

## An empirical investigation of social media and youth empowerment

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The flight of global unemployment is frightening especially with more jobs being rendered redundant due to the advent of Information Communication Technology notably the internet. Despite this ugly trend, stakeholders are optimistic that the internet if effectively applied would create more job opportunities. Anchored on Uses and Gratification theory of communication, the study is an inquiry into specific areas of social media economic empowerment among users. In the method section, mixed method design which involved descriptive survey and factorial design was employed using descriptive analysis and ANOVA statistical tools. The sample population was 143 social media users in Anambra State whose ages ranged from 23-37 years. The participants were sampled from a pool of social media users using purposive and convenient technique. The result revealed that youths' awareness on the empowerment potential of social media is high, while indicating that majority (65.7%) of the youths are attracted by social media by its leisure appeal and they use it for chatting, connecting friends and leisure compared to 34.3% of youths whose use it for learning, empowerment and opportunities. Furthermore, significant differences were observed between males and females on social media user appeal. It is recommended that youths be mentored on the empowerment potentials of social media by the successful leaders in the industry.

**KEYWORDS:** *information and communication technology, internet, leisure, social media, unemployment, youth empowerment*

### **Introduction**

Year in and out, the annual global job losses hit new highs especially since the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) notably the internet which birthed social media (Agbawe 2018). Currently, there is a renewed concern regarding the technological advancement that, it displaces much of workforce and consequently create widespread unemployment, human hardship, and social disruption (McClure 2018). Some economists have advanced the argument that government must act to avert the loss of jobs that are likely to be replaced by technology (Van Roy, Vértésy, and Vivarelli 2018). However, other authors have argued that opposition to technology

stems from a lack of understanding of the economic usefulness of technology (Peters 2017) and such arguments also believe that technology will help to deepen job creation and youth empowerment. This can only be possible if the contribution of technology to economic development of the new technology is diffused and applied. Diffusion results from the individual's decisions in the exploitation of the new technology; such is what social media offers.

As much as the proliferation of ICT created job redundancy in some aspects, considering the ease and speed of ICT which replaced hitherto some human jobs; it has equally opened larger opportunities for part and fulltime paid employment (McClure 2018). Harrah (2016) contends that more than job creation, the presence of the internet has specially opened an unlimited window of entrepreneurial activity large enough to empower any enterprising youth. This unique dimension of ICT got more prospective with the advent of social media interaction in the digital space. Many youths are finding it more convenient to exist and reach out to the world in the digital world than they do within their physical space. In reality, a number of youths have been able to catch in on this presence for empowerment. Many youths have their blogs through which they market their own products (things they can do in exchange for a pay) and services which the public can subscribe to. Yet, others have equally taken advantage of the paid services of leading social networking sites such as Youtube to market their videos while the networking sites pay

them a certain amount of money based on the number of visitors traffic they bring to their networks, websites or Youtube.

Going by the unlimited opportunities provided by the ICT, perhaps there will be more empowerment among youths who utilize and take advantages of the potency of ICT especially social media to create profitable ventures. Thus, this study intends to examine the impact of social media on youth empowerment with hindsight on whether its users' have taken advantage of its windows of entrepreneurship.

In view of the above, the following objectives will guide the study:

- i. To ascertain youths' knowledge regarding the prospects of social media usage in Anambra State
- ii. To ascertain youths' appeal towards social media usage as tools for empowerment
- iii. To evaluate gender differences in social media leisure and empowerment appeal among youths in Anambra State.

## **Review of Literature**

### ***Information and Communication Technology (ICT)***

The evolution of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) especially the internet gave birth to the social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Badoo, Wechat, Instagram, Youtube, WhatsApp, etc. Social media networks are platforms or sites that facilitate the building of

social relationships among people of different races and provide opportunities for them to share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections (Brynjolfsson & McAfee 2011). Social network services also consist of a representation of each user's social connections, and a variety of additional services (Chaudhry 2014).

Odi (2013) contends that social media is the medium to socialize as well as market and today, the plethora of social media networks are among the finest opportunities available to organizational marketers in their bids to connect with existing and prospective customers. Social networks are contents created online by people using highly scalable and accessible communication technologies available under various digital gadgets like smart phones, notebook, palmtops, multi-media player etc. (Samuel & Joe 2016). It represents how people discover, read and share news, information, contents, products and services. Social network applications provide users with new forms of empowerment and means of information sharing as it bridges the gap and physical barrier that exist in reaching out to the global community (Mahwish, Wajahat, Shazia, Hummaira & Nadia 2017). As much as it has become a strong tool for socialization and reaching out to people; many youths have taken keen interest and advantage in it to create a market share for financial rewards by attracting followers and subscribers and linking them as customers to valuable range of information, products and services which ordinarily would have taken more resources to access and find.

### ***Social Media and Empowerment***

Social media is influencing employment both as an industry that creates jobs and as a tool that empowers workers (users) to access new forms of work, in new and more flexible ways (Vein 2013). According to Vein (2013) the emerging ICT-enabled employment opportunities because countries around the world are looking to create more good jobs, which have positive economic and social implications for workers and for society. As regards "connecting to work," The new policy noted that Information and Communication Technologies could help expand employment opportunities and thus identified three global drivers responsible for the increase in ICT-related jobs worldwide:

1. **Greater connectivity** – more than 120 countries now have over 80 percent market penetration of mobile telephones
2. **Digitization of more aspects of work** – today, telecommuting and outsourcing have become standard business practices globally

3. **More globalized skills** – India and the Philippines have become major outsourcing hubs thanks to their English language skills, and other countries are targeting the sector for future growth (Vein 2013).

Social media enabled by various ICTs is providing new avenues for job creation that could help tackle global unemployment (Raja 2013). For instance, the development of the mobile phone applications industry has created new opportunities for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A firm that provides a digital application to the Apple app store, for example, gains access to over 500 million app store account holders. Social media connect people to jobs. Online employment marketplaces are helping an estimated 12 million people worldwide find work by connecting them with employers globally. Babajob in India, Duma and M-Kazi in Kenya, and Souktel in the Middle East and North Africa are examples of job search services using internet-based and mobile tools. Such services empower workers by making labor markets more transparent and inclusive; for instance, Souktel targets low-income and marginalized communities (Raja 2013).

To maximize the positive impact of ICTs on employment, the World Bank in Vein (2013) recommends that policymakers pay attention to five enabling systems, adapting the mix as needed to the country context:

1. **Human capital systems:** A labor pool with appropriate ICT skills, and the awareness and soft skills that give competitive advantage in the labor market.
2. **Infrastructure systems:** Ubiquitous connectivity to ICT; access to electricity and transport; infrastructure to support innovation and adoption of technology by SMEs.
3. **Social systems:** Networks of trust and recognition for workers and employers, social safety nets, and measures to minimize possible negative outcomes of ICT-enabled employment.
4. **Financial systems:** Efficient and accountable systems to ensure timely payments; and access to finance to support innovation and entrepreneurship.
5. **Regulatory systems:** An enabling environment that creates employment opportunities and increases labor market flexibility while protecting the rights of workers.

Guided by these principles, the evolution of ICT which created social media made the social media the ideal cloud society where people of diverse backgrounds can meet and interact and offer services and products without boundaries and discrimination. Such is the potential of social media in empowering youths who take unique advantage of the social circle to offer services to their followers and subscribers or people in their contacts.

## Prospects and Challenges of Social Media

As good as the evolution of the ICT has been, there have been also prospects and challenges.

**Prospects:** Social media is a significant media platform to disseminate information considering the huge number of people in using most prominent social media platforms. For instance, Facebook, is the largest social media platform in the world with more than 2.4 billion users while other social media platforms including Youtube and WhatsApp also have more than one billion users each. Amita(2016) contends that with the population of the world at 7.7 billion, at least, 3.5 billion people are always online at any point. These numbers are huge in terms of how viral a message or information can be shared and for advertisement and blogging.

Ambrose and Catherine (2013) believe that social media can play very significant roles in empowering its users especially youths in various ways; thus, social networking sites have become an important part of any youth's life. Ambrose and Catherine considered that the present era is enriched with social media, networks & ICT and youths are the most vulnerable users. Generally, they use internet mostly for entertainment but now is the time to make them aware about the benefits of technologies and also enlighten them on how to make their contributions to the development of the country (Amita 2016). The social media can be used for political, economic, health, religious and social purposes. Therefore, the economic aspects of different plethora of social media usage of the different plethora of social media platforms available for Nigerian youths, thus:

- i. **Online editors:** Online media is one of the most deep-rooted professions that have been created by the internet and social media. The online market or global community currently needs online communicators with a good command of languages such as English and power of persuasion.
- ii. **Web developers:** With almost every organization and individuals needing to own a website, there is one opportunity for people to offer this service.
- iii. **Data security specialist:** Everyone needs the affirmation that their information on the internet is safe. So that is an open opportunity that having the skills to maneuver the internet to secure intra-coms, websites, blogs among others from online hackers, has created an opportunity.
- iv. **Online training and certification:** Today, formal and informal education can be online. Social media provide an unlimited gateway to educational advancement with available tools as well as promote science and technological growth. Scholars have argued that the internet is the ultimate interactive environment and offers education needed to move from what he described as a teacher-centered approach to learning, to a learner-centered approach. In order words, technology has become a major tool in driving modern learning and education.
- v. **E-marketing:** Social media has significantly more potential than merely serving as a forum for sharing selfies and memes. That potential is something that's been recognized by nearly

every company as an opportunity to help grow their business - many brands even feel 'invisible' without some type of social media presence. In some ways, this is true - social media can be used as a powerful marketing tool by businesses in nearly every type of industry.

- vi.  **Blogging:** Blogging is a discussion or informational website published on the World Wide Web consisting of discrete, often informal diary-style text entries (posts). Posts are typically displayed in reverse chronological order, so that the most recent post appears first, at the top of the web page. It can be hosted by an individual or a group and the bloggers earn money based on the volume of traffic to the site. An example of a successful blogger in Nigeria is Linda Ikeji.
- vii.  **Pay per view and pay as you view and click:** this is an area being explored by many creative people in the internet. It involves creating short videos, Memes and GIFs, and internet users pay for viewing the clips. In turn, the originators are paid heavily.

## Challenges

Despite these bright prospects of social media towards empowerment, it has not been all rosy without challenges. Some of the challenges with social media usage are:

1.  **Addiction:** The research by Chou, Condrón, and Belland (2005) cited in Umeogu and Ojiakor (2014) observed that youths especially students have become obsessed with the internet, besides using it for academic purposes and thus can be said to be addicted to the internet. The reason for the addiction was laid on ease of access and low cost.
2.  **Poor academic performance:** Studies have shown that social media is a huge distraction to students who spend most of their time visiting non educational sites. This becomes challenging as you need to find a balance between maximizing the prospects of social media while guarding against its effect on one's academics (Umeogu & Ojiakor 2014; Olasinde 2014).
3.  **Cyber bullying or online harassment:** Cyber bullying or online harassment is the act of deliberately using digital media to communicate false, embarrassing, or hostile

information about another person. Though not common in Nigeria, it nonetheless takes place among students especially when it comes to dating. This can cause psychosocial outcomes like depression, anxiety and isolation (Amita 2016).

4. **Distractions:** Despite the new line of socioeconomic, educational and technological advancement opportunities opened by the social media, there is the fear that young people (digital natives) are very much distracted by the social media platforms. Agbawe(2018) found out that social media addicts give more than 20% of their daily time schedule to chatting or browsing on social media platform.
5. **Lack of self-control:** There is also the fear of lack of self-control by the young people in the use of social media leading to moral decay, low educational values and unethical behaviors, (Agbawe 2018; Umeogu & Ojiakor 2014).

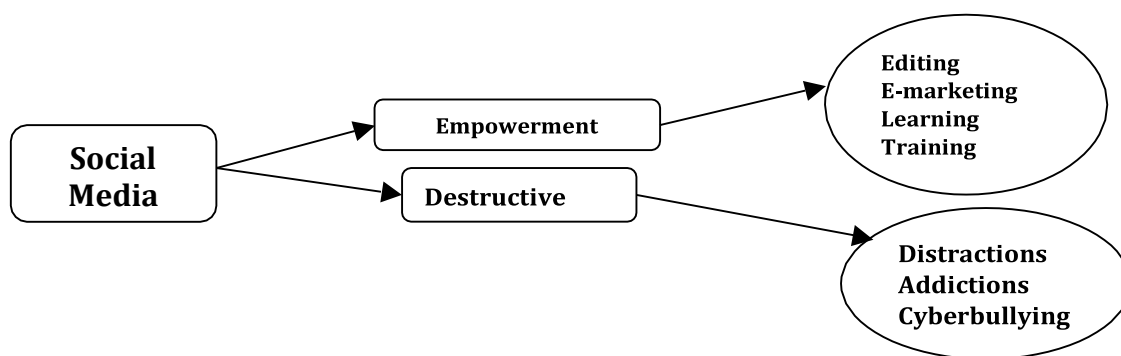
Also, Agbawe's (2018) study on Challenges and Prospects of Social Media on Digital Natives: the Case of Nigeria revealed that the digital natives are actually very much knowledgeable and aware of the social media platforms and that despite the horrendous challenges articulated, social media portends some prospects that could be harnessed to change the shape of society and the way businesses are done. These according to the author are salient points of empowerment. Agbawe's findings further revealed that young people could acquire relevant new skills and become efficient in a multi-task environment in the social media as forms of entrepreneurship and wealth creation.

Equally, findings by Umeogu and Ojiakor (2014) revealed that most times, the youths may be overwhelmed by the negative outcomes of social media use such as: social media addiction, social maladjustment and lack of self-control in the use of social media leading to moral decay, low educational values and unethical behaviors such as online fraud, promiscuous behavior, crimes and other e-related vices.

## Framework

### a. Conceptual

Figure 1: Social media empowerment and destructive model depicting aspects of social media that could empower users and inherent dangers that could also destroy users



Source: Authors, 2022.

The diagrammatic representation conceptualizes that the users of social media are usually pulled by the empowerment or destructive aspects of social media which is dependent on the aims and mindset of the user.

### **b. Theoretical**

The study was anchored on Uses and Gratifications (U and G) theory of Social Media which emphasized that gratifications or benefits of media attract and hold audiences to various types of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs (Ancu & Cozma 2009). Whilst researchers traditionally tended to emphasize the effects of media exposure on audiences, U and G theory espouses the need to consider what people do with media (LaRose & Eastin 2004; Ruggiero 2000). In this perspective, the perceived benefits and gratification which social media serve is a strong determining factor for youth's usage. As depicted in the conceptual framework, this could be destructive or empowerment. Such motives sustain the drive in the use of social media.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses will guide the study:

- i. Youths in Anambra State are aware of the empowerment prospects of social media usage.
- ii. Youths in Anambra State use social media more for its leisure appeal than its empowerment prospects.

There will be significant gender difference in social media leisure and empowerment appeals among youths in Anambra State.

### **Method**



Mixed method research was applied in the design which included descriptive and factorial designs while descriptive statistics and One-way analysis of variance were utilized as statistical tools for analysis. The participants were 143 social media users living in Anambra State (62 males and 81 females) drawn purposively through the researchers' active contacts from 3 social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter). Their ages ranged from 19 to 31 years with a mean age of 23.50 and standard deviation of 1.10. The participants were presented with "Social Media Usage Perception Index" developed by the authors to assess the social media perception and preferences of the participants especially as regards the social media prospects (empowerment or destructive), its appeal and gender preferences.

The Social Media Usage Perception Index was prepared as a list of questions with options and was electronically distributed to researchers' list of contacts domiciled in Anambra State and that are at least active in more than one social media platform. The participants were instructed on how to answer the questions and attach it back to the researchers through the platform. The online Index also contained demographic information which enabled the researchers to ascertain the participants' gender, social media usage frequency, state of origin and social media platforms they use.

**Result**

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on youths’ awareness of the empowerment prospectsof social media

S/N	ITEM	Responses						N	X̄	SD
		1	2	3	4	5				
1	Social media has a lot of packages that can impact my life positively	29 20%	26 17%	-	45 32%	43 31%	143 100%	3.3	.7576	
2	There is much I can learn through social media to improve my potential	15 10%	32 21%	7 5%	67 48%	22 16%	143 100%	3.3	2.670	
3	I know about legitimate business opportunities available on the social media platforms	33 22%	38 27%	9 6%	34 25%	29 20%	143 100%	2.9	1.093	
4	Social media creates opportunities for empowerment	-	-	38 27%	33 22%	72 51%	143 100%	4.2	.7974	
	Total							<b>3.4</b>	1.3295	

*Source: Field work, 2022*

The mean score analysis is indicative that youths’ awareness on the empowerment potential of social media is high at  $M = 3.4$ ,  $SD = 1.3295$ . The finding is indicative that the participants understand that social media could be used as a platform to engender empowerment in varying capacities such as learning an art, business and services and employment.

The result in Table 2 shows that primarily, majority (65.7%) of the youths are attracted by social media by its leisure appeal and they use it for chatting, connecting friends and leisure compared to 34.3% of youths who use it for learning, empowerment and opportunities. The finding is indicative that greater population of the youths is focused in the leisure appeal of social media for past time leisure like chatting with friends and family, connecting friends and other leisure.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics showing the male and female social media user appeal

Gender	Social media user appeal	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	Leisure	2.2687	.15298	23
	Empowerment	2.9706	.21087	39
	Total	2.6218	.02274	62
Female	Leisure	1.3081	.48939	57
	Empowerment	1.7500	.31906	24
	Total	1.5495	.12559	81
Total	Leisure	1.75024	1.02661	80
	Empowerment	2.35298	1.62557	63
	Total	2.0521	.17627	143

The result in Table 3 showed that significant differences were observed between males and females on social media user appeal at  $F(1, 142) = 50.55, p < .05$ . The result is indicative that greater number of females (57) has leisure appeal than empowerment appeal (24) whereas greater number males (39) prefer its empowerment appeal to its leisure appeal (23). The differences observed reached were statistically significant.

**Discussion**

The result recorded a high level of awareness on the empowerment potential of social media. It is not surprising going by the trending of social media as the new way of life which has bloated user’s expectation as a new way of life in line with the proponents of technology determinism which emphasized mutual influence and impacts of society and technology. This is true especially when one considers the findings of Ambrose and Catherine (2013) that in reference to entrepreneurship growth, social media can play very significant roles in empowering its users especially youths in various ways; thus, social networking sites have become an important part of any youth’s life. The awareness is huge and has become a driving force for youth users who has a lot of expectation from social media.

However, although youths are aware of the empowerment potentials of social media, the result of second hypothesis indicated that, majority of the youths are mostly attracted to the social media by its leisure appeal which includes: chatting, connecting friends, fun seeking and other forms of part time. The outlook in this perspective is not bright because the empowerment aspects of social media are one of the ingredients which make social media a good prospect especially for third world countries struggling with perennial unemployment. Equally, it further portends a kind of social and

moral danger if youths are more interested in leisure than empowerment. Consider that Umeogu and Ojiakor (2014) found that most times, youths may be overwhelmed by the negative outcomes of social media use such as: social media addiction, social maladjustment and lack of self-control in the use of social media leading to moral decay, low educational values and unethical behaviors such as online fraud, promiscuous behavior, crimes and other e-related vices. This is because the in line with technology determinism theory, the society can be influences by technology and vice versa. Hence, the social media vices can spread to the physical society and affect the lives of even those who have never used a social media platform.

In this perspective, women other than men were also found to be more interested in the leisure appeal user preference of social media whereas it was confirmed that men were attracted to the empowerment appeal than the women. The finding is complimentary to socio-cultural underpinning of our African society which recognizes the males as bread winners and thus, their interest is more dominated with means of production than their female counterparts. In line with the findings of Ojeleye, Opusunju, Ahmed and Aku (2018) which found that social media impact significantly on entrepreneurship development among users, there is belief that males will see social media as an extension of productive means than women who will see it as a platform for leisure. This is supported by Agbawe's (2018) findings that despite the horrendous challenges articulated, social media portends some prospects that could be harnessed to change the shape of society and the way businesses are done.

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