

Deploying Digital Media as Innovations in Marketing Government Policies and Enhancing Civic Engagement among Vulnerable Youths in Calabar

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Governments have often sought improved ways to market their policies, which are variedly viewed as adequate or inadequate, in a bid to get the citizens actively engaged in the process of development. Digital media usage has inundated the social media space with both individual and governments presences. However, despite strong digital media presence driven by massive deployment of human and material resources, the question still arises as to how well such efforts have been used to deepen civic engagement among the citizens generally, and the vulnerable youth population that is digital media savvy. Data gathered from a sample of 900 respondents, revealed a positive correlation between digital media deployment in marketing government policies and enhancement of civic engagement among the vulnerable community provided such policies are people-oriented, and adequate marketing strategies are used. It recommends creation and deployment of digital media content as marketing tools to harness accrued gains.

Keywords: Digital media, civic engagement, deployment, enhancement, youths, marketing, government policies

The gamut of digital media has often been stretched beyond its simplistic conceptualization. These stretched points conceptualize digital media as encoded media contents in machine-manipulatable formats, digitalized processing, easily transmittable over networks as well as assuming the forms of text, audio, video, graphics, animation, to evolving into interactively and virtually enabled elements of communication (Buckingham, 2007; Hansen, 2008). Its study has involved an inquiry into the extent of saturation and effects of social identities of young persons, virtualism, the subtle shaping of the social networked individuals and communities, as well as transformational drives towards capitalism, authoritarianism, and communism (Buckingham, 2007; Couldry, 2012). Even the issues associated with their threats (Buckingham & Willet, 2013) as well as the reinventing of 'self' within the frames of self-representation are well studied (Lundby, 2008).

The digital conundrum provides for an "almost inconceivably vast amount of information, from sources that are increasingly portable, accessible, and interactive" (Metzger & Flanagia, 2007). These information wave patterns suggest that effective management of this information can yield goals for development. In this problem lies the intentions of digitalizing content. Among several other arguments and plans for the need to digitalize media contents are the economic challenge to right holders (Edwards, Klien, Lee,

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Moss, & Phillip, 2015); the capabilities that are captured in the process (Moss, 2018); the ability for curation which can lead to digital and media literacy (Cohen & Mihailidis, 2013) and the increasing usage of the various digital media aggregator, personalization of information content in a manner that such are recognized in a fashion to make more sense out of a topic and share with peers (Lessig, 2008). There are intentions and advantages in appreciating diversities of voices since individuals now have exerting control over their information habits, and empowering civic values and raising civil voices that provide greater appreciation and understanding to the question of how or what would make their involvements in civic responsibilities stand-out, as well as, detailing their responsibilities (Cohen & Mihailidis, 2013).

It thus suggests that digital media usage can engender civic engagements by stakeholders. Digital media could be isolated along with the two converging areas of 'packaged offline media' and 'transmitted media' (Feldman, 2003), and this takes root in all aspects of media industries as well as governmental concerns. The government drives her activities through the creation and implementation of policies. These policies are couched in specific languages that are sometimes unclear and misunderstood. Government policies are effective and elicit active engagements when well understood. The business-like nature of couching these policies as messages tend, to some extent, diminishes the capacity for civil commitments. A study has found that Generation Y extensively uses a mobile phone to get information on brands and other commercial developments (Jain & Pant, 2016), while the proliferation of digital media has influenced several professional fields. In the field of journalism also, plenty of shifting is taking place. As a result, the readers and viewers have become an active part of news production, distribution, and consumption (Dutta & Gangopadhyay, 2019).

The use of digital media as tools to reach varied and diverse audiences is well documented with varying levels of effectiveness or ineffectiveness (Reddick & Anthopoulos, 2014; Preston & Kerr, 2001; Gurevitch, Coleman, & Blumler, 2009; Dijik, 2012; Marland, Lewis, & Flanagan, 2017). The problem, however, is not in the deployment of digital media, but in how well a particular segment of the society could be actively connected to government policies on digital media, in a bid to engender civic engagement. These specific segments are the vulnerable groups that litter the streets. These are "high-risk, homeless, prostitutes, truants, those excluded from schools, young offenders, children from families with substance-abusing parents, or siblings and young people with depressive order" (Lloyd, 2013; Pittaway, Bartolomei & Hugman, 2010).

The categorizing of this group, which will form part of our study population, makes them a left-over segment of the population that should not be disturbed or engaged with the whole nuances of civic engagement. The position that the government deploys digital media to help drive participation in policy implementation is sacrosanct. The socio-economic variables around vulnerable populations may present challenges for stakeholders. However, Jacob and Akpan (2015) argue that vulnerable people in Nigeria are very well primed as digital media '*prosumers*.' This submission implies that supposedly vulnerable groups can still find expression and relevance with digital media use. If this is the case, then effective marketing of government policies to them might enhance their level of civic engagement.

Governments have often sought out improved ways to market their development policies to relevant stakeholders. Although some of these policies have been argued to be unviable, related to this study is the ability of the government to get the citizenry locked-on to the projects. Government and personal presence in the media space provide strong

encouragement. They may, therefore, signal that with government deployment of enormous resources, then, there are likely to be corresponding stakeholders' engagement, especially from detached-vulnerable groups.

Since governments at all levels need to share policy-meanings with various stakeholders, and with the benefits that digital media brings to the meaning construction, sharing, and deconstruction processes, it is inevitable for governments to do without the use of digital media in marketing her policies. The vulnerable groups depicted in this study are seen to somewhat operate within the digital media conundrum, even though they are seemingly and mostly obliterated from the scheme of things. Consequently, this study, with the hindsight of both qualitative and quantitative data, aims at establishing the fact that effective deployment of digital media as tools in marketing government policies towards vulnerable groups, despite their perceived exclusiveness, can engender civic engagement and participation.

Literature Review

Digital Media and Engagement Possibilities

Engagement possibilities with digital media use are limitless in terms of both gains and pains, prompting the suggestions that "communicators must be flexible and ready at all times, while the techniques and basics of such communication engagements" should remain workable at all times (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2014). Inherent in the overall arguments presented overtime is that digital media tools can come handy for several reasons, if well driven. These include educative and evaluative purposes, as well as for dissemination (which provides the other exchange value for governments who should use them for marketing their policies). The nuances created from the effective feedback mechanism of deploying digital media tools could serve the real purpose of active engagements to civic responsibilities. When stakeholders provide opinion on specific issues, an opportunity presents itself for gleaning the chaff from the grains, and for people to connect with, most times unhindered. Digital media as tools could produce such unfettered social exchange even with vulnerable groups (William & Chinn, 2010; Yasim, Tasneem, & Fatema, 2015).

Another issue of positive paradigmatic change is when the gatekeeping hold of traditional media architecture is broken or bypassed. Digital media allow direct, unfettered access to the vulnerable groups, who ordinarily are weaned-off, and whose media needs are sometimes filtered away, especially with the use of business and profit maximization indexes as decimators for media engagements (Asemah, 2004; Croteau & Hoynes, 2013). The extent of inputs by opinion leaders is minimal when this happens. Stakeholders, by this approach, are given a fair measure of *belongingness*, making them more engaging and more discerning (Everett, 2010; Obukoadata, 2018).

However, such engagement possibilities could experience hitches, which Bobbitt and Sullivan (2014) labeled as "barriers to the new world," where policies must evolve and be implemented. They drew attention to the current trend where some countries have mounted severe onslaught against the various genre of digital and new media, stating that some countries "have blocked the use of social media and shut down use." These identified barriers include stalking, insomnia, identity theft, creation and sustenance of digital identity, inability to cope with changes, failure to anticipate coming changes, content stealing and re-fabrication, creation of unrealistic and false scenarios as a result of digital content manipulations and display of narcissistic tendencies. Others would include

invasion of privacies, creation of new communities, creation of new lease of 'experts' in everything who are labeled as influencers, absence of the gatekeeping mechanics and its attendant consequences, issues with access to the internet to enhance the digital experiences, as well as the inability of content creators/consumers to keep track with developments.

Nevertheless, scholars maintain that such possibilities are only faced by psychodynamics and socio-pragmatic infiltrators that permeate society at differing levels (Verhoef, 2012; Wazid, Katal, Goudar & Rao, 2013). Within this window of discourse, one needs to ponder over the extent to which governments in developing countries and Nigeria, in particular, deploy such digital media as tools, and to what effects. At the other end of the spectrum, we can equally begin to consider systemic seizures inherent along the continuum where the stakeholders, especially the vulnerable persons, operate. This frame will thus, enable us to contend whether such use of digital media as tools in marketing government policies can enhance civic engagements among vulnerable youths.

Technology, Digital Media and Vulnerable Groups

In an analysis of seven digital technologies that will impact the world in 2020, Moss (2019) identified artificial intelligence (AI), 5G data networks, internet of things (IoT), autonomous driving, personalized and predictive medicine, computer vision, extended reality, and block-chain technology as key technological processes. Key to this discourse is the deployment of artificial intelligence (AI), 5G data networks, extended reality, and blockchain technologies. AI is most likely to ensure that the government interacts personally and smartly with the vulnerable groups by programming these policy thrusts and the needed engagement attributes by all stakeholders into the algorithm so designed. It assumes and assures, for instance, that when people wake up in the morning, a system outlines what their tasks are and what their privileges and benefits would likely be. On completion of such tasks, it equally buzzes to draw attention to gains, failures, and markers. This can effectively attenuate civic engagement among stakeholders. The technologies of 5G data networks, though with attendant limitations of cost, use, and complementary devices, can drive the AI portfolios, and provide more significant and prompt engagements. The 5G data network becomes the carrier of the technologies. The 5G packages come in the internet of things face-time. It enhances effectiveness and personalizes data utilization, engagement, and '*fussyynchronization*' (fusion and synchronized).

The extended reality, as an advancement in the virtual reality (VR) networks, could project policies and how they will involve and engage the stakeholders in virtual frames. It posits that rather than stakeholders dealing with understanding texts, stories, opinions on the issue, a 5G enameled extended reality (ER) would reflect the whole project/policy from inception to futurist challenges in front of the stakeholders, so that they can see how it benefits and connects to them, and thus engender engagements. These technological leach points assume a much more positively useful pontification when viewed against the diffusion of innovation pathways of awareness, interest, trial, evaluation, and adoption (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2014). It suggests that stakeholders would be actively aware of these policies, and the avalanche of technologies would generate the necessary interests. The stakeholders would, by the ER and 5G data networks, put the policies on trial, evaluate them, and ultimately adopt such policies.

Digital media, aided by the ravaging technologies, offer rooms to create awareness on policies and stimulate interests. At the same time, satisfactions are derivable from great personal touch and evaluation, which, again, such technologies can offer. Inherent

in the discourse of overt usage of these technologies to drive digital media marketing of government policies is the position of the social exchange theory (SET) which subsumes that most communication is “those cases in which both sides feel they are getting something out of a transaction,” underscoring the fact that “the more successful communication transactions will be those are producing similar results” (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2014). Invariably, the notion that each side of the communication encounter benefits equally, though debatable, subsists. Digital media enabled by these technologies can help advance the social exchange of ideas and ultimately engender engagement.

However, these technologies that help the digital media marketing process of policies are limited by certain variables, primarily as they affect the vulnerable groups (Akpan & Obukoadata, 2013). The vulnerable groups, as earlier discussed, experience disconnect, not because of their inability to access these digital gadgets that would make them digital media consumers, but because contents carried by the digital media are not vulnerable-group-friendly.

As from previous studies, and with the notion of the consumer as very active and discerning, it is supposedly right to assume within the discourse of the social exchange theory, that diffusion of government policies will be given adequate consideration when the communication exchange pragmatic allows for participants to draw benefits. If the media transaction does not allow the vulnerable groups some benefits, then engaging them will make for little or no gains. Arguments of their inability to aggregate digital content no longer subsist within critical frames. Bobbitt and Sullivan (2014) note that the need to get connected and wired has taken-over, stating that “personal wants have changed;” that instead of jewelry and other personal items, “individuals put new iPads or new phones on their want list.” This applies to the vulnerable as well as abled populations, where a study by Jacob and Akpan (2015), maintained that vulnerable people spend more resources on mobile telephony activities than on food and other basic needs.

Another 2019 study suggested increased use of technologies by individuals across class and race, with conscious efforts to secure their own communication experience and guide against misinformation. Although journalists were the focus of the study, it is instrumental here in positing that this development should propel the government at all levels to become more digital-savvy on their communication engagement across sectors. The study identified a growing hybridization of the media production and consumption patterns with emphasis on meaningful data gathering and interpretation (ICFJ, 2019). This subsists for this study because people and news sources are getting more technologically driven.

Engaging Theories: Social Exchange Theory and Diffusion of Innovation Model

Emerson (1976) provides a detailed historical description of the social exchange theory (SET), noting how efforts by George Homans, John Thibart, Harold Kelly, and Peter Blaudrove the view to a theoretical postulation. The concerns of the scholars were to present an argument that amplifies people’s involvement in communication activities. The theory is derivable from the equity, interdependence, and recourse theories, and drawn from several disciplines (Roloff, 2009). Inherent in his arguments, and as further encapsulated by Roloff (1981) is that SET is a voluntary transference of a random subject or activity from one person to another in return for another topic or event. Within the frame that this study seeks to engage this theory is the notion that with the dynamics of the vulnerable groups, their attention to government policies as contained in digitalized formats is highly dependent on what could be gained from the voluntary transference of their own. This argument

becomes more endemic when viewed against the fact that these sets of persons are economically disadvantaged and, thus, getting involved in the digital exchange will cut a deep hole in their pockets. This theory is of relevance in that it helps in identifying stop gaps in previous dissemination of government policies, and in making recommendations for future ones.

Though studies may have made such recommendations based on the use of the SET, it becomes more germane at this point to establish that the use of digital media tools allows for rich communication schemes that would accommodate intrinsic rewards. Corrigan (2001) had, at some point, found the economic frontiers of the theory in terms of costs and benefits, pushing the comparing 'level for alternative' button (Roloff, 1981). Invariably, what obtains is that when the vulnerable groups get involved with digital media contents that do not spell rewards concerning cost and resources expended, there will arise a level or extent when comparing alternatives will exist. Most times, such options circumvent the system.

Humans are self-interested and need resources to survive, meet their needs, and enact behavior that will result in benefits. Interactions are required to facilitate even distribution of these resources. Interactions are means of exchanging symbolic resources, negotiating exchanges, creating exchange relationships and networks, and ways by which individuals maintain and repair such transactions. Resources that are usually exchanged are love, status, information, services, goods, and money (Roloff, 2009). It could be established here that as relevant as the theory is to the study, there are critical points where the characterization of individuals as 'strategic and self-interacted' does not fit within any logical consistency. That deeper cognition is required to provide insight into texts.

Everett's diffusion of innovation (DoI) theory engages the theoretical frame further. While communication is viewed as a social exchange activity, the process of exchanging and the pathways for exchanges are sacrosanct and essential for the communication encounter. Diffusion describes how innovative ideas, policies, projects, practices make their way through various societal layers. Singhal (2009) notes that interpersonal communication is at the heart of the diffusion of innovations model. However, with the digitalization of the media and channels, machine-computer-mediated interpersonal communication takes center stage, and belonging to such groups enabled by influencers with resource-enabled-messages can produce more significant results at civic engagements.

The DoI theory, germane in explaining the spread of innovations (Cheng, 2011), is further stretched to include concepts as intervention, attributes, intervention clusters, demonstration projects, societal sectors, reinforcing contextual conditions, opinion leadership, and intervention adaptation (Dearing, 2009). With government policies, these sparks of the extension are relevant and make the theory connected to the study. The result of the DoI theory is that people adopt new behavior, ideas, or products. We thus expect the vulnerable group to adopt new ideas and practice of civic engagements. However, since adoptions are not automatic, but procedural, it should follow the consistent pathways of awareness, interest, trial evaluation, and adoption.

The theories are further connected by the reward resources' (SET) and the influencing factors for adoption (DoI) matrix. When innovations are diffused, people will adopt when there is a relative advantage, compatible with their needs, not complicated for them to identify with, and, if they are allowed to experiment with the possibilities of alternatives, and the extent to which the innovation provides tangible results. These could subsume as a reward for resources committed to the social exchange of communication. It is, therefore, within the constellation of these two theories that we engage the study to

establish that adequate marketing of government policies through digital media can engender civic engagements among, even, the vulnerable groups. Therefore, the research questions that guide the study are:

- RQ1:** What specific digital media types could be used by the government in marketing her policies towards vulnerable youths in Calabar to enhance civic engagement?
- RQ2:** Does the effective deployment of digital media as a tool to market government policies enhance civic engagements among the vulnerable youths in Calabar?
- RQ3:** To what extent does the government use digital media as tools to market her policies and enhance civic engagement among vulnerable youths in Calabar?

Methodology

The survey, based on the projective technique, was used for the study. It relied on data gathered through the use of interviews and questionnaire tools, from a sample of 900 respondents, drawn through clusters and purposively arrived at using 90% confidence level, and 75% expected response rate. The population is infinite. The study's respondents were drawn from vulnerable groupings in Calabar metropolis in the Cross Rivers State of Nigeria. These groups include out-of-school children who were targeted on weekdays; homeless persons around soft spots in town; sex workers around brothels, and apprentices in business areas. They were all within the 16-35 years brackets that best define youths. Research assistants made up of students of the researchers were instrumental in contacting the respondents. The questionnaire identified specific digital media government could deploy in marketing her policies to the respondents as well as determine the effectiveness of such deployment and subsequent engagements. The interview focused on the extent of government usage of these digital media tools. The percentile technique satisfies the purpose of quantitative data analysis while the thematic approach met the qualitative analysis of data needs. The mortality rate was 2.2%, as 20 copies of the questionnaire were voided or not returned. Subsequent data analysis was based on 880 respondents or 97.8%.

Findings and Discussion

The study aggregates responses from categories of persons that include out-of-school, homeless, sex workers, and apprentices within the age brackets of 16-35 years. This was considered adequate for the study as it meets the established benchmark for such. Although the sampling techniques involved the cluster and purposive designs, it was also important to create categories for the vulnerable populations that would help present a reflection of the groups.

Table 1. Categories of vulnerable groups

Items	Frequency	%
Out-of-school children	298	33.8
Homeless persons	64	7.3
Sex workers	66	7.5
Apprentices	452	51.4
Total	880	100

The labeling, as captured in the distribution above, indicates that the likelihood of meeting an apprentice (51.4%) who is likely to be vulnerable was higher than meeting an

out-of-school child (33.8%) or even a homeless person (7.3%) and sex worker (7.5%). The argument, as supported by the interview with some of the apprentices, was that part of what made them align with learning a trade as an apprentice was not unconnected with them being socially exposed. There was thus the need to be engaged in a manner that would connect them back to society. The low values for homeless persons and sex workers only buttress the stigma associated with the groups and thus the need to be labeled as either apprentice or out-of-school.

Table 2. Understanding and Usage of digital media

Categories	Yes (%)	No (%)
Out-of-school children	193 (64.8)	105 (35.2)
Homeless persons	60 (93.8)	4 (6.2)
Sex workers	65 (98.5)	1 (1.5)
Apprentices	356 (78.8)	96 (21.2)
Total	674 (76.6)	206 (23.4)

Their understanding and usage of digital media were tested as a basis for further analysis. Seventy-six-point six (76.6%) percent of the respondents seem to understand what digital media represents, and probably had made use of one. Interestingly nearly all the homeless persons in this study (93.8%) and sex workers (98.5%) agreed to understand the nature of digital media and using them, primarily as consumers. The further query of the process indicates that their knowledge base streams along with the basics of text, audio, video, graphics, animation, as opposed to the interactive and virtual components. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the respondents were more reluctant to digital media in its simplistic and isolated forms. In contrast, 12% of the respondents went further to identify with the interactive and virtual components of digital media.

Interesting, also is that this understanding of digital media was tested to assert if the respondents know of government or organizations' use of them to transmit messages and possibly engage with them. Only 13.2% of the respondents were of the opinion that the government could use or had used digital media formats in any form. In comparison, 86.8% felt that the digitization of media content was only for informal communications and entertainment. This misconception underlies the failure of the government at strategic policy levels to contemplate the total use of digitalization as media content form (Couldry, 2012). It equally raises the issues of being unrewarding for the vulnerable groups to think the government could mean anything serious if such contents are digitalized.

Suggestions for adequate awareness creation to stimulate interests and allowing the respondents to try and evaluate such contents as government-driven would no doubt inspire the use. Also assessed is the basic knowledge of respondents on civic engagements, where 88.7% responded in the positive. Ninety-three-point two percent (93.2%) of the respondents across categories equally felt they understood their public engagements. However, they felt that performing such engagements was not necessary as there was hardly anyone that enforces them or takes cognizance of whether they were completed or not. Their opinion of civic engagements includes payment of their taxes as at when due (83.5%); casting their votes, during elections (89.4%); volunteer jobs that include environmental sanitation, controlling traffic, helping the needy (74.3%); advocating for effective government and governance (83.1%) and reporting untoward activities such as corruption, security breach, and unusual awareness (68.5%). For them, getting involved in all of these was not necessary, and they felt that they could be 'helping the government to be seen as responsible rather than it having any benefit for themselves.' This touches on the SET as well as how awareness and interest should be created and diffused.

Table 3. Opinion on civic engagement

Categories	% Values
Payment of taxes	83.5
Casting their votes	89.4
Volunteers tabs	74.3
Advocacy	83.1
Reportage of issues	68.5

RQ 1: *What specific digital media types could be used by the government in marketing her policies towards vulnerable youths in Calabar to enhance civic engagement?*

Firstly, the need to identify specific digital media use suggests that this form of approach is needed to get the citizenry to participate in development processes. Digital media present the user with such an experience that makes for proper meaning sharing if well applied. Inherently, there is the assumption that digital media is seen as easily transmittable over networks as well as assuming textual, audio, video, graphics, animated, interactive and virtual formats (Hansen, 2008). Next is that full deployment and use of such digital media formats in Nigeria have been argued to be at the barest minimum despite the inherent advantages (Uduma & Obukoadata, 2018), and this, though, might challenge some of the results of this study. Nevertheless, there are documented instances where digital media uses have been very productive (Dijik, 2012; Edward et al., 2015). Also, there is a common denominator of the lack of necessary infrastructure to help support the drive towards a digital society. The Nigerian state, government, and individuals, as well as corporate organizations and institutions, have not been forthright in putting the digital media use at fullest thrust. Whether out of caution or sheer absent-mindedness, there has been a deliberate policy of exclusivity of specific stakeholders.

It is from this base that the respondents identified animation (86.4%) as the most suitable and specific media form that finds better appreciation among them. The implication is that animated messages could readily engage their attention and thus enhance their involvement in civic activities. Media such as text had a 76.5% response rate, while video and audio media had 75.3% and 61.3% attention respectively from the respondents. Animated media are seen as those that give life to the media text. Therefore, such animated messages are expected to get the attention of the respondents, and ultimately induce adoption from generated interests.

The focus on interactivity and virtuality (85.6%) as media genre equally received attention from the respondents who maintained in line with Feldman (2003), Dijik (2012), and Lewis and Flanagan (2007) that such media forms pull consumers in and a present avenue for adequate social exchange. This social exchange comes with rewards on resources diffused. Another gain from this identification of this media genre is that the media-rich nature ensures that necessary information is couched for the benefit of the consumers. In contrast, consumers are seen to have a voice (Preston & Kerr, 2001). The exchange value is also amplified within this frame.

RQ 2: *Does the effective deployment of digital media as a tool to market government policies enhance civic engagements among the vulnerable youths in Calabar?*

In determining if effective deployment of digital media as tools to market government policies can enhance civic engagement, the study found new variables and arrived at some challenging results. First, there was the position where 84.3% of the respondents seem not to be able to decipher between mere government messages and government policies. Every message from government is seen as something geared at making their lives worse and

that the functionality of such messages does not affect and involve them (Obukoadata, 2018). Such a lack of appreciation and differentiation between ordinary messages and policy messages may likely diminish the extent of enhancing civic engagements.

Next was that 81.6% of the respondents contend in line with Bobbitt and Sullivan (2014), that, challenges exist that have made the consumption of such digital contents minimal. These challenges mainly associated with their economic potentials to acquire the resources needed for digital media literacy are further compounded by their educational level and improper understanding of digital media and civic engagement. The exciting focus here is not in the acknowledgment of such challenges, but in the results that 92.1% of the respondents had access to one form of digital media device; 87.4% of them consume digital media every week, and 74.3% of them cannot do without internet subscription for a week, with another 83.2% maintaining they cannot stay without their computing devices (laptops, phones, tablets) for 24 hours.

It thus begs the question of “what do they frequently consume on these devices, and why will consumption of government-related messages point them in the direction of challenges?” The responses provided by Jacob and Akpan (2015) and Chang (2011), where it was emphasized that people, irrespective of the class are more wired and digital, are apt. But to what purpose? The contention that there is averagely high access, possession, and appreciation of digital media content only buttresses the place of awareness and sustaining interest as central to the diffusion of innovation model. It suggests that digital tools could be effectively engaged among vulnerable populations and that the once held notion that vulnerable persons are more likely to pursue hedonic needs lesser than basic physical needs as captured in the Maslow hierarchy of needs model would not be tenable in all situations. The dynamics of societies, psychographics, and socialization are most likely to upset the cart when needs are balanced on the hierarchy ladder. The catch-phrase, however, is that such deployment must be active.

The respondents beguiled effectiveness as contents that would serve their needs (93.2%), meet their peculiarities in terms of educational level, industrial standards and time-connectedness (88.3%), and propose rewards that come with the social exchange (82.7%). Such awards are expected to be demonstrated with thoughtful attention to specific roles, timing, and engagements, as well as corresponding reciprocities from the government. It can allude here that digital media provide a better platform to accommodate all these demands within reasonable justification (Dearing, 2009).

RQ 3: *To what extent does the government use digital media as tools to market her policies and enhance civic engagement among vulnerable youths in Calabar?*

Sadly, though, data on the extent to which the government deploys digital media to market her policies revealed that governments at all levels do not give adequate consideration to digital media use, and therefore, deployed digital media to a lesser extent that is convenient for them. They generally use digital media as a ‘flip-up’ tool rather than as a strategic one. Some of the interviewees contend that the whole idea of digitalization is scary to most top government officials, and always provokes a nostalgic feeling of how it should be done and why the civil service is all about the complaint and not innovations. Some others contend that such innovations only stream through if the communications are initiated at the top, and then they become a compliant issue for all. They argue further that, even at that, “the innovations must be seen to have met some financial needs to be able to see the light of day,” else they are dead on arrival. This feeling is mutual for almost all the interviewees, who acknowledge that the ‘fight’ against digitalization is not restricted to digital media alone but everything within the e-governance and e-commerce portfolios.

Governments' lack of use of digital media is not unconnected with the diatribes that characterize paradigmatic changes in work ethics (Couldry, 2012). The notion that the digital media conundrum is a product of the youthful generation (Buckingham & Willet, 2013), and therefore should not be accorded the desired responses, is also a negative quotient. These and several others, no doubt, challenge the extent to which the government is willing to deploy digital media use to marketing her policies. We have maintained that marketing is a conscious and deliberate policy that demands adequate planning, strategizing, and deployment of relevant resources. This marketing mentality is near absent in the Nigerian space. On the contrary, the attitude and variant of it, since the issues are government-driven; therefore, there must be some form of compliance (Asemah, 2011; Reddick & Anthopoulos, 2014).

Therefore, the contention is that government does not see digitalization, and its processes and gains as top most on their agenda and this attitude is further compounded by "technological lifestyles of those at the helm of affairs who normally see such innovation as an attempt at displacement, that should be resisted." If such does not exist at the general level of e-governance, it becomes more difficult to plant the same to the specific boundaries of digital media.

Data analyzed also suggest that effective deployment of digital media in marketing government policies among the vulnerable populations will enhance civic engagement. The data distribution shows a positive relationship which implies effectiveness. Therefore, if the digital media contents are tailored towards identifying with the recommendations of serving needs and socio-economic-cultural peculiarities as well as clearly defined rewards, then, the extent of civic engagements would be better enhanced.

Vulnerable populations with their distinct identities are most likely not going to get into the digital conundrum if the government does not provide a social exchange mechanism. This is not because they are opposed to its benefits, but because of the quantum of suspicion that this segment of the population holds against the policies of the government. In Calabar, for instance, and especially among the youthful population, the catch-phrase is that since it is 'coming from the government,' then 'it should be free, readily accessible to all and sundry, and should not be taken seriously.' This attitude is deeply entrenched and would take a whole lot of diffusion of innovations to disabuse. The deployment of digital media and its peculiarities, especially as agreed by the respondents that it would engender more civic engagements, would start from government putting-in place necessary machinery to market its policies. This would be done by first telling the various populations that they all need to embrace the digital media space, especially the vulnerable youths.

This segment of the population was mainly studied because of its averseness to issues of development. A peep into government regulations and activities to curb the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) have been met with disdain by the vulnerable population who felt that it was another ploy by government officials to enrich themselves from the commonwealth, entrench deep-seated poverty among the poor, and deny them access to their source of livelihood. This marked suspicion is a pathological hindrance to its full deployment, no thanks to the antics of government and its agencies. Therefore, governments should not only think about just deploying digital media but should also apply it effectively to meet the needs of the vulnerable, isolated, and less impactful population.

Conclusion

The study evaluated the position that deployment of digital media to marketing government policies can enhance civic engagements, not only among the populace but also, and effectively, among vulnerable youths. The focus on the adolescents and vulnerable groups were informed by the assumption that vulnerable populations, most times, focus on satisfying their basic physiological needs before other hedonic needs of which civic engagement is one. The study concludes that vulnerable youths in Calabar are active users of digital media and somewhat appreciate the nuances involved. It maintains that animated media content provides higher interest levels than any other digital media form. When such animations are made interactive as well as have virtual component, then, they are likely to be more productive. Another notable conclusion that should attract further studies is that effective deployment of digital media in marketing government policies can enhance active civic engagement. The contention, though, is that governments at all levels in Nigeria, and specifically Calabar, are cautious with the idea of digitalization, and as such, do not give attention to digital media.

Consequently, it recommends, among others, that digital media content meant to market government policies should include reward components in such policy marketing strategies that involve digital media. This is to ensure that interest in line with the DOI model is entrenched. These reward components should be animated and made interactive as much as possible to ensure active engagements. Also, conversational groups should be created with administrators and influencers using such policy thrust as diffusion elements within these groups. This approach would give deeper meanings to government policies at different levels and ultimately provide understanding, participation, and engagements. Another recommendation would be to initiate communication from the top on innovations such that those at the bottom would strategically implement them. This is to guide against apprehension when such changes come from the bottom. Initiating communication encounters from the top is perceived as more holistic and accommodating of diversities. Such processes, though, would require that the top brass of governance would be duly educated on digital media use and appreciation. This will help achieve almost total compliance.

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