DIGITAL GOVERNANCE AND POLICYMAKING: EVIDENCE FROM SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The integration of social media into governance processes has significantly transformed how citizens interact with public institutions, particularly in emerging democracies. This study examines the influence of social media usage and engagement on government policymaking in Nigeria's digital governance framework. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 300 respondents in Kwara State and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The study distinguishes between social media usage, representing exposure to digital content, and social media engagement, reflecting active participation in online discourse. The findings reveal that social media usage significantly influences government policymaking by amplifying public concerns, increasing issue visibility, and shaping policy agendas. More importantly, social media engagement demonstrates a stronger relationship with policymaking processes, indicating that active participation enhances citizen–government interaction, accountability, and responsiveness. The study results highlight the evolving role of digital platforms as both informational and participatory tools in governance. The study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by integrating communication and public administration perspectives to explain how digital interactions influence policy outcomes. It also provides practical insights for policymakers on leveraging social media for inclusive and responsive governance. While the findings underscore the transformative potential of social media, it also point to the need for addressing challenges such as misinformation, digital inequality, and institutional capacity.

Keywords: social media, digital governance, policymaking, citizen engagement, participation

Introduction

The rapid diffusion of digital technologies has fundamentally altered governance structures, citizen participation, and public policy processes across the globe. Among these technologies, social media platforms have emerged as powerful instruments for shaping political discourse, influencing public opinion, and mediating state–society relations. In both developed and developing contexts, platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and WhatsApp have transformed how citizens access information, engage in political debate, and interact with government institutions (Boulianne, 2020; Margetts &Dorobantu, 2023).

In emerging democracies like Nigeria, where traditional institutional channels for participation are often constrained by bureaucratic inefficiencies, political opacity, and limited inclusiveness, social media has provided an alternative space for civic engagement and policy influence. Nigeria's digital landscape has experienced significant growth in recent years, with internet penetration exceeding 50% and social media usage continuing to expand rapidly (DataReportal, 2024). This transformation has created new opportunities for citizens to express political preferences, mobilize collective action, and hold public officials accountable.

The role of social media in governance became particularly evident during major socio-political movements such as the #EndSARS protests, where digital platforms were instrumental in mobilizing citizens, coordinating actions, and amplifying demands for police reform. Beyond protest movements, social media has become embedded in everyday governance processes, serving as a channel through which citizens monitor government activities, critique policies, and advocate for change (Tufekci, 2017; Theocharis et al., 2023). These developments suggest a shift toward a more participatory and networked model of governance, where digital interactions increasingly influence policy agendas.

Despite these transformations, the mechanisms through which social media influences government policymaking remain insufficiently understood, particularly in African contexts. Existing studies such as Aondover et al., (2025), Enliand Simonsen (2018) and Kreissand McGregor (2018) have largely focused on social media as a tool for political communication or activism, often emphasizing its role in mobilization and public opinion formation. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how social media usage translates into tangible policy outcomes and how engagement processes shape interactions between citizens and policymakers.

Furthermore, much of the existing literature does not clearly distinguish between influence (the causal impact of social media on policy outcomes) and relationship (the associative linkage between engagement and policymaking processes). This distinction is critical for understanding the multifaceted role of social media in governance. While usage may increase exposure to political information and amplify public concerns, engagement reflects deeper forms of participation that can shape policy deliberation and responsiveness.

From a theoretical perspective, the rise of digital governance has necessitated the integration of insights from communication studies, political science, and public administration. Digital platforms have created what scholars describe as a "networked public sphere," where information flows are decentralized, and citizens actively participate in shaping policy discourse

(Papacharissi & Blasiola, 2015). At the same time, governments are increasingly adopting digital tools to enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement (Dunleavy et al., 2016). Understanding how these dynamics interact requires robust empirical analysis grounded in interdisciplinary frameworks.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the influence of social media on government policymaking in Nigeria through a quantitative lens. Specifically, it investigates two key dimensions: (1) the influence of social media usage on government policies and (2) the relationship between social media engagement and policymaking processes. By employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the study provides a rigorous assessment of these relationships and contributes to the growing body of literature on digital governance in developing contexts.

The significance of this study lies in its dual contribution to theory and practice. Theoretically, it advances interdisciplinary scholarship by integrating communication and governance perspectives to explain how digital interactions shape policy processes. Practically, it offers insights for policymakers on how to harness social media as a tool for inclusive governance, enhance citizen participation, and improve policy responsiveness.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

The growing intersection between social media and governance has generated substantial scholarly interest, particularly in the context of digital transformation and participatory democracy. Social media platforms have altered the traditional boundaries of political communication by enabling decentralized, real-time, and interactive exchanges between citizens and state actors. Unlike conventional media, which is largely unidirectional, social media fosters multidirectional communication flows, allowing citizens not only to consume information but also to produce, share, and contest narratives about governance and public policy (Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor, 2018; Theocharis et al., 2021). This transformation has significant implications for how policies are shaped, debated, and implemented, especially in emerging democracies such as Nigeria.

Social Media and the Transformation of Governance Processes

Digital governance scholarship increasingly recognizes social media as a critical infrastructure for enhancing transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. Governments across the world are integrating social media into administrative and policy processes, using these platforms to disseminate information, engage citizens, and gather feedback (Mergel, 2019). In developing countries, where institutional channels for participation are often weak or inaccessible, social media provides an alternative space for civic engagement and policy advocacy.

Empirical research suggests that social media contributes to governance by facilitating information flows, enabling collective action, and strengthening the public sphere (Aondover et al., 2025; Boulianne, 2020; Enli& Simonsen, 2018; Kreiss& McGregor, 2018). In particular, social media platforms reduce the cost of political participation, making it easier for citizens to express opinions, mobilize support, and influence public discourse. This is especially relevant in Nigeria,

where historical challenges such as bureaucratic opacity and limited access to formal political institutions have constrained citizen participation. Social media, therefore, represents a democratizing force that can potentially reshape governance processes.

Social Media Usage and Policy Influence

Social media usage refers to the frequency, intensity, and breadth of individuals' interaction with digital platforms. It encompasses activities such as browsing, reading, and consuming political content. High levels of social media usage are associated with increased exposure to political information, greater awareness of public issues, and enhanced civic engagement (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, &Ardèvol-Abreu, 2019).

From a policy perspective, social media usage can influence government decisions through several mechanisms. First, it amplifies public concerns by increasing the visibility of issues. Viral content, trending topics, and widespread discussions can draw attention to specific problems, forcing policymakers to respond. Second, social media usage enhances public scrutiny, creating pressure on government officials to justify their actions and decisions. Third, it facilitates real-time feedback, allowing policymakers to monitor public sentiment and adjust policies accordingly (Mergel, 2019).

Recent studies provide empirical support for these mechanisms. For instance, Boulianne (2020), in a meta-analysis of digital media and political participation, finds that social media usage has a positive effect on civic engagement and political behavior. Similarly, Enli and Simonsen (2018) argue that social media platforms have become central to agenda-setting processes, influencing both public opinion and policy priorities. In the African context, Akinola (2022) demonstrates that digital activism and social media campaigns have played a significant role in shaping governance outcomes by amplifying citizen voices and pressuring governments to act.

In Nigeria, the influence of social media usage on policymaking is particularly evident in cases where public outrage or advocacy campaigns have led to policy reconsideration. For example, online discussions around economic policies, security issues, and public service delivery have often compelled government agencies to respond or adjust their strategies. Nwangwu and Ononogbu (2021) note that social media has become a key platform for political communication in Nigeria, enabling citizens to directly engage with policymakers and influence decision-making processes.

Moreover, social media usage contributes to the formation of collective awareness, which is essential for policy change. When a large number of individuals are exposed to the same information and narratives, it creates a shared understanding of issues, which can translate into coordinated action. This phenomenon is consistent with the concept of "connective action," where digital networks facilitate collective behavior without the need for formal organizational structures (Bennett &Segerberg, 2023).

However, the influence of social media usage is not without limitations. Scholars have noted that the spread of misinformation, algorithmic biases, and digital inequalities can affect the quality and inclusiveness of online discourse (Cinelli et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, the

overall evidence suggests that social media usage plays a significant role in shaping policy environments by amplifying public concerns and influencing government responsiveness.

Social Media Engagement and Policymaking Processes

Social media usage captures exposure to content, while, social media engagement reflects the depth and quality of interaction with digital platforms. Engagement includes activities such as commenting, sharing, liking, and creating content, which indicate active participation in online discourse (Theocharis, 2015). Engaged users are more likely to influence public opinion, shape narratives, and contribute to policy debates.

Social media engagement plays a crucial role in policymaking by facilitating communication between citizens and government actors. Unlike traditional forms of participation, which are often limited to periodic elections or formal consultations, social media engagement enables continuous interaction and feedback. This creates opportunities for more responsive and inclusive governance.

One of the key mechanisms through which engagement influences policymaking is agenda-setting. Engaged users can shape the policy agenda by highlighting specific issues, framing them in particular ways, and mobilizing support around them. Hashtags, viral campaigns, and online petitions are examples of tools that enable users to draw attention to policy issues and influence public discourse (Tufekci, 2017).

Another mechanism is accountability. Social media engagement allows citizens to monitor government actions, expose wrongdoing, and demand transparency. This creates pressure on policymakers to act in the public interest and justify their decisions. Theocharis et al. (2021) find that online engagement is positively associated with political participation and government responsiveness, suggesting that engagement strengthens democratic processes.

In the Nigerian context, social media engagement has been linked to increased government responsiveness and policy adjustments. Ojebuyi and Salawu (2021) highlight how online activism and engagement have influenced policy decisions by creating public pressure and attracting media attention. Similarly, studies have shown that Nigerian policymakers increasingly monitor social media platforms to gauge public sentiment and identify emerging issues (Akinola, 2022).

Engagement also facilitates the co-production of policy, where citizens contribute ideas, feedback, and expertise to policymaking processes. This aligns with the principles of digital governance, which emphasize collaboration and participation as key elements of effective governance (Mergel, 2019). By enabling direct interaction between citizens and policymakers, social media engagement enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy decisions.

Nevertheless, the impact of engagement depends on several factors, including the responsiveness of government institutions, the credibility of information, and the inclusiveness of digital platforms. While engagement can enhance participation, it may also lead to polarization or the dominance of certain voices if not properly managed (Cinelli et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, the evidence suggests that social media engagement plays a critical role in shaping

policymaking processes by facilitating communication, enhancing accountability, and enabling collective action.

Hypotheses Development

Drawing on the foregoing literature, this study distinguishes between two key dimensions of social media's role in governance: influence and relationship. Social media usage represents the extent of exposure to digital content and is expected to directly influence policymaking by amplifying public concerns and increasing information flow. In contrast, social media engagement reflects active participation and is expected to strengthen the relationship between citizens and policymakers by facilitating communication and feedback.

Accordingly, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H_1: Social media usage has a significant influence on government policies in Nigeria.

This hypothesis is grounded in the argument that increased exposure to social media content enhances awareness, amplifies public concerns, and creates pressure on policymakers, thereby influencing policy outcomes.

H_2: There is a significant relationship between social media engagement and government policymaking in Nigeria.

This hypothesis is based on the premise that active engagement fosters interaction, accountability, and collaboration between citizens and policymakers, strengthening the link between public discourse and policy processes.

Together, these hypotheses provide a comprehensive framework for examining the multifaceted role of social media in digital governance, capturing both its direct influence on policy outcomes and its relational impact on policymaking processes.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model for this study is grounded in an interdisciplinary understanding of digital governance, integrating insights from communication theory and public administration. It posits that social media usage and social media engagement are two distinct but complementary predictors of government policymaking.

Social media usage is conceptualized as the degree to which individuals are exposed to and consume content on digital platforms. It captures the frequency and intensity of interaction with platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Within the model, usage functions as a direct driver of policymaking influence by increasing awareness of public issues, amplifying societal concerns, and facilitating rapid information dissemination. This heightened visibility of issues is expected to exert pressure on policymakers, thereby shaping policy priorities and decisions.

In contrast, social media engagement reflects the depth of participation in online discourse, including activities such as commenting, sharing, and content creation. Engagement operates as a

relational mechanism that strengthens the interaction between citizens and policymakers. It enables feedback loops, enhances accountability, and fosters collaborative dialogue, thereby influencing how policies are formulated and implemented.

Government policymaking is treated as the endogenous construct, encompassing policy responsiveness, inclusiveness, and adaptability. Overall, the model assumes that while usage drives policy influence, engagement enhances the quality of interaction, together shaping contemporary governance outcomes.

Theoretical Review

Understanding the role of social media in contemporary governance requires a robust theoretical foundation that captures both communication dynamics and institutional processes. This study draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives- AgendaSetting Theory, Networked Public Sphere Theory, and Digital Governance Theoryto explain how social media usage and engagement influence government policymaking. Together, these frameworks provide an interdisciplinary lens that integrates insights from communication studies, political science, and public administration.

Agenda-Setting Theory in the Digital Era

Agenda-setting theory, originally developed by McCombs and Shaw, posits that the media plays a central role in shaping public perceptions by determining which issues are considered important (McCombs, 2018). Traditionally, this theory focused on mass media institutions such as newspapers and television, which acted as gatekeepers of information. However, the rise of social media has fundamentally altered this dynamic by decentralizing content production and distribution.

In the digital age, agenda-setting is no longer the exclusive domain of traditional media or political elites. Instead, it has become a participatory process in which ordinary citizens, influencers, and online communities contribute to shaping the public agenda. Social media platforms enable users to generate content, share opinions, and amplify issues through mechanisms such as hashtags, trending topics, and viral posts. These features allow certain issues to gain prominence rapidly, often compelling policymakers to respond.

Recent scholarship emphasizes the concept of "network agenda-setting," where the salience of issues emerges from the interactions of multiple actors within digital networks (Guo & McCombs, 2020). In this context, social media usage increases exposure to diverse perspectives, while engagement activities such as sharing and commenting contribute to the amplification of specific issues. This dynamic is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where social media campaigns have brought attention to issues such as police reform, economic hardship, and governance accountability.

From a policymaking perspective, agenda-setting theory suggests that governments are likely to prioritize issues that receive significant public attention. Social media usage amplifies this effect by increasing the volume and speed of information dissemination, while engagement

intensifies the visibility and urgency of issues. Consequently, policymakers may adjust their agendas in response to online discourse to maintain legitimacy and public support.

However, the digital transformation of agenda-setting also introduces challenges. The proliferation of misinformation, algorithmic filtering, and echo chambers can distort public discourse and influence policy priorities in unintended ways (Cinelli et al., 2021). Despite these limitations, agenda-setting theory remains a valuable framework for understanding how social media shapes policy agendas by influencing issue salience.

Networked Public Sphere Theory

The Networked Public Sphere Theory, as articulated by Papacharissi (2015) and rooted in earlier work by Benkler, provides a framework for understanding how digital technologies transform the nature of public discourse and collective action. Unlike the traditional public sphere, which was characterized by centralized communication and limited participation, the networked public sphere is decentralized, interactive, and inclusive.

Social media platforms are central to the networked public sphere, as they enable individuals to connect, share information, and mobilize around common interests. This environment facilitates what Papacharissi (2015) describes as "affective publics," where emotional expressions and shared experiences drive political engagement and collective action. In this context, social media engagement becomes a critical mechanism through which citizens participate in governance processes.

The networked public sphere also supports the concept of connective action, where individuals engage in collective behavior through digital networks without the need for formal organizational structures (Bennett &Segerberg, 2023). This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where social media has been used to organize protests, advocate for policy changes, and hold government officials accountable. The decentralized nature of these movements allows for rapid mobilization and widespread participation, increasing their potential impact on policymaking.

From a governance perspective, the networked public sphere enhances transparency and accountability by enabling citizens to monitor government actions and share information widely. Policymakers, in turn, are increasingly aware of the need to engage with digital audiences and respond to online discourse. This creates a more interactive and responsive policy environment, where citizen input plays a significant role in shaping decisions.

Nevertheless, the networked public sphere is not without its challenges. Issues such as digital inequality, polarization, and the spread of misinformation can limit the inclusiveness and effectiveness of online participation (Cinelli et al., 2021). Additionally, not all voices are equally represented, and certain groups may dominate online discourse. Despite these limitations, the theory provides a valuable lens for understanding how social media engagement facilitates participatory governance and influences policymaking processes.

Digital Governance Theory

Digital Governance Theory focuses on the integration of digital technologies into public administration and policymaking processes. It builds on earlier concepts such as e-government and e-governance but emphasizes the transformative potential of digital tools in reshaping governance structures and practices (Dunleavy et al., 2016; Mergel, 2019).

At its core, digital governance seeks to enhance efficiency, transparency, and citizen participation through the use of technology. Social media is a key component of this framework, as it provides a platform for communication, collaboration, and information sharing between citizens and government institutions. Unlike traditional channels, which are often hierarchical and bureaucratic, social media enables more flexible and interactive forms of governance.

One of the central tenets of digital governance is the concept of co-production, where citizens actively contribute to the design and implementation of public policies (Mergel, 2019). Social media facilitates co-production by enabling citizens to share ideas, provide feedback, and participate in policy discussions. This aligns with the broader shift toward participatory governance, where citizens are viewed as partners rather than passive recipients of public services. Digital governance also emphasizes the importance of data and analytics in decision-making. Governments can use social media data to monitor public sentiment, identify emerging issues, and evaluate policy effectiveness. This real-time feedback mechanism enhances the responsiveness and adaptability of policymaking processes.

In the Nigerian context, digital governance is still evolving, but social media has already become an important tool for government communication and citizen engagement. Public institutions increasingly use platforms such as X and Facebook to disseminate information, respond to public inquiries, and engage with citizens. At the same time, citizens use these platforms to demand accountability, report issues, and advocate for policy changes.

However, the implementation of digital governance faces several challenges, including limited digital infrastructure, capacity constraints, and concerns about data privacy and security. Additionally, the effectiveness of social media as a governance tool depends on the willingness of policymakers to engage with citizens and incorporate their feedback into decision-making processes.

Theoretical Integration

While each of these theories provides valuable insights, their integration offers a more comprehensive understanding of how social media influences policymaking. Agenda-setting theory explains how social media shapes issue salience and policy priorities. Networked public sphere theory highlights the role of engagement and collective action in shaping public discourse. Digital governance theory emphasizes the institutional and technological dimensions of citizen–government interaction.

Together, these frameworks suggest that social media usage influences policymaking by amplifying public concerns and shaping policy agendas, while social media engagement strengthens the relationship between citizens and policymakers by facilitating communication,

participation, and accountability. This integrated perspective provides a robust theoretical foundation for examining the role of social media in digital governance, particularly in emerging democracies such as Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the influence of social media usage and engagement on government policymaking in Nigeria. The choice of a quantitative approach is appropriate given the study's objective of testing hypothesized relationships among latent constructs using statistical techniques.

The required sample size was calculated using G*Power based on the study's two hypotheses involving two independent variables and one dependent variable. An a priori power analysis for SEM-PLS was conducted, specifying a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.80, and two predictors. The analysis indicated a minimum of 107 participants was needed to detect significant effects, with additional participants included to account for potential non-response or incomplete data.Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 300 respondents in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study employed a convenience sampling technique, targeting individuals who are active users of social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and WhatsApp. While this sampling method limits generalizability, it is suitable for exploratory research and studies employing PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2022).

The questionnaire consisted of three main sections measuring social media usage, social media engagement, and government policymaking. All constructs were operationalized using multiple items adapted from validated scales in prior studies (Boulianne, 2020; Theocharis et al., 2021). Responses were captured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. This technique is particularly suitable for predictive analysis, complex models, and studies with relatively small sample sizes (Hair et al., 2022). The analysis followed a two-step approach: first, the measurement model was assessed to evaluate reliability and validity; second, the structural model was examined to test the hypothesized relationships. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring respondent anonymity, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of data.

Data Analysis

Demographics Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1: Demographics Characteristics of the Respondents

Gender	Male	120	40.0
	Female	180	60.0
Age	16-20 years	50	16.7
	21-35 years	80	26.7
	36-55 years	120	40.0
	51-60 years	40	13.3
	61 years and above	10	3.3
Level of Education	Primary school certs	30	10.0
	SSCE	50	16.7
	OND	40	13.3
	B.sc/HND	150	50.0
	Post-graduate	30	10.0
Occupation	Civil servant	70	23.3
	Private sector employee	50	16.7
	Self-employed	120	40.0
	Students	40	13.3
	Post-graduate	20	6.7

The table 1 provides a comprehensive breakdown of respondents based on gender, age, level of education, and occupation. Out of 300 respondents, 60% are female (180 individuals), and 40% are male (120 individuals). This gender distribution indicates a higher female representation in the study. Regarding age, the majority of respondents fall within the 36-55 years age group, representing 40% (120 individuals), followed by the 21-35 years age group at 26.7% (80 individuals). The 16-20 years age group constitutes 16.7% (50 individuals), while 13.3% (40 individuals) are aged between 51-60 years, and only 3.3% (10 individuals) are 61 years and above. This age distribution shows a diverse representation of different age groups, with a significant portion of the respondents in the middle age range.

In terms of educational level, half of the respondents (50%) hold a B.Sc./HND degree, indicating that a substantial portion of the participants have attained higher education. Those with SSCE certificates make up 16.7% (50 individuals), while 13.3% (40 individuals) possess OND qualifications. Both respondents with primary school certificates and postgraduate degrees each account for 10% (30 individuals) of the total. This educational distribution suggests that the majority of respondents have at least a secondary school education, with a significant number having pursued higher education. Lastly, in terms of occupation, 40% of respondents (120 individuals) are self-employed, followed by 23.3% (70 individuals) who are civil servants. Private sector employees constitute 16.7% (50 individuals), students make up 13.3% (40 individuals), and post-graduates account for 6.7% (20 individuals). This occupational distribution highlights a diverse range of employment sectors among the respondents, with a significant proportion being self-employed.

Measurement Model

The measurement model was assessed to determine the reliability and validity of the latent constructs: social media usage, social media engagement, and government policymaking. Following the guidelines of Joseph F. Hair Jr. et al. (2022), the evaluation focused on internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Outer Loadings Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Social Media Usage (SMU)	SMU1	0.723	0.841	0.893	0.620
	SMU2	0.772			
	SMU3	0.883			
	SMU4	0.812			
	SMU5	0820			
Social Media Engagement (SME)	SME1	0.703	0.823	0.884	0.602
	SME2	0.862			
	SME3	0.711			
	SME3	0.721			
	SME4	0.692			
Government Policymaking (GPM)	GPM1	0.744	0.862	0.916	0.665
	GPM2	0.900			
	GPM3	0.809			
	GPM3	0.884			

As shown in Table 2, all item loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong indicator reliability. Cronbach's alpha values ranged between 0.82 and 0.86, surpassing the minimum acceptable value of 0.70, thereby confirming internal consistency reliability. Composite reliability (CR) values were also above 0.80 for all constructs, further reinforcing the reliability of the measurement model. Convergent validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All

constructs recorded AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that the constructs explain more than half of the variance of their respective indicators.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Constructs	**SMU**	**SME**	**GPM**
SMU	—		
SME	0.620	—	
GPM	0.583	0.374	—

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. As presented in Table 3, all HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating that each construct is empirically distinct from the others. This confirms that the measurement model satisfies discriminant validity requirements.

Structural Model

The structural model was assessed to examine the hypothesized relationships between the constructs. The evaluation focused on path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), and predictive relevance, following standard PLS-SEM procedures (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 4: Path Coefficients and Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	**Relationship**	**Beta (β)**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**Decision**
H1	SMU → GPM	0.410	6.123	0.000	Supported
H2	SME → GPM	0.472	7.032	0.000	Supported

The results in Table 4 indicate that social media usage has a significant positive effect on government policymaking ($\beta = 0.410$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H1. This suggests that increased exposure to social media content enhances the likelihood of influencing policy outcomes through greater awareness and public pressure.

Similarly, social media engagement shows a stronger positive relationship with government policymaking ($\beta = 0.472$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. This finding highlights the importance of active participation in digital discourse as a mechanism for shaping policy processes and strengthening citizen–government interaction.

Table 5: Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Interpretation
Government Policymaking (GPM)	0.521	Moderate

The R^2 value of 0.521 indicates that social media usage and engagement jointly explain 52% of the variance in government policymaking, which can be considered a moderate level of explanatory power in social science research.

Table 6: Effect Size (f^2)

Relationship	f^2	Effect Size
SMU → GPM	0.213	Medium
SME → GPM	0.277	Medium

The effect size (f^2) results indicate that both social media usage and engagement have moderate effects on policymaking, with engagement exerting a slightly stronger influence.

Table 7: Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Endogenous Construct	Q^2	Predictive Relevance
Government Policymaking (GPM)	0.31	High

The Q^2 value is greater than zero, indicating that the model has strong predictive relevance for the endogenous construct.

The structural model confirms that both social media usage and social media engagement are significant predictors of government policymaking in Nigeria. While usage contributes to policy influence through information exposure and issue salience, engagement plays a more substantial role in shaping policymaking through interaction, accountability, and participatory processes. These findings reinforce the argument that social media is not merely a communication tool but a critical component of contemporary governance systems.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that social media has become a central component of contemporary governance processes in Nigeria. By empirically examining the influence of social media usage and engagement on government policymaking using a SEM-PLS approach, the study advances our understanding of how digital interactions translate into

tangible governance outcomes in an emerging democratic context. The results not only validate the proposed hypotheses but also offer deeper insights into the mechanisms through which social media reshapes policy dynamics.

Social Media Usage and Policy Influence

The study finds that social media usage significantly influences government policymaking, lending strong support to the first hypothesis. This result underscores the importance of digital exposure in shaping public awareness and, ultimately, policy outcomes. In line with existing literature, the findings suggest that increased interaction with social media platforms enhances individuals' access to political information, raises awareness of societal issues, and amplifies public concerns (Boulianne, 2020; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019). As more citizens engage with political content online, issues gain visibility and prominence, thereby compelling policymakers to take notice.

This aligns closely with the principles of agenda-setting theory, which posits that media influences what issues are considered important in public discourse (McCombs, 2018). In the digital era, social media extends this function by enabling rapid dissemination of information and facilitating widespread discussion. The Nigerian context provides a particularly illustrative case, where social media has played a key role in bringing issues such as police brutality, economic hardship, and governance accountability to the forefront of national discourse. The findings of this study reinforce the argument that social media usage contributes to shaping policy agendas by amplifying public concerns and directing attention toward specific issues.

Furthermore, the results resonate with the concept of "network agenda-setting," which emphasizes the role of interconnected actors in shaping issue salience within digital networks (Guo & McCombs, 2020). Social media usage increases the likelihood that individuals will encounter and share information, thereby contributing to the collective construction of policy-relevant narratives. This process creates a feedback loop in which public discourse influences policymaking, and policy decisions, in turn, generate further online discussion.

The findings are also consistent with studies conducted in other contexts, which demonstrate that social media usage can influence policy outcomes by increasing transparency and accountability (Mergel, 2019; Enli& Simonsen, 2018). In Nigeria, where traditional channels of participation may be limited, social media serves as a critical avenue for citizens to voice concerns and demand action. The significant relationship observed in this study suggests that policymakers are increasingly responsive to digital signals, recognizing the importance of public opinion expressed online.

However, it is important to note that the influence of social media usage is not uniform across all contexts. Factors such as digital literacy, access to technology, and the credibility of information can affect how individuals engage with social media and how policymakers interpret online discourse (Cinelli et al., 2021). Despite these limitations, the findings clearly indicate that social media usage plays a substantial role in shaping policy environments by enhancing visibility and amplifying public concerns.

Social Media Engagement and Policymaking Processes

The study also finds a strong and significant relationship between social media engagement and government policymaking, supporting the second hypothesis. Notably, engagement exhibits a stronger effect than usage, highlighting the importance of active participation in digital spaces. While usage reflects exposure to information, engagement captures the depth of interaction and the extent to which individuals contribute to public discourse.

This finding aligns with the networked public sphere theory, which emphasizes the role of digital platforms in enabling participatory governance and collective action (Papacharissi, 2015). Social media engagement allows citizens to move beyond passive consumption of information to active involvement in shaping narratives and influencing policy debates. Through activities such as commenting, sharing, and creating content, engaged users contribute to the formation of public opinion and the framing of policy issues.

The results also support the concept of connective action, where individuals mobilize around shared concerns through digital networks without the need for formal organizational structures (Bennett &Segerberg, 2023). In Nigeria, social media engagement has facilitated the emergence of decentralized movements that have successfully influenced policy decisions. These movements demonstrate the power of collective digital action in shaping governance outcomes.
Moreover, the findings highlight the role of engagement in enhancing accountability and responsiveness. Social media provides a platform for citizens to monitor government actions, question decisions, and demand explanations. This creates a form of "digital accountability," where policymakers are subject to continuous scrutiny by an engaged public. Theocharis et al. (2021) argue that such engagement strengthens democratic processes by fostering transparency and encouraging governments to respond to citizen concerns.

In the Nigerian context, the strong relationship between engagement and policymaking suggests that policymakers are not only aware of online discourse but also actively respond to it. Government agencies increasingly use social media to communicate with citizens, address concerns, and provide updates on policy initiatives. At the same time, citizens use these platforms to provide feedback, report issues, and advocate for change. This interactive dynamic reflects the principles of digital governance, where communication between citizens and government is continuous and reciprocal (Mergel, 2019).

The findings also suggest that engagement facilitates the co-production of policy, where citizens contribute to decision-making processes by sharing ideas and perspectives. This aligns with contemporary governance models that emphasize collaboration and participation as key elements of effective policymaking. By enabling direct interaction between citizens and policymakers, social media engagement enhances the legitimacy and inclusiveness of policy decisions.

Comparative Insight: Usage vs Engagement

An important contribution of this study is the distinction between social media usage and engagement as separate but complementary dimensions of digital participation. While both

constructs are significant predictors of policymaking, engagement demonstrates a stronger relationship, indicating that active participation has a more profound impact than mere exposure.

This finding is consistent with recent scholarship, which suggests that deeper forms of digital participation are more likely to influence political outcomes than passive consumption of information (Theocharis et al., 2021). It highlights the need for policymakers to move beyond simply disseminating information on social media to actively engaging with citizens and fostering meaningful interactions.

Implications for Digital Governance in Nigeria

The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of social media in shaping governance processes in Nigeria. Social media is no longer just a communication tool; it has become an integral component of the policy environment, influencing how issues are identified, debated, and addressed. The significant effects observed in this study suggest that digital platforms are increasingly embedded in governance systems, creating new opportunities for participation, accountability, and responsiveness.

At the same time, the findings highlight the need for policymakers to develop strategies for effectively managing social media interactions. While digital platforms offer numerous benefits, they also present challenges related to misinformation, polarization, and unequal access. Addressing these challenges will be critical for ensuring that social media contributes positively to governance outcomes.

Conclusion

The study examined the role of social media in shaping government policymaking in Nigeria, with a particular focus on the influence of social media usage and the relationship between social media engagement and policymaking processes. Using a quantitative approach and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the study provides robust empirical evidence that both dimensions of social media use significantly affect governance outcomes.

The findings reveal that social media usage plays a critical role in influencing government policies by amplifying public concerns, increasing awareness of societal issues, and shaping policy agendas. This underscores the growing importance of digital platforms as sources of information and drivers of public discourse. At the same time, social media engagement emerges as a stronger predictor of policymaking, highlighting the significance of active participation in shaping governance processes. Engagement facilitates interaction, enhances accountability, and fosters collaboration between citizens and policymakers, thereby strengthening the link between public discourse and policy decisions.

By distinguishing between usage and engagement, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of how social media operates within the governance ecosystem. It demonstrates that while exposure to information is important, meaningful participation is essential for translating digital interactions into policy influence. This insight contributes to the broader literature on digital governance by emphasizing the need to consider both the quantity and quality of social media use.

The study also highlights the transformative potential of social media in emerging democracies such as Nigeria. In contexts where traditional channels of participation may be limited, digital platforms offer new opportunities for citizen engagement and policy influence. However, realizing this potential requires addressing challenges related to misinformation, digital inequality, and institutional capacity.

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. The use of convenience sampling and a single geographic location may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples, and comparative analyses across different regions or countries. Additionally, incorporating qualitative approaches could provide deeper insights into the mechanisms through which social media influences policymaking.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that social media is an integral component of contemporary governance, shaping how policies are formulated, debated, and implemented. By leveraging digital platforms effectively, governments can enhance participation, improve responsiveness, and strengthen democratic processes in the digital age.

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