realize the purpose of the study. The result of the study would help voluntary activists in particular and the government and the society in general to know how to use the digital media to interface with vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria regarding any future social or democratic engagement.

Literature Review

Volunteerism and Civic Engagement

Hustinx, Cnaan and Handy (2010) asserted that Volunteering as a social engagement concept refers to the act of rendering service by choice or free will for the benefit of the wider community by an individual, group, or organisation without necessarily expecting a monetary gain in full knowledge and appreciation of being a volunteer. They have observed that governments have recognized the critical contribution that volunteering makes to build a strong and cohesive society since government cannot do alone and has therefore supported volunteering as the essential act of citizenship, a means for combating social exclusion, and promoting civic engagement for democratic participation.

Volunteerism, an altruistic/unselfish activity, according to Hustinx, et al. (2010), is defined as the practice of people working on behalf of others without being motivated by financial or material gain. It is an engagement based on free will, commitment and solidarity, with the aim to promote human development by supporting the delivery of economic and social services, fostering reciprocity among people and contributing to social cohesion. Volunteering according to them, provides individuals the opportunity to get involved in humanitarian activities. According to Brown & Swanson (2003), voluntary motivation is deeply embedded in most cultures, especially African culture. In almost all societies, it comes from the most basic of all values- people helping people and, in the process, helping each other. It emerges from long-established, ancient traditions of sharing, philanthropy and community service, or civic participation and advocacy. Volunteering brings significant benefits to individuals and communities and helps to nurture and sustain a richer social texture and a stronger sense of mutual trust and cohesion. It is often referred to as the "glue" that holds society together.

Digital Media and their Functions

Dewar (2004) described digital media as digital images, digital video, video game, web pages and websites; including social media, data and databases, digital audio, such as MP3 and electronic books. Digital media according to him, often contrasts with print media, such as printed books, newspapers and magazines, and other traditional or analog media, such as images, movies or audio tapes. Today in Nigeria, the use of digital media is the response to new technology. With the digital media, the citizens of Nigeria are empowered not only in generating media contents, but to distribute them freely. This is where volunteer activism in Nigeria may be greatly enhanced. Digital media have a significant broad and complex impact on society and culture. (Dewar, 2004).

Combined with the Internet and personal computing, digital media connect people in ways never before possible, enabling users to maintain friendships across time and distance. They enable those who are socially isolated or somehow set apart from their immediate physical community to connect with like-minded or like-situated people. Digital media also facilitate interaction across social, economic, cultural, political, religious and ideological boundaries, allowing for enhanced understanding.

Many people access social media platforms which are part of digital media to express empathy and receive support from friends and family, including in times of emotional distress. This enriches people's relationships and their ability to stay in touch, and the ability of friends and family to identify and help loved ones in need. According to a 2015 survey by Pew Research Center, the use of social technology is linked to having a greater number of close confidants, as well as a larger, more diverse social circle. Another Pew survey showed that 57% of teens state they have made a new friend online, and 83% state that social media make them feel more connected and informed about their friends' lives. (<http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/>)

A study by Bell (2015) in the World Economic Forum Report (2015) found that adolescents' use of social networking sites enhances existing friendships and the quality of relationships for those who use digital social networks to deal with social challenges. (<https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/2401429/technology.pdf>).

Steps in the Usage of Social Media for Voluntary Activism

Social media have the potential to dramatically transform how people get involved. This occurs in stages. In the preliminary or first stage, people become aware of an issue and leaders emerge. A shrewd user of Twitter can alert thousands of followers about an emerging cause or an issue on his or her mind. Issue awareness can spread at the speed of a click, with thousands of people across the globe becoming informed at the same time. In a similar vein, those who are savvy and engaged with social media emerge as leaders. Suddenly, one does not need to be a powerful

public speaker. He does not even need to leave his house. He can build an audience through social media without ever meeting the people he is inspiring.

At the next stage, the coalescence stage, social media also is transformative. Coalescence is the point when people join together to publicize the issue and get organized. U.S. President Obama's 2008 campaign became a case study in organizing through social media. Using Twitter and other online tools, the campaign engaged volunteers who had typically not bothered with politics, and empowered those who were more active to generate still more activity. The ability to organize without regard to geographical boundaries becomes possible using social media.

The real impact of the digital media can be seen when the social media like Twitter brought down Mubarak in Egypt in 2011.

Gladwell (2010) tackled what he considered the myth that social media gets people more engaged. He pointed out that most of the tweets relating to the Iran protests were in English and sent from Western accounts instead of people on the ground. Rather than increasing engagement, he contended that social media only increased participation; after all, the cost of participation is so much lower than the cost of engagement. Instead of risking being arrested, shot with rubber bullets, or sprayed with fire hoses, social media activists can click "like" or retweet a message from the comfort and safety of their desk (Gladwell, 2010).

Causes of Social Change and Emergence of Vulnerable/ Minority Groups

Changes to technology, social institutions, population, and the environment, alone or in some combination, create change.

Improving technology has made our lives easier. Friedman (2005) argued that technology is a driving force behind globalization, while the other forces of social change (social institutions, population, environment) play comparatively minor roles. He suggested that we can view globalization as occurring in three distinct periods.

First, globalization was driven by military expansion, powered by horsepower and wind power. The countries best able to take advantage of these power sources expanded the most, exerting control over the politics of the globe from the late 15th century to around the year 1800. The second shorter period, from approximately 1800 CE to 2000 CE, consisted of a globalizing economy. Steam and rail power were the guiding forces of social change and globalization in this period. Finally, Friedman brought us to the post-millennial era. In this period of globalization, change is driven by technology, particularly the internet (Friedman 2005).

Technology can also create change in the other three forces social scientists link to social change. Advances in medical technology allow otherwise infertile women to bear children, indirectly leading to an increase in population. Advances in agricultural technology have allowed us to genetically alter and patent food products, changing our environment in innumerable ways. From

the way we educate children in the classroom to the way we grow the food we eat, technology has impacted all aspects of modern life.

Of course there are drawbacks. The increasing gap between the technological haves and have-nots-sometimes called the digital divide-occurs both locally and globally. This contributes to the growth of vulnerable/minority groups everywhere including Nigeria. Further, there are added security risks: the loss of privacy, the risk of total system failure (like the Y2K panic at the turn of the millennium), and the added vulnerability created by technological dependence.

Each change in a single social institution leads to changes in all social institutions. For example, the industrialization of society meant that there was no longer a need for large families to produce enough manual labour to run a farm. Further, new job opportunities were in close proximity to urban centres where living space was at a premium. The result is that the average family size shrunk significantly.

This same shift toward industrial corporate entities also changed the way we view government involvement in the private sector, created the global economy, provided new political platforms, and even spurred new religions and new forms of religious worship like Scientology.

Little and McGivern (2011) observed that in Canada, there is an increase in their senior population as baby boomers begin to retire, which will in turn change the way many of their social institutions are organized. For example, there is an increased demand for housing in warmer climates, a massive shift in the need for elder care and assisted-living facilities, and growing awareness of elder abuse. There is concern about labour shortages as boomers retire, not to mention the knowledge gap as the most senior and accomplished leaders in different sectors start to leave. Further, as this large generation leaves the workforce, the loss of tax income and pressure on pension and retirement plans means that the financial stability of the country is threatened.

Review of Studies

In 2018, Frank M. Attah & Bassey E. carried out a study titled: “Volunteerism as a Strategy for Community Development in Nigeria.” They noted in the study that community development remains a key concern in Nigeria. Despite frantic efforts of the government and non government organizations to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of rural communities. They observed that in Nigeria, there are indicators of under development in the areas. Their study therefore, examined volunteerism as an effective strategy for developing rural communities in Nigeria. The study adopted qualitative research method. The study relied on the secondary sources of information, such as journals, textbooks, the internet and newspaper.

Concerned with the challenges of prevalence poverty in the country and success stories of volunteerism as a viable strategy, the study advocated for the involvement of more Nigerian in delivering selfless services for the benefit of others and their immediate communities.

In 2006, three organizations, CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV conducted a study titled, “Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World.” The study underpinned the centrality of participation and social change to development. Consequently, three partner organisations-CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) and United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme jointly commissioned a study in 2006 to look at the relationship between volunteering and social activism in promoting development.

The study drew on inputs from all three partner organisations, engaged a geographically diverse range of over 100 volunteer involving organisations, and tapped the experience of individuals from 54 countries. Participants in the study ranged from community based organisations (CBOs) to large international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and included volunteer centres, volunteer sending organisations, youth service initiatives, research centres and institutes, as well as civil society organisations (CSOs) focused on human rights, the environment, gender-based violence, health, good governance, humanitarian issues and international development.

The study showed that diverse interpretations of volunteering are shaped by different contexts and experiences. Taken together, however, they help us understand the range of actions by which people seek to effect positive social change in the circumstances that produce conditions of poverty, inequality and under-development around the world. Central to an understanding of these actions is the notion of people’s participation, which expresses solidarity, fosters social cohesion and promotes participatory development.

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How is volunteering a social activism understood?
2. How do volunteering and social activism foster people’s participation?
3. What is the relationship between participation and development?
4. What is required to widen and sustain participation?

In 2019, Megan E. Gilster carried out a study titled: Comparing Neighborhood-Focused Activism and Volunteerism: Psychological Well-Being and Social Connectedness. In the study, the author noted that engagement of community members in neighborhood civic life has been identified as an important component of safe and healthy communities. He pointed out that research on community engagement has encompassed voluntary associations, volunteering, as well as participation in neighborhood activism. He suggested that there are psychological and social benefits to community engagement, but also suggests that there are differences between forms of participation. In order to understand these differences, the author examined the relationship of both volunteerism and neighborhood activism to psychosocial outcomes using survey data from a neighborhood-based sample of Chicago residents (n=3105). Findings suggest that activism is different-activists have higher neighborhood and personal mastery than those who only volunteer.

He also found that participation in neighborhood activism is also associated with an increased likelihood of contact with local officials and social ties in the neighborhood.

While the study by Frank M. Attah & Bassey E. in 2018 focused on “Volunteerism as a Strategy for Community Development in Nigeria” and examined volunteerism as an effective strategy for developing rural communities in Nigeria, the study by CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV focused on “Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World” and they looked at the relationship between volunteering and social activism in promoting development. Similarly, the study by Megan E. Gilster in 2019 concentrated on Comparing Neighborhood-Focused Activism and Volunteerism: Psychological Well-Being and Social Connectedness, and noted that engagement of community members in neighborhood civic life has been identified as an important component of safe and healthy communities. However, none of these reviewed studies attempted to focus entirely or in part on **“Assessment of Selected Digital Media Usage and Public Perception of Volunteer Activism for Vulnerable Groups in Nigeria.” This is the gap this present study has filled. The gap has been filled through the assessment of the role of Digital Media usage by voluntary activists for democratic engagements for vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria and how the public perceive and participate in this form of democratisation process.**

Theoretical Framework

Two theories underpinning this study are Critical Theory and the Theory of Public Sphere.

Critical Theory developed by the **Frankfurt School** lends its origin to critical thinking of the 1930’s. Contemporary critical theory according to Bohman (2005), includes both neo-Marxist and hermeneutic approaches. According to him, early prominent school of neo-Marxist theory developed during the 1930s at the University of Frankfurt and became known as the **Frankfurt School**. Two of the most prominent individuals associated with the school were Max Horkheimer, its longtime head, and Theodor Adorno a prolific and cogent theorists. Critical Theory according to Bohman (2005), has a narrow and a broad meaning in philosophy and in the history of the social sciences. “Critical Theory” in the narrow sense according to him, designates several generations of German philosophers and social theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School. According to these theorists, a “critical” theory may be distinguished from a “traditional” theory according to a specific practical purpose: a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human “emancipation from slavery”, acts as a “liberating ... influence”, and works “to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers” of human beings (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 246). This is the purpose of every volunteer activism. In both the broad and the narrow senses, however, as Bohman (2005) has explained, a critical theory provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms.

Critical Theory in the narrow sense according to Bohman (2005), has had many different aspects and quite distinct historical phases that cross several generations, from the effective start of the Institute for Social Research in the years 1929–1930, which saw the arrival of the Frankfurt

School philosophers and an inaugural lecture by Horkheimer, to the present. Its distinctiveness as a philosophical approach that extends to ethics, political philosophy, and the philosophy of history is most apparent when considered in light of the history of the philosophy of the social sciences. Critical Theorists have long sought to distinguish their aims, methods, theories, and forms of explanation from standard understandings in both the natural and the social sciences. Instead, they have claimed that social inquiry ought to combine rather than separate the poles of philosophy and the social sciences: explanation and understanding, structure and agency, regularity and normativity. While Critical Theory is often thought of narrowly as referring to the Frankfurt School that begins with Horkheimer and Adorno and stretches to Marcuse and Habermas, any philosophical approach with similar practical aims could be called a “critical theory,” including feminism, critical race theory, and some forms of post-colonial criticism or volunteer activism. In the following, Critical Theory when capitalized refers only to the Frankfurt School. All other uses of the term are meant in the broader sense and thus not capitalized. When used in the singular, “a critical theory” is not capitalized, even when the theory is developed by members of the Frankfurt School in the context of their overall project of Critical Theory.

It follows from Horkheimer's definition that a critical theory is adequate only if it meets three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. That is, it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation. For Horkheimer, a capitalist society could be transformed only by becoming more democratic, to make it such that “all conditions of social life that are controllable by human beings depend on real consensus” in a rational society (Horkheimer, 1972, pp. 249-250).

The focus on democracy as the location for cooperative, practical and transformative activity according to Bohman (2005) continues today in the work of Jürgen Habermas, as does the attempt to determine the nature and limits of “real democracy” in complex, pluralistic, and globalizing societies.

In the first instance, Critical Theory according to Bohman (2005), presents a viable alternative for social and political philosophy today. Second, Bohman (2005) considered its core normative theory-its relation to its transformation of a Kantian ethics of autonomy into a conception of freedom and justice in which democracy and democratic ideals play a central role (Horkheimer 1993, p. 22; Horkheimer 1972, p. 203).

This theory is relevant to this study, because for instance, as Horkheimer and Adorno were openly skeptical that high culture could or should be communicated through mass media, the high level of censorship by the government in Nigeria today compels volunteers in activism for vulnerable groups to employ the digital media whose spaces are freer to disseminate the messages of democratic and social engagement. The Frankfurt School has been criticized along with other forms of traditional humanism for being too elitist and paternalistic. Similarly, although I do not in this paper, see the traditional mass media such as the radio, television,

newspapers, magazines, etc. to be “bad” means of disseminating messages of volunteer activism, the preference of the digital media is based on their ease or access and use.

Public Sphere Theory

Public Sphere is another theory relevant to this study. It was developed by James Bohman in 2005. It is predicated upon the assumption that when the institutional alternatives implicitly address a different public than is currently constituted by evolving institutional practice and its consequences, the public may act indirectly and self-referentially by forming a new public with which the institutions must interact. Similarly, as assumed in this paper, volunteer activism designed to interface and bring about democratic participation by vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria because they constitute a different public in a way, can use selected digital media for civic engagement. This interaction initiates a process of democratic renewal in which publics organise and are organised by new emerging institutions with a different alternative set of political possibilities. Of course, this is a difficult process: “to form itself the public has to break existing political forms; this is hard to do because these forms are themselves the regular means for instituting political change” (Dewey 1927b, 255) cited in Bohman (2005). This sort of innovative process describes the emergence of those national and transnational publics that are indirectly affected by the new sorts of authoritative institutions brought about by managing “deregulation” of freedom of expression and information dissemination in the so-called global village. This account of democratic learning and innovation seems not to be limited by the scope of the institutions, even as the potential for domination also increases under current arrangements.

What sort of public sphere could play such a normative role? In differentiated modern societies (that is, societies divided into multiple economic and social spheres such as markets, a state, civil society (volunteer activism) and so on), one role of the distinctive communication that goes on in the public sphere is to raise topics or express concerns that cut across social spheres: it not only circulates information about the state and the economy, but it also establishes a forum for advocacy in which the boundaries of these spheres are crossed, primarily in citizen's demands for mutual equality. This is necessary because the public sphere has become less socially and culturally homogeneous and more internally differentiated than its early modern form (Habermas 1989) and as stipulated by the idea contained in the libertarian press philosophy. Instead of relying on the intrinsic features of the medium to expand communicative interaction, volunteer activism for vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria can select certain digital media for democratic and social engagement through networks that are not only national, but global in scope. This kind of communication is aimed at integrating the vulnerable people into the national and global public sphere. The creation of such a civil society in such a general public sphere, according to Bohman (2005), is a slow and difficult process that requires the highly reflexive forms of communication and boundary crossing and democratic engagement typical of developed public spheres and this is where the digital media come in handy. Through the digital media, voluntary

organisations can develop the reason to cross and negotiate boundaries and differences between persons, groups, and cultures within Nigeria and beyond.

In such boundary-crossing publics, the speed, scale, and intensity of communicative interaction facilitated by networks such as the Internet according to Bohman (2005), provides a positive and enabling condition for democratic deliberation and thus creates a potential space for inclusive democracy in favour of vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria. However, if the way to do this is through disaggregated networks (such as the digital media) rather than mass media, then we cannot in the thinking of Bohman (2005), expects that the global public sphere will no longer exhibit features of the form of the national public sphere. Rather, it will be a public of publics, of disaggregated networks embedded in a variety of institutions rather than an assumed unified national public sphere alone.

Methodology

The study adopted ex-post facto research design. The population of the study was digital media voluntary. activists for vulnerable groups in Nigeria, particularly, those using digital media platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc for voluntary activism for vulnerable/minority groups for democratic and social engagement across Nigeria in an online survey as well as leaders of vulnerable groups in Nigeria. This population was chosen following the statistics of the registration of voluntary groups with the Corporate Affairs Commission in 2018 and the cluster groups affiliated to the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD) in Nigeria. The selection was done through the census sampling technique and purposive sampling approach employed by the researchers Five research questions and two hypotheses were adopted for the study at .05 level of significance. The construction of the instrument for data collection was carried out by the researchers and validated by experts in tests and measurements. The instrument was used for data collection. The instrument named **Assessment of Selected Digital Media Usage and Public Perception of Volunteer Activism for Vulnerable Groups in Nigeria** was a 20-item questionnaire on a four point likert scale option. The response options were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The reliability of the instrument was carried out using Cronbach Alpha with correlation coefficient of .79. The data was analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient and Anova.

Result and Discussion

In this section each hypothesis is re-stated in the null form. The variables are identified and the result of the statistical analysis carried out to test the hypotheses are presented and interpreted. The .05 level of significance was used for the statistical testing of each hypothesis.

Hypothesis One

Public perception of the volunteer activism in the selected digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements does not significantly influence fund raising, advocacy towards changing current government policy and the giving of a voice to vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is Public Perception in selected digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements, while the dependent variable is fund raising, advocacy towards changing current government policy and the giving of a voice to vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was considered the most appropriate statistical technique employed to test this hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between public perception of volunteer activism in the selected digital media used for social and democratic engagements and fund raising, advocacy towards changing current government policy and the giving of a voice to vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria; N=35)

Variable	X	SD	$\sum x \sum y$	$\sum x^2 \sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r
	16.03	2.59	561	1342	15120	0.70*
fund raising, advocacy towards changing current government policy and the giving of a voice to vulnerable/ minority groups in Nigeria	16.85	2.53	590	1461		

* Significant at .05 level, critical $r=.349$, $df = 33$

The result of analysis as presented in Table 1 reveals that the calculated r-value of 0.70 is greater than the critical r-value of .349 at .05 level of significance with 33 degree of freedom. The result of the analysis is significant since the calculated value is higher than the critical value. With this result the null hypotheses was rejected. This therefore means that there is a significant relationship between Public perception of the volunteer activism in the selected digital media used for social and democratic engagements and the success or failure of fund raising, advocacy towards changing current government policy and the giving of a voice to vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

The selected digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements do not play significant role in the involvement of vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria. The independent variable in this hypothesis is The selected digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements with three dimensions (high usage of selected digital media, average usage of selected digital media and low usage of selected digital media); while the dependent variable is involvement of vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria who need to

participate in governance following the democratic and social engagement. To test this hypothesis one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. One way analysis of variance of influence of the selected digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements (N=35)

Digital Media Usage	N	X	SD		
Low-1	9	16.17	3.12		
Average-2	16	16.96	2.05		
High-3	10	17.32	2.32		
Total	35	16.85	2.53		
Source of variance	SS	df	Ms	F	Sig of f.
Between group	6.35	2	3.17	4.70*	.000
Within group	21.62	32	0.68		
Total	27.97	34			

*Significant at the 0.05 level, critical F=3.00, df=2,34.

The result of Table 2 reveals that the calculated F-value of 4.70 is higher than the critical F-value of 3.32 at .05 level of significance with 2 and 34 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis that the selected digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements do not play significant role in the involvement of vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria was rejected. This result therefore implies that, the selected digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements significantly influence the involvement of vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria. Since the digital media significantly influence involvement of the vulnerable groups in Nigeria, a further pattern of influence was employed using Fishers' Least Significant Difference (LSD) multiple comparison analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Fishers' Least Significant Difference (LSD) multiple comparison analysis of the influence of Selected Digital Media Usage on the involvement of Vulnerable Groups in Nigeria

Level of Digital Media Usage	N	Low 9	Average 16	High 10
Low	9	16.17 ^a	-0.79 ^b	-1.12
Average	16	-2.31 ^c	16.96	-0.33
High	10	-2.98	-1.00	17.29
MSW=0.68				

* Significant at .05 level, critical t=1.96, df=33.

a = Group means are placed along the diagonal

b = Difference between Group means are placed above diagonal

c = Fishers' t-values are placed below the diagonal

* = Significance at 0.05 level (critical t=2.04).

The significant Fishers' t-value of -2.31 indicates that vulnerable group members are involved when level of selected digital media usage is high (mean =17.29) is significantly different from

vulnerable group members get involved in democratic and social engagements when the level of selected digital media usage is average (mean = 16.96). The significant Fishers' t-value of -2.98 indicates that vulnerable group members exposed to the selected digital media usage is either High (mean = 17.29) or average (mean = 16.96) are significantly different from vulnerable groups and members when the level of selected digital media usage is low (mean = 16.17).

Discussion of Findings

This section is concerned with the discussion of findings of the hypotheses directing the study. The discussion is presented hypothesis by hypothesis.

The result of the first hypothesis revealed that there is a significant relationship between public perception of selected digital media usage in democratic and social engagements and their benefit of the vulnerable groups and their members exposed to the digital media. The findings of this hypothesis is in line with the views of Dewar (2004) who noted that Digital media have a significant broad and complex impact on society and culture.

He further noted that combined with the Internet and personal computing, digital media connect people in ways never before possible, enabling users to maintain friendships across time and distance. They enable those who are socially isolated or somehow set apart from their immediate physical community to connect with like-minded or like-situated people. Digital media also facilitate interaction across social, economic, cultural, political, religious and ideological boundaries, allowing for enhanced understanding.

Many people access social media platforms which are part of digital media to express empathy and receive support from friends and family, including in times of emotional distress. This enriches people's relationships and their ability to stay in touch, and the ability of friends and family to identify and help loved ones in need. However, while some key informants in in-depth interview perceive the digital media to be powerful, disagreed significantly with the views of Dewar (2004). For instance, Akinola in a personal communication with the researcher (2019) said:

The public in Nigeria sees the social media as informal almost to the point of being trivial. The intensive government campaigns of the last few years sometimes seen as propaganda messages, have also made people to consider information on the social media as fake. Thus, volunteer activists for voluntary groups do not often succeed in gathering the kind of public reaction to issues of advocacy, marginalization and oppression for which they wish to influence change. The prevalence of younger people as users of social media also makes the older citizens view such media as young people's domains.

The result of the second hypothesis revealed that selected digital media usage in democratic and social engagement by voluntary activists, significantly influence vulnerable groups who are exposed to the digital media. The findings of this hypothesis is in line with the study by Bell

(2015) which indicated that adolescents' use of social networking sites enhances existing friendships and the quality of relationships for those who use digital social networks to deal with social challenges. Those who use online social networks to avoid social difficulties, however, tend to exhibit reduced well-being. (<https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/2401429/technology.pdf>). On how the public perceive the use of digital media for volunteer activism in Nigeria, Umo in a personal communication (2019) while acknowledging the power of the digital media in volunteer activism expressed some reservation as follows:

The public perception of the social media has reduced its efficacy as a means of disseminating “serious” information. Physical demonstrations and rallies are still more effective tools of gathering popular support. However, the social media have become a powerful for intra-group communication as people who share common interests usually set up a use group on which they communicate.

On how selected digital media usage can help activists to influence public perception towards fund raising for volunteer activism for vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria, Babson in a personal communication with the researcher (2019) stated that the selected digital media usage help activists to influence public perception towards fund raising for volunteer activism for vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria. He averred that the digital media reflect the society itself. Political and policy issues are not popular in the digital media, but fundraising campaigns attract much attention. Most fundraising campaigns on the digital media have been successful, probably it is easier for people to give money than to commit their time and energy to a cause.

On how the digital media are used by volunteers for social and democratic engagements for vulnerable/minority groups in shaping the public perception for advocacy towards changing existing government policies in Nigeria, Olayi in a personal communication with the researcher (2019) expressed the opinion that volunteer activists today in many parts of Nigeria create blogs or pages of digital media on which they consistently post information towards sensitizing the public to the issues of interest. He further stated that despite recent operators' reduction of the number of exposures one can get on any of the social media, sympathizers still get information from the activists. He pointed out that sometimes, even the traditional media like the radio, television, newspapers and magazines use contents obtained from social media. Matthew (2019) further said, “Example is the 2019 case of a senator molesting a female shop attendant. The campaign started on the social media but government attention and desired change came only after it was taken up by the traditional media.”

On what role the selected digital media used by voluntary activists for social and democratic engagements play in the involvement of vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria, Akinola in a personal communication with the researcher (2019) remarked:

The selected digital media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) provide a platform for intragroup discussions, helping to forge group ideologies and action plans. Hence, a voluntary activist who may not belong to a vulnerable community can easily engage the members of that community on

areas of interest and form an action plan for a social change campaign with them even across geographical zones. This fosters national-level actions such as rallies and protests. So the digital media are a nursery bed for forging change advocacy movements.

Conclusion

This study was intended to assess the use of selected Digital Media in democratic and social engagements of vulnerable/minority groups in Nigeria and how they fair and how the public perceive and subsequently provide the space to accommodate them. The theories of Critical Thinking and the Public Sphere served as theoretical framework.

Five specific objectives, five research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Ex-post facto research design was adopted for the study. A sample of 35 volunteers were selected through census technique for the assessment of digital media usage for volunteer activism for vulnerable groups while 12 key informants selected through purposive sampling technique from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria were selected to determine the public perception of volunteer activism for vulnerable groups. The instruments for data collection consisting of a questionnaire and interview guide were validated by experts in tests and measurements. The reliability estimate of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha with the coefficient range of .72 to .79. The data were analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient and Anova. The result of the analysis indicated that there is a significant relationship between the use of digital media for democratic activism and participation of vulnerable/ minority groups in democratic/social engagements. The result also revealed that digital media usage significantly influenced public perception of the engagement of the vulnerable/ minority groups as well as the level of involvement of vulnerable groups in governance.

A rising from the findings, it can be concluded that the digital media cannot be excluded from the democratic engagement of vulnerable/minority groups by volunteer activists. This is because the digital media have become part and parcel of communication culture today.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations have been made:

1. Volunteers should increasingly employ the use of digital media for the democratic and social engagements of vulnerable groups along with rallies and demonstrations.
2. Sponsors of volunteer activism should increase the budget for digital media use and expand its usage since the degree of their influence on vulnerable groups is dependent on the level of their usage.
3. Volunteer activists should introduce sustained education of vulnerable groups on the technology and use of digital media to enhance their access to the digital media and their technologies.

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