

Social Media and Agricultural Revitalisation in Nigeria: Living Beyond Oil

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ABSTRACT

Before the discovery of oil in Nigeria, agriculture was the backbone of the Nigerian economy, but it has now been completely abandoned. Attention has then been shifted to oil and its accruing revenue. This has not only brought about food scarcity in the country but also created poverty and unemployment. The need, therefore, arises to reorient Nigerians and relevant stakeholders to revisit the agricultural sector. The study examined the usefulness and effectiveness of utilising social media in reaching out to farmers in the rural area of the Central Senatorial District of Delta State, Nigeria. Data was collected using a well-structured questionnaire and quantitatively analysed using multiple regressions, descriptive statistics, and the mean. Also, the agenda-setting theory, whose central concern is the transfer of topics deemed important by the media from the media agenda to that of the public, believing that the level of media coverage a topic receives affects how relevant it is to the general public, was adopted. The result showed that farmers in the study area can be influenced by the media and reoriented if the issue at stake is given prominence. This stems from the fact that most of the respondents use internet-enabled phones and have access to information on social media. It was recommended, among others, that all stakeholders get involved in the revitalisation of the agricultural sector for food sufficiency and self-dependence.

Keywords: Agriculture, Reorientation, Revitalisation, Self-Dependence, Social Media.

Introduction

Ever since the discovery of significant amount of crude oil in 1956 at Oloibiri, in present-day Bayelsa State, Niger Delta of Nigeria (Agbaeze & Ukoha, 2018; Steyn, 2009; Udosen *et al.*, 2009), there has been a tremendous shift from agriculture to excessive dependence on oil by the Nigerian government and the citizens. The once agrarian nation has abandoned the agricultural sector for oil exploration and exportation, which it now mainly depends on. Sayne and Hruby in their report attest that crude oil is Nigeria's biggest source of revenue, "generating 61 percent of total government revenues in 2013" (2016, p. 5). The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Companies (OPEC) (2021) corroborates Sayne and Hruby as it attests that the oil and gas industry in Nigeria contributes around 10% of the country's GDP, and petroleum exports account for about 86.5% of all exports. Apart from crude oil, which is now heavily dependent on as a major source, if not the only source, of revenue for the country's economy

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(Ebimobowei, 2022; Madugba *et al.*, 2016). Nigeria is endowed with other mineral resources, amongst which are tin, iron ore, and coal, as well as lead, zinc, limestone, niobium, and arable land. However, minimal attention is paid to these other God-given resources, even the free, vast arable lands meant for agricultural purposes.

The Nigerian economy once relied solely on agriculture prior to the discovery of crude oil. Nigeria produced and exported raw agricultural resources to other continents. Without equivocation, Prothero (1955) noted that Nigeria was essentially an agricultural country, where the majority of her citizens worked on and lived off the land. According to him, Nigeria's total value of exports in cocoa, oil palm products, groundnuts, cotton, hides and skins in 1952 was 10,464, with a total value income of £130,358. Thus, there was abundance of food, both for human consumption and industrial use. However, times have changed. There is insufficient food production; the price of the little available has skyrocketed beyond the reach of the common man. Hunger has, therefore, continued to take its toll, leading to an increase in crime and insecurity. It is therefore imperative to revisit the status quo before the oil boom and reduce overdependence on oil revenue, especially in the rural areas, where agriculture can play a pivotal role.

Kimaro and Towo (2015) argue that agriculture plays a significant role in the economies of the majority of developing nations worldwide. It is deemed an effective way of alleviating hunger, starvation, and poverty and has remained a top and extensively profitable business sector in virtually all countries of the world (Adelanke, 2019; Amunga & Bayo, 2014). Aside from its profitability, Agwu, Nwankwo, and Anyanwu (2014) stress its employment potential as well as its contribution to the economic growth of the Nigerian nation. Corroborating the above, Alabi and Nnaji (2021, p. 99) add that "Agriculture possesses the greatest potential for playing a leading role in making Nigeria a self-reliant nation."

As vital as the agriculture sector is, it has been relegated to the background as a result of over dependence on revenue from oil production, making the sector moribund and uninteresting. There is, consequently, a need to revive this sector. In this regard, the mass media have a crucial role to play. Hence, this study focuses on social media utilisation and agricultural revitalisation in Nigeria as a way of living beyond excessive dependence on oil revenue in the Delta Central Senatorial District.

Delta Central Senatorial District is located in the oil-producing territory of Delta State, Nigeria. Its size is approximated at 3,700km² (Ejemeyovwi, 2019). Before the discovery of oil in this area, the occupants were predominantly farmers, growing vegetables, yams, maize, and cassava. Although subsistence farming still exists in the region, it is observed that, most of the inhabitants have abandoned farming in search of white-collar jobs in the oil industries. Equally observed is that the level of awareness and the use of social media as tools in assessing information in agriculture are still in their embryo among rural farmers in the senatorial district. Thus, there is need for sensitisation, especially of the rural dwellers, towards rethinking and taking action geared towards food security in the region in particular and the nation in general. One cannot deny the obvious fact that farmers in rural areas are primarily responsible for producing food for human consumption as well as raw materials for export and manufacturing industries (Mbah *et al.*, 2016). One is, however, curious to ask: are social media popular amongst the rural dwellers in this region? If they are, can they significantly influence their decision-taking regarding agriculture reforms?

This study's main goal is to determine the extent to which farmers in Nigeria's Delta State's Central Senatorial District use social media to evaluate agricultural information. Other goals comprise the following:

- i. A description of the socioeconomic traits of farmers in the study area;
- ii. Identification of the social media platforms used in the study area by farmers to obtain agricultural information;
- iii. Assessment of farmers' awareness of the use of social media platforms for information gathering; and,

- iv. Assessment of respondents' challenges in using social media in the study area.

Hypothesis

It is more likely that there is no significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and the level of social media usage.

Theoretical Framework

For the revitalisation of the agricultural sector, there is a need to persuade the Niger Delta indigenes to engage in farming and achieve marginal growth towards self-sufficiency. Constant information dissemination is crucial, as it facilitates communication among stakeholders, acts as a way to identify trends, and helps to direct decision-making (Kalusopa, 2005). Flowing from the above, the agenda-setting theory of the media becomes germane to this study. The media, mainstream or modern, as systems of mass communication, are known for their persuasive power. In the agenda-setting theory, salient issues or topics are emphasised by the media for public persuasion. Thus, the media become agents of propaganda. This theory, which gained popularity in 1972 after McCombs and Shaw published their research, *The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media* (1972), has become popular amongst media scholars, who research the effect of the media on society. The main concern of this theory is the transfer of topic, which the media deem important from the media agenda to the public agenda, and that the amount of media coverage a topic receives affects how important it is perceived to be by the general public (McCombs, 2005). In other words, people will see certain topics as being less important than others if the news media do not devote coverage to them (Wanta & Wu, 1992). This proves that, on the one hand, a topic's importance and significance are determined by the public's recurrent exposure to it in the media, and, on the other hand, a topic's ability to gain societal significance is hampered by its lack of exposure to the media. The public is influenced by the media to accept what it accepts, but this does not mean that the media tell its audience what to think; rather, it means that the media draw the public's attention to those important problems that they should consider. According to McCombs *et al.* (2013), the media may be effective in influencing what and how the public thinks about those specific themes.

As noted earlier, the agenda-setting theory has gained popularity in the study of media and communication studies. It has, in recent times, also become important in related academic fields of study, such as the Arts and Humanities and Agricultural Science, where the audience's views, values, emphasis, and priorities can be affected or contributed to by the mass media. In the case of persuading Niger Deltans towards revisiting the status quo before the discovery of oil, for self-sufficiency and the bid to eradicate hunger and poverty in the region, who then will set the agenda for the media to popularise?

This study believes that the onus of agenda-setting rests on the shoulders of the regional governments and extension workers. It is important to revisit the farms for food production as well as educate Niger Delta farmers on the use of modern technologies. Modern media (social media) promise to be effective in this regard, as they have become part of their lives.

Social Media and Agricultural Revitalisation

Information, they say, is power. It is essential in our day-to-day lives. We all need information to be aware of what exists in our environment. A witticism in Nigeria states, "If you are not informed, you are deformed." On a daily basis, the media, in all their various forms, purvey information to the general public, and what they deem necessary, they give prominence. However, the world of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has altered the traditional media paradigm. ICT has given birth to more speedy media of communication. Social media are some of these. Unlike traditional forms of communication, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Pinterest, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, Whatsapp, and LinkedIn, to name a few, are internet-based digital tools used for sharing and debating information (Andres & Woodard, 2013). Also, they are multimedia based, using text, audio, and video, making the information sharing process seamless and enjoyable (Baerenklau, 2005; Young, 2009). Social media are currently faster and more effective ways of

disseminating information in various fields of endeavour (Chan *et al.*, 2020; Lamidi & Gana, 2014); the Agricultural sector inclusive. In the view of Adejo and Opeyemi (2019) the agricultural industry in the majority of emerging nations is becoming more experienced and understanding. It becomes imperative for stakeholders, chiefly Agricultural Extension Workers (AEWs), to key into the world of ICT, especially social media, to engage and educate farmers on how to use modern technology for self-sufficiency. Similarly, the agricultural system of the twenty-first century is becoming more complicated, and farmers' ability to access trustworthy, timely, and relevant information sources is becoming increasingly important to their ability to compete and also help to direct them in decision-making (Kalusopa, 2005).

Since they have been educating farmers using traditional mass media like print, radio, and television as well as communication techniques like farm and home visits, contact farmers, and other means, AEWS have so far remained committed (Olaniyi, 2013). However, the use of these emerging ICTs by agricultural information providers for the benefit of all and especially farmers is then necessary, given that the aforementioned approaches are currently constrained by the evolution of social media. Adejo and Opeyemi (2019) opine that the advent of social media has provided a visible solution to the possible gap between AEWs workers and farmers, who daily need up-to-date information on modern farming techniques to improve productivity. Social media's role in this regard cannot be underestimated in the age of digitisation as they are all important in the transfer of technologies in agriculture (Abuta *et al.*, 2020; Aliyu & Alfred, 2017; Kuria, 2014).

With the advent of the internet and the proliferation of smart phones, having a phone and surfing the net is becoming part and parcel of most rural dwellers' lives, and this makes for easy access to information. With the population of Nigeria estimated at 216,889,751 million as at July 2022 (World Population Review, 2022), and about 204,578,953 telecommunication users (Nigerian Communications Commission, 2022), a sizable population is guaranteed access to timely information, as a remarkable Nigerian population have access to the internet. Hence, communicating agricultural innovations and news to the ever-increasing user population would be faster and easier.

Exposure of Nigerians and Nigerian farmers to modern technologies through the use of social media would invariably grant them access to reliable information from within and around the globe, which could revive interest in agricultural activities, thereby leading to limited dependence on accruing oil revenue that has brought more woes than gains to the nation. The only way to improve agricultural production and lower the unemployment rate in the nation is to engage in agriculture, especially on a large scale. Not only that, Balogun *et al.* (2020), Inegbedion *et al.* (2020), Kuria (2014), and Olorunniyi *et al.* (2022) believe that social media could as well facilitate the marketing of agricultural produce. No doubt, social media are veritable tools in marketing as they help to save time and cost obtaining agricultural information, even, from the comfort of one's home.

This study acknowledges various shades of research on the significance of social media towards improving agricultural standards and output; see Abuta *et al.*, 2020; Balogun *et al.*, 2020; Mamgain *et al.*, 2020; Sayne & Hruby, 2016; White *et al.*, 2014. Flowing from the above, one could hazard that social media can be effective in bridging the ancient gap. Social media are therefore, crucial to the revitalisation of the agricultural sector in Nigeria.

Methodology

Simple random sampling done on a multi-stage basis was used to compose the sample for the study. The population of the Delta Central Senatorial District is estimated to be 2,032,707 people (Ejemeyovwi, 2019). The Delta Agricultural Development Programme (DADP) delineated the state into three Agricultural zones. The study was carried out in the Delta Central Extension Block and respondents were randomly selected from this zone. In the first phase, 30 percent of the Extension Blocks were selected namely, Ughelli North, Ethiope East and Isoko North. The second stage involved the selection of twenty (20) cells from the Extension Blocks, and a third stage involved the selection of four farmers from the selected cells, making a total of 80 farmers. A carefully constructed questionnaire was given to the

respondents to obtain the data. Multiple regressions, descriptive statistics, and the mean were all used to examine the collected data quantitatively

Results and Discussion

Table 1: *Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents*

Age		
Frequency	No of Respondents	Percentage Distribution
21 – 30	30	37.5%
31 – 40	40	50.0%
40 and above	10	12.5%
Total	80	100
Marital Status		
Married	41	51.3%
Single	30	37.5%
Divorced	09	11.2%
Total	80	100
Gender		
Male	27	33.7%
Female	53	66.3%
Total	80	100
Education		
Non formal	08	10.0%
Primary	04	5.0%
Secondary	40	50.0%
Tertiary	28	35.0%
Total	80	100
Farming Experience		
1 – 10	49	61.2%
11 – 20	10	12.5%
21 – 30	18	22.5%
31 – 40	03	3.0%
Total	80	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The findings showed that the majority of responders were aged between 31 and 40 (50.0%). The survey contained more female responders (66.3%). This however had no significant influence on the results. Educationally too, (50.0%) of respondents have a secondary education. Of interest also is that the majority of the respondents' farming experience is 1–10 (61.2%).

Table 2: *Types of social media platforms used by the respondents*

S/n	Social Media Platforms	Yes	No	Total
1.	Facebook	67 (83.7%)	13 (16.3%)	80 (100%)
2.	Twitter	32 (40.0%)	48 (60.0%)	80 (100%)
3.	WhatsApp	65 (81.3%)	15 (18.7%)	80 (100%)
4.	YouTube	27 (33.7%)	53 (31.3%)	80 (100%)
5.	TikTok	25 (31.3%)	55 (68.7%)	80 (100%)
6.	Linkedin	-	80 (100%)	80 (100%)
7.	Digicow	-	80 (100%)	80 (100%)
8.	M. Shamba	-	80 (100%)	80 (100%)
9.	Instagram	25 (31.3.6%)	55 (68.7%)	80 (100%)
10.	Snapchat	15 (18.7%)	65 (81.3%)	80 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The results in the above table revealed an effective use of various social media platforms by the respondents. That Facebook (83.7%) and WhatsApp (81.3%) are more widely deployed attests to the fact that they are more popular with Nigerians and flexible to use. This is consistent with Varner's (2018) claim that social media has given farmers a quick and simple means to communicate with their clients and other farmers in the agricultural industry.

Table 3: Awareness of social media usage in obtaining agricultural information by the respondents

S/n	Items	Fully Aware	Aware	Not Aware	Fully not Aware	Mean	Remark
1.	Are you aware of social media?	(66.7%)	(10.3%)	(23.16%)	-	3.43	Accepted
2.	Are you using social media currently in obtaining agricultural information?	(38.5%)	(28.2%)	(33.3%)	-	3.05	Accepted
3.	Do you prefer in obtaining agricultural information from social media than other channel?	(23.1%)	(15.4%)	(35.0%)	(25.6%)	2.36	Rejected
4.	How often do you use social media in obtaining agricultural information?	-	(56.4%)	(43.6%)	-	2.56	Accepted
5.	To what extent do think agricultural information needs are addressed by social media?	-	(25.6%)	(23.1%)	(51.3%)	2.03	Rejected

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The results revealed that the respondents were aware of social media in obtaining agricultural information, use media in obtaining agricultural instructions and use social media very often in obtaining agricultural information, with a mean value of 3.43, 3.05, and 2.56 respectively. Social media platforms assist in the buying and selling of agricultural products as well as educating and informing farmers about agricultural challenges.

Table 4: *Challenges faced by respondents on the usage of social media*

S/n	Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Remark
1.	Poor network connection	(82.1%)	(17.9%)	-	-	3.82	Accepted
2.	Unreliable information on social media	(53.8%)	(41.0%)	(5.1%)	-	3.48	Accepted
3.	Relevant information not available	(51.3%)	(38.5%)	-	(10.3%)	3.31	Accepted
4.	Costly internet data.	(25.5%)	(69.2%)	-	(5.1%)	3.15	Accepted
5.	Less trust concerning E-buying	(20.5%)	(48.7%)	(5.1%)	(25.6%)	2.64	Accepted
6.	Less trust concerning E-selling	(17.9%)	(33.3%)	(5.1%)	(43.6%)	2.26	Rejected
7	Illiteracy	(35.9%)	(41.0%)	(2.6%)	(20.5%)	2.92	Accepted
8	Social media facilities not available.	(15.4%)	(43.6%)	(5.1%)	(35.9%)	2.38	Rejected
9	Lack of interest	(30.8%)	(38.5%)	(15.4%)	(15.4%)	2.85	Accepted
10	Financial difficulties	(20.5%)	(74.4%)	(5.1%)	-	3.15	Accepted
11	Lack of awareness on the usage of social media	(12.8%)	(59.0%)	(10.3%)	(17.9%)	2.67	Accepted
12	Power failure	(48.7%)	(30.8%)	(10.3%)	(10.3%)	3.18	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Flowing from the above, poor network, unreliable information, relevant information not available, costly internet data, less trust in e-buying, illiteracy, lack of interest, financial difficulties, lack of awareness of social media usage, and power failure were the major challenges the respondents faced in the use of social media in assessing agricultural information, with mean values of 3.82, 3.48, 3.31, 3.15, 2.64, 2.92, 3.85, 3.15, 2.67, and 3.18, in that order.

Testing of Hypothesis

It is more likely that there is no significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and the level of awareness of social media usage in obtaining agricultural information.

Table 5: *Level of awareness of social media usage to obtain agricultural information*

Variable	Un-standardised coefficient			
	B	Std. Error	t-value	Sig.
Gender	2.424	.736	3.296	.002
Age	.209	.559	.374	.711
Marital status	-.028	.606	-.046	.964
Level of education	1.662	.383	4.337	.000
Family experience	-.629	.569	-1.106	.277

$R^2 = 501$, $R = .708^a$

The R^2 value 501 means approximately 50.1% of the various level of awareness of social media usage in obtaining agricultural information were explained by the independent variables (age, gender, education level, marital status, and farming experience). However, gender and level of education were statistically significant with ($t = 3.296$, $p < 0.05$, $t = 4.337$, $p < 0.05$). Age, marital status and farming experience were not statistically significant, age having a positive coefficient while marital status and farming experience have a negative coefficient.

Furthermore, the study revealed that rural farmers can be informed about agricultural and farming activities just as they can be influenced in their decision-making if the proper agenda is set on their media of information. That is, if the need to revisit the status quo before the discovery of oil in Nigeria is given prominence on social media by relevant stakeholders, the message will get to the target audience, the rural dwellers. This corroborates Kalusopa's (2005) view that constant information dissemination is crucial, as it facilitates communication among stakeholders, acts as a way to identify trends, and helps to direct decision-making. The birth of social media has provided a visible solution to the possible gap between Extension Workers and farmers, who daily need up-to-date information on modern farming techniques to improve productivity (Adejo & Opeyemi, 2019). Majority of the rural dwellers/farmers have smart phones with which they access information on social media platforms. This validates Abuta *et al.*, (2020); Balogun *et al.*, (2020); Mamgain *et al.*, (2020); Sayne and Hruby, (2016), and White *et al.*, (2014), who hold views on the significance of social media in improving agricultural standards and output. With proper agenda-setting, therefore, the agricultural sector in Nigeria can be revitalised.

Conclusion

The study discussed social media and agricultural revitalisation as a way of living beyond oil in Nigeria, with a focus on the Delta Central Senatorial District. It was argued that since the discovery of oil in Nigeria, emphasis shifted from agricultural production to excessive reliance on revenue from oil by the government and citizens. Everybody wants to earn from the oil sector, thereby abandoning other relevant sectors such as the agricultural sector, which once served as a source of revenue to the nation. This neglect has led to a sharp drop in agricultural produce, with attendant hunger and loss of revenue to the government. The relevance of agriculture to any nation cannot be underestimated. No matter the source of a nation's income, without agriculture engagement or farmers, such a nation is bound to be draped in hunger and food insufficiency. This sector has been unduly neglected by the Nigerian government and citizens. It needs a revival. This pilot study on the reinvigoration of the agricultural sector to deemphasise overreliance on oil revenue using social media for reorientation in the Delta Central Senatorial District of Delta State, Nigeria, showed a degree of effectiveness as most respondents use smart phones and have access to information on social media, indicating that they can be influenced by the media for reorientation if the issue at stake is given prominence by all stakeholders, although there are some inherent challenges. It is recommended that the social media be engaged in emphasising the importance of agriculture to all, especially rural dwellers. The government, through its agricultural extension programme, should improve on extension services to all and sundry. As earlier noted, this is a pilot research that can be repeated for comparative purposes in other regions of the state and the nation.

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Conflict of Interest

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