Integrating Social Media into Theatre for Community Development among Theatre Arts Students of Plateau State University, Bokkos, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Theatre has long been a powerful tool for social change, but in today's digital age, its impact can be amplified through social media. Meanwhile, whereas social media has been widely adopted in various fields, its integration into theatre for community development remains underexplored, particularly in Nigerian universities, presenting a gap in understanding how theatre arts students can specifically leverage social media to drive community engagement and development in the Nigerian context.

Objective: This study explored how theatre arts students at Plateau State University, Bokkos, can harness social media to promote community development, engage with local audiences, and drive positive change in Plateau State, Nigerias.

Method: Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Data were collected from 384 respondents with the use of questionnaire, while analysis was done using descriptive statistic and presented using pie, bar chats, and frequency table. The participants were selected from Mangu and Jos East Local Government Areas in the state. The study was situated within the Participatory Culture and User Agency Theory and Theory of Affective Economies.

Results: The result revealed that Facebook and WhatsApp were effective in mobilising the community members and that the respondents received messages on the various social media platforms that increased their levels of awareness about political consciousness, good governance, community responsibility in solving local problems and the judicious use/misuse of power.

Conclusion: The study concluded that the integration of social media platforms into the Theatre for Development has significantly improved the mobilisation and conscientisation of the community members on some of the issues affecting them and proffering solutions to the problems as well as solving them using local resources and expertise.

Unique Contribution: This study has offered new approach in Theatre for Development practice by using social media in the practice in mobilising and conscientising community members on some of the issues affecting and encouraging them to solve the problems through communal efforts while drawing government's attention to the plights.

Key Recommendation: Relevant government ministries and agencies, particularly those responsible for health, education, and community development should adopt and integrate social media in TfD as a complementary method for grassroots mobilisation and policy implementation.

Keywords: Social Media, Theatre for Development, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

Theatre has historically relied on physical space and real-time presence to generate impact. However, in the 21st century, digital technologies and online platforms have reshaped the way theatre is produced, consumed, and interpreted. Social media, in particular, has emerged as a transformative tool, providing new avenues for marketing, audience development, and interactivity (Nwafor, & Nwabuzor, 2021). Theatre as an art form thrives on presence of performers, of audiences, and of live interaction. Yet, in the digital age, audience engagement has taken on new meanings and methods. Social media platforms have emerged as critical tools for extending the reach of theatre beyond the physical auditorium. Particularly in Africa, where access to traditional theatre spaces may be limited, social media offers a virtual stage for visibility and connection. Ekpe (2018), Ekpe (2017) and Bassey (2014) underscore this shift in their study of digital communication dynamics in Nigeria, observing that social media platforms have evolved into influential public spheres where narratives are not just disseminated but negotiated, contested, and reimagined.

In this light, the theatre is no longer confined to a proscenium or an amphitheatre; it lives on in hashtags, user-generated content, and online reviews. Ekpe's insights provide a critical foundation for understanding how Nigerian theatre practitioners and audiences engage in a cultural dialogue that spans both physical and digital spaces. Theatre has long thrived on physical proximity and communal immersion, where audience presence within a defined space plays a crucial role in the transmission of meaning. Yet, in the digital age, this traditional mode of engagement is increasingly reshaped by the pervasive influence of social media (Nwonyi, et al., 2024). Platforms like X, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have transformed how theatrical productions are marketed, discussed, and even experienced. As boundaries between performer and spectator blur, theatre audiences are no longer passive observers but active participants in a broader digital dramaturgy. In this evolving landscape, Jacob (2024; Jacob 2023; Umanah, Atakpo & Jacob 2024) notes that social media has given theatre a second stage, a virtual one, where narratives are extended, challenged, and reimagined beyond the physical performance. This second stage allows theatre to reach geographically dispersed audiences, foster real-time dialogue, and archive audience reactions as part of its interpretive life. The immediacy and interactivity enabled by social media have also altered production aesthetics and audience expectations, prompting Nigerian theatre practitioners to rethink how they cultivate and sustain the use of social media for promoting sustainable community development.

In the digital age, the landscape of theatre is undergoing a transformative shift. Traditionally characterised by physical co-presence and ephemeral liveness, theatre has long relied on direct, in-person engagement to convey its emotive power and social resonance. (Bassey & Wekpe 2023; Jacob 2024). However, the emergence of social media has redefined the relationship between performance and audience, expanding the boundaries of theatrical interaction beyond the stage and into digital spaces (Ekpe & Akpabio 2021; Ekpe 2016; Bassey 2025). Platforms such as X, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok now serve as parallel arenas where audiences discover, critique, and co-create theatre experiences. This transformation is particularly evident in Nigeria, where a burgeoning digital culture intersects with a rich tradition of performative storytelling. Theatre producers and artists increasingly turn to social media not only to market

productions but also to promote development initiatives. However, there has been very little studies that focused on the adoption and integration of social media into TfD practice in Nigeria. It is therefore, the concern of this study was to assess the integration of social media into TfD practice in promoting sustainable community development by the students of Theatre Arts department of Plateau State University, Bokkos in Mangu and Jos East Local Government Areas in the state.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to assess the integration of social media into theatre for development practice in promoting sustainable community development in Mangu and Jos East Local Government Areas, Plateau State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

i. Identify the various social media platforms the respondents use to get access to the 2024 and 2025 community theatre performance of students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos.

ii. Investigate the extent of accessing social media messages of the 2024 and 2025 community theatre performance of students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos.

iii. Examine the kinds of sustainable community development messages access through social media regarding the 2024 and 2025 community theatre performance of students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Social Media

Social media, which comprises of online communication platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, X, among others, according to Mayfield (2008) is a group of new kinds of online media has six potential strengths; participation and engagement, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness Later Graham and Dutton (2014) define social media as "possessing three characteristics: the affordance of user-generated content, the ability for individuals to directly engage with other individuals and content and the ability to select and articulate network connections with other individuals". Seargeant and Tagg (2014) further state that the essence of social media, as a focus on the facilitating of participation and interaction with the result that the content of what is developed and shared on the internet is as much a product of participation as it is of traditional creative and publishing/broadcast processes". The Business Directory (2017) describes social media to include popular networking websites, like Facebook and Twitter; as well as bookmarking sites like Reddit. It involves blogging and forums and any aspect of an interactive presence which allows individuals the ability to engage in conversations with one another, often as a discussion over a particular blog post, news article, or event".

Other viewed these digital communication platforms as the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), such as Facebook, Twitter, and others, as a tool to achieve

better communication (Graham &Dutton 2017). Rathore (2016) states that Web 2.0 "allows users to collectively classify and find dynamic information that flows two ways between the site owner and site user using evaluation, comments, and reviews. Site users can add content for others to see. Social media is a general term used to describe a collection of online communication platforms focused on community-based cooperation, communication, content sharing, and engagement.

Theatre for Development

The concept of Theatre for Development is grounded in empowerment, conscientization, mobilisation, and participation for the purpose of effecting conceivable change in those who use it. TFD uses indigenous resources and allows programme recipients to use its platform to speak to their situation and the need to create positive outcomes. Indigenous resources in this context are the non-material aspects of the life of the people that generate rallying points for collective and communal living or encounters. These include songs, dances, proverbs, poetry, music, masquerades, drumming, storytelling and all other immediate media that people use to speak to their daily realities. The TFD methodology is designed in a way to disseminate information helpful in raising consciousness and influencing rural communities to change their perceptions of themselves and their world Essien, 2020).

Theatre for Development (TfD) or Community theatre is often defined as the theatre of the people, by the people and for the people. The import of this is that, (TfD) originates or is culled from the community concerned. Every material needed for the theatre: storyline, actors, place of performance inclusive is taken from the community. The theatre is often time planned and executed by the people, though under the supervision of an experienced theatre practitioner (Yerima, 2022). The theatre is originally, intentionally targeted towards every member of the community in question, rather than a group of audience(s) like in the conventional theatre. Perhaps the way it is made, and the way the community have input, differs depending on the situation.

The primary objective of TfD is to promote civic dialogue within the community in order to stimulate social debates that would lead to development (Iyorwuese, 2021). The ability of TfD to stimulate discussions is evident as audiences often engage in debatesand even constructive argument surrounding sensitive topics. TfD prioritises inclusion, community engagement, and issue-driven performance. Its processes are as significant as its outcomes, since much of its transformative power lies in the collaborative work that precedes the public staging. At the core of TfD is its participatory ethos, which positions community members not as consumers of art but as co-creators of meaning. As Obasi et al (2021) observe, this participatory process enhances agency, particularly in conflict-affected communities, by providing people with opportunities to share their own stories and explore possible solutions.

Community Sustainable Development
This is a positive change which occurs in a society for the well-being of the people and can be maintained within the period and the future without destroying the foundation of its source. In the declaration by UNICEF sustainable development can be seen as development that not only

generates economic growth but distributes its benefits equitably, that regenerates the environment rather than marginalising them. It gives priority to the poor, enlarging their choices, and opportunities, and provides for their participation in decisions affecting them. It is development that is pro-poor, pro-nature, pro-jobs, pro-democracy, pro-women, and pro-children (Batta, 2008).

From the above, it is safe to say that sustainable development embodies all the basic factors which are capable of stabilizing the society and make it functional for every citizen. In line with the above Batta (2008, p. 39) espoused further on the essence and implications of a sustainable development for our situation in Nigeria when he says:

> To develop in a sustainable way therefore means developing at a pace and quality that permits people to learn, think and act in ways that make it possible to refine the value of life from age to age. It means empowering people as families, villages and communities, social collectives, and countries to promote environmental protection, social harmony and economic progress. Sustainable development is safeguarding, ensuring, enhancing and nurturing the future with the actions of today.

The implication of the above is that in whatever form development occurs, it should be meant to benefit the society. Therefore, any developmental project which benefits only an individual at the detriment of the entire society should be discouraged as it is counter-productive. The interest of the citizenry should be protected as well be the driving force of every development and as such every effort should be made to improve the living condition of the citizenry. This also corresponds with the standard of development a country ought to attend as required by the United Nations General Assembly which includes a minimum standard of living compatible with human dignity, underpinned improvement of well-being of the individual, sharing of benefits by society at large and more equitable distribution of wealth and income among other things.

According to Izibili and Enegho (2019), the end product of any development initiative ought to be the general good and happiness of the citizens as a whole through the provision of basic necessities of life such as food and shelter, enhancement of the material and spiritual well-being of the people, freeing individuals and nations from servitude and dependence not only in relation to other people and nation states but also to the forces of ignorance and human misery. From the above, it is clear that real development has to be focused on man and his welfare in society. This also entails that there is need to ensure that man and the other living organisms within his environment benefits from any developmental endeavour.

The Role of Social Media in Theatre for Development Practice
Theatre has experienced significant evolution globally and within Africa, with each era introducing new paradigms in performance, audience engagement, and production techniques. From ritualistic and communal forms to formal stagecraft, the growth of theatre reflects society's shifting values, technological developments, and political climates (Jacob 2023; Bassey 2025; Ekpe 2025; Jacob 2024). According to Akpan and Ekpe (2018), the influence of social media on theatre audience engagement has been a growing area of interest in performance and media

studies. Jenkins (2006) introduced the concept of participatory culture, where users actively engage in media creation and dissemination. This theory has laid the groundwork for understanding how audiences interact with theatrical content online. Similarly, Ekpe (2019); Castells (2010) theorize the rise of the network society, emphasizing how digital technologies restructure communication and cultural production.

Instagram has become a vital space for theatre promotion in Nigeria, with visual storytelling and influencer collaboration driving ticket sales. African theatre practitioners increasingly use digital platforms to engage diasporic and local audiences, breaking spatial and temporal boundaries. The transformation of the production-reception dynamic is central to Bruns' (2024) notion of Prod usage: the complete convergence of producer and receiver, artist and spectator, facilitated by accessible digital tools and the internet as a means of creation, distribution and consumption. Bruns (2024) describes the shift from artistic products created by individual artists, to creativity as an unfinished, evolving and participatory process, giving examples of web-based media sharing tools such as Flicker and YouTube. The study focused on the new media viewing experience of youth. Many factors like Live (li) ness, resourcefulness, attitude, the distribution of performers and its situation in cyberspace distinguish theatre viewing experience from other art forms. The content, technology and other factors also are included. The study finally concludes that theatre gets wider possibility to prove themselves with the help of new media. One of the major advantages of social media marketing is the ability to reach a wide audience breaking down geographic boundaries.'

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
The intersection of theatre and social media can be best understood through key theoretical lenses that address both digital interactivity and the transformation of cultural consumption. This discourse draws primarily on participatory culture theory. Henry Jenkins' (2006) theory of participatory culture provides a foundational framework for interpreting audience behaviour in the digital age. Jenkins posits that users are no longer passive consumers of media but active participants who contribute, remix, and distribute content. Applied to theatre, this means that audiences do not merely attend shows, they now engage with productions before, during, and after performances via tweets, Instagram posts, Facebook comments, and TikTok duets. These platforms enable them to shape discourse, aesthetics, and even the perceived value of a production.

Performance, Liveness, and Mediatization: Philip Auslander (2008) introduces the concept of Mediatised Performance, which interrogates the shifting boundaries between live and recorded experiences. Social media complicates the traditional notion of liveness in theatre by enabling a hybrid form of engagement. Live tweeting, behind-the-scenes Instagram reels, and YouTube talkbacks extend the performance space beyond the theatre hall. While this allows for dynamic engagement, it also raises questions about authenticity, immediacy, and the theatrical experience's temporal integrity. In an era of constant media innovation, this theory remains a relevant framework for analysing how audiences navigate the ever-expanding media environment.

METHODOLOGY

The research adopted the quantitative research strategy. The purpose of adopting this research approach was to reach out to a large number of populations, is concerned with facts and verifiable information, faster in obtaining information and it can be done anonymously, meaning without knowing the person that is giving you the information. The study further adopted descriptive survey research design in order to study a group of people to represent the entire population. The target population of the study were residents of Mangu and Jos East Local Government Areas. The total population of these two areas are (442, 100, Mangu and 85, 607 for Jos East, according to data from National Bureau of Statistics, 2025). The overall total of the study is 527, 707.

The researcher collected information from four wards in each of the study areas through stratification. Each village was divided into five zones. Furthermore, purposive sampling was adopted. Purposive sampling technique. Therefore, the researcher purposively selected only adult population who have social media-enabled phones and have accessed information of the community theatre performance of the students of Department of Theatre Arts, Plateau State University, Bokkos, performed in 2024 and 2024. From the total population (527, 707), the researcher used Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table method of getting sample size from a total population to arrive at a sample size of 384. Below is the table:

Table for determining sample's size of a known Population

N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	100	50	280	162	800	260	2800	338
15	14	110	56	290	165	850	265	3000	341
20	19	120	92	300	169	900	269	3500	346
25	24	130	97	320	175	950	274	4000	351
30	28	140	103	340	181	1000	278	4500	351
35	32	150	108	360	186	1100	285	5000	357
40	36	160	113	380	191	1200	291	6000	361
45	40	170	118	4000	196	1300	297	7000	364
50	44	180	123	420	201	1400	302	8000	367
55	48	190	127	440	205	1500	306	9000	368
60	52	200	132	460	210	1600	310	10000	370
65	56	210	136	480	214	1700	313	15000	375
70	59	220	140	500	217	1800	317	20000	377
75	63	230	144	550	226	1900	320	30000	379
80	66	240	148	600	234	2000	322	40000	380
85	70	250	152	650	242	2200	327	50000	381
90	73	260	155	700	248	2400	331	75000	382
95	76	270	159	750	254	2600	335	**1000000**	**384**

Note: N = Population size, S = Sample size
Source: Krejcie and Morgan (1970)

The structured questionnaire was used to gather data for the study. The researcher adopted questionnaire because it is suitable for the study and does not disclose the identity of respondents. The questionnaire for this study was divided into two sections. The first section solicits for information about respondents' demographic data while the second part contained

questions that are open and closed ended in nature. The questionnaire contains various items to elicit responses from the respondents.

The administration of the research instrument was done on a face-to-face basis by the researcher. The justification for the adoption of direct method of data collection is because such technique ensures a high return rate of the questionnaire administered as well as waiting for the respondents to send their responses is avoided in this form of data collection. Also, three research assistants were trained and engaged by the researcher who helped in the data collection.

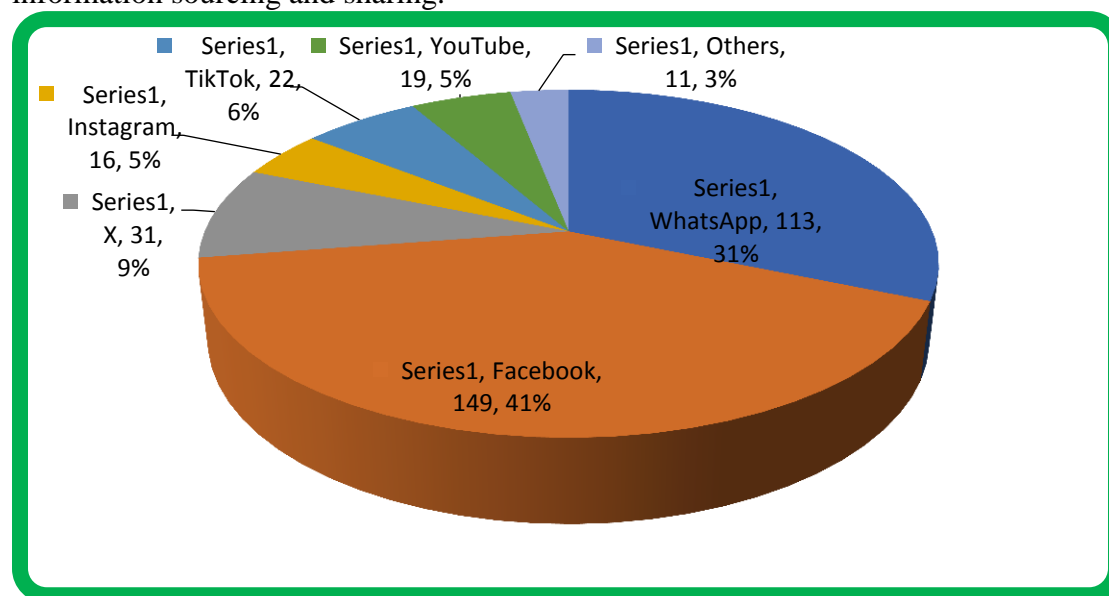## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Answering Research Questions
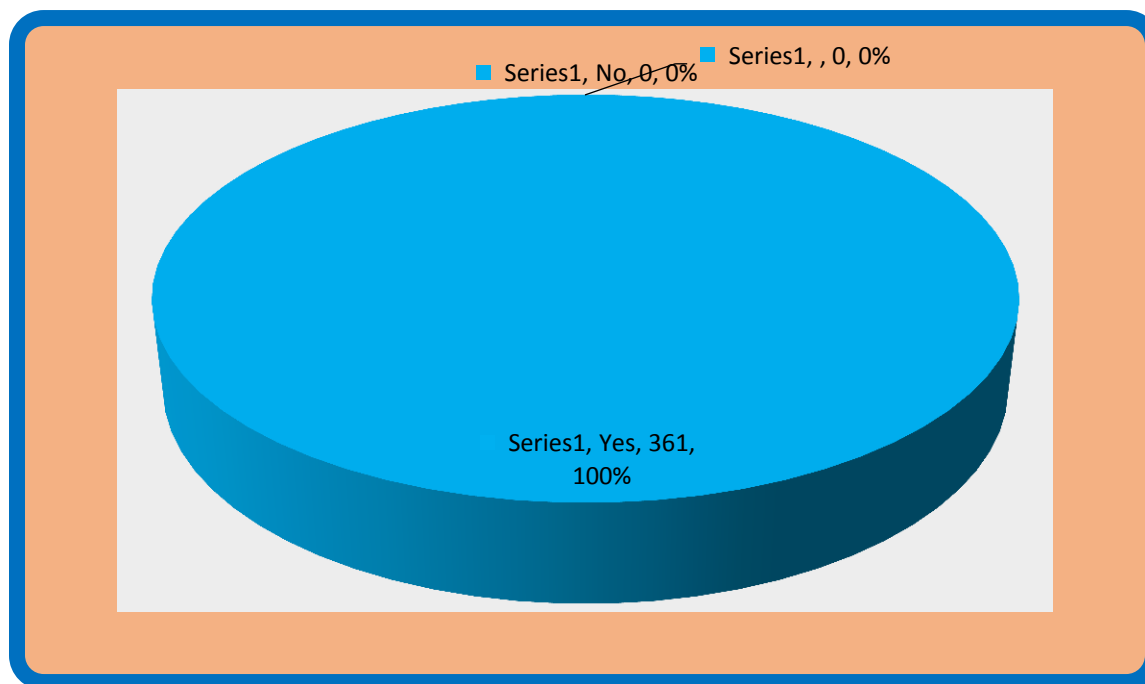
Source: Field Survey, 2025

Figure 1.1: Do you have Social Media Account?

The data in Figure 1.1 points to the important of social media platforms in modern day information sourcing and sharing.
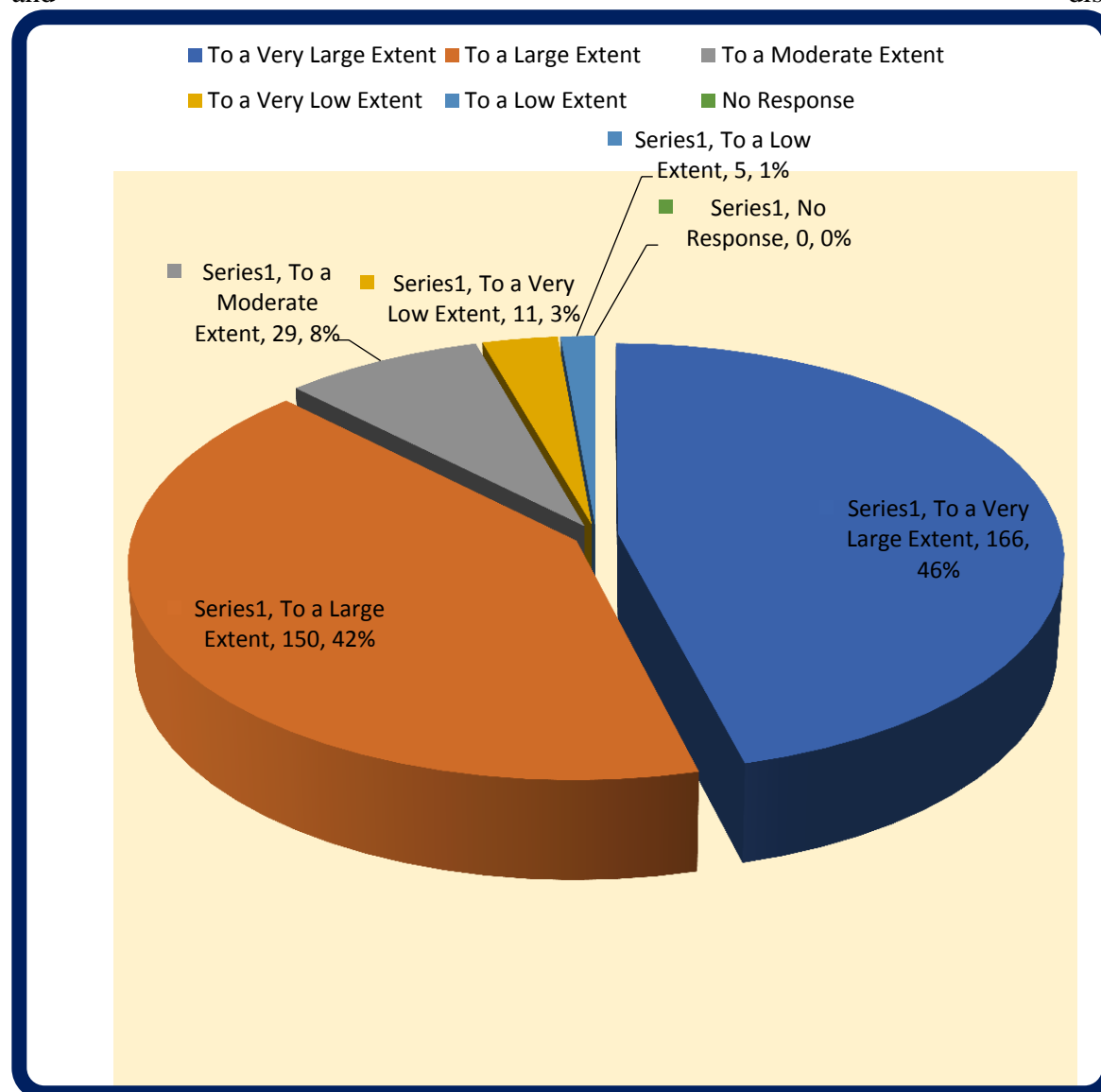

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Figure 1.2: Most Used Social Media Platforms the Respondents Use to Get Access to the 2024 and 2025 Community Theatre Performance of Students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos

The data displayed in Figure 1.2 indicate that Facebook, WhatsApp, are the most frequently used social media platforms among the respondents to get access to the 2024 and 2025 Community Theatre Performance of Students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos. This prevalence emphasises the dominance of these platforms in facilitating social interaction and information exchange, particularly in the context of community development engagement

and   discourse.

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Figure 1.3 Extent of Accessing Social Media Messages of the 2024 and 2025 Community Theatre Performance of Students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos

The data depicted in Figure 1.3 suggest that social media has become a primary communication platform for the respondents. The frequency of usage highlights its significant role in daily interactions and information dissemination, reinforcing its importance in contemporary communication dynamics, especially as it concerns accessing messages on development-related

issues like the ones presented by Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos in 2024 and 2025.

Table 1.2: Types of Sustainable Community Development Messages Access by the Respondents through Social Media Regarding the 2024 and 2025 Community Theatre Performance of Students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos

Options	AS	A	U	SD	D	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
Messages and campaigns related to health issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention, sanitation, hygiene, nutrition, family planning, and vaccination drives	194	167	0	0	0	**361**	4.5	Accepted
Messages addressing social anomalies and human rights issues, including campaigns against child labour, human trafficking, gender discrimination, and advocating for women's empowerment and the rights of children	201	160	0	0	0	**361**	4.5	Accepted
Messages raising awareness about political consciousness, good governance, community responsibility in solving local problems and the judicious use/misuse of power	213	148	0	0	0	**361**	4.5	Accepted
Information and theatrical pieces highlighting environmental issues, pollution, conservation, and sustainable development practices	199	162	0	0	0	**361**	4.5	Accepted
Messages promoting the importance of formal and non-formal education, adult literacy and supporting the education of children	231	130	0	0	0	**361**	4.6	Accepted
Messages aimed at fostering community harmony, religious tolerance, and promoting peaceful co-existence	222	139	0	0	0	**361**	4.6	Accepted

It could be inferred from the results that the respondents accessed various community development information from social media share by Students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos.
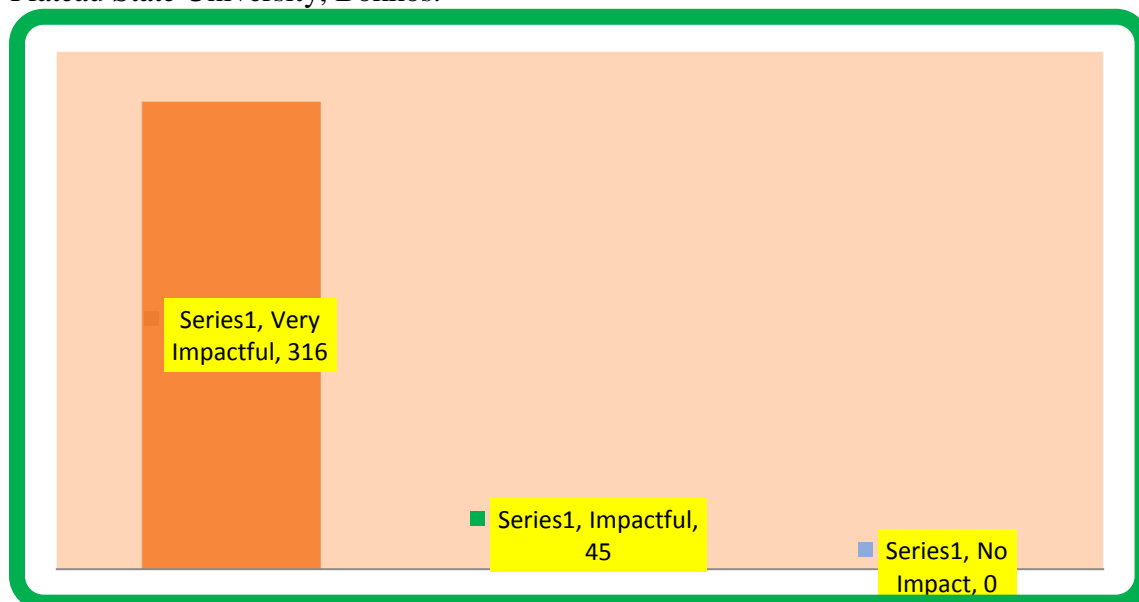
Source: Field Survey, 2025

Figure 1.4 Impacts of the Messages of the 2024 and 2025 Community Theatre Performance of Students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos Shared on Social Media

The data imply that social media has become an important tool in achieving the aim and objectives of Theatre for Development.

DISCUSSION

The first objective of the study was to find out the types of social media platforms the respondents use to get access to the 2024 and 2025 community theatre performance of students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos. Data revealed that Facebook was the most used social media platform. This was followed by WhatsApp (see Figure 1.1 above). This prevalence emphasises the dominance of these platforms in facilitating social interaction and information exchange, particularly in the context of community development engagement and discourse. This finding agrees with the position of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) Facebook and WhatsApp have revolutionised information sharing and they are the most used social media tools, facilitating interactive engagement and real-time information transmission in all aspects of human life.

The second objective of the study focused on the extent of accessing social media messages of the 2024 and 2025 community theatre performance of students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos. The study found here that the respondents accessed these messages to a very large extent (see Figure 1.2 above). The extent of usage highlights its

significant role in daily interactions and information dissemination, reinforcing its importance in contemporary communication dynamics, especially as it concerns accessing messages on development-related issues like the ones presented by Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos in 2024 and 2025. The finding is in line with that of Adejumo (2022) who found that social media like Instagram has become a vital space for theatre promotion in Nigeria, with visual storytelling and influencer collaboration driving ticket sales. It enhances the dissemination of development information due to it video ability.

The third objective of the study examined the types of sustainable community development messages access through social media regarding the 2024 and 2025 community theatre performance of students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos. The study established that the respondents got messages and campaigns related to health issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention, sanitation, hygiene, nutrition, family planning, and vaccination drives. They also accessed messages addressing social anomalies and human rights issues, including campaigns against child labour, human trafficking, gender discrimination, and advocating for women's empowerment and the rights of children.

In addition, the participants received messages raising awareness about political consciousness, good governance, community responsibility in solving local problems and the judicious use/misuse of power. Further, they got information and theatrical pieces highlighting environmental issues, pollution, conservation, and sustainable development practices. Others were messages promoting the importance of formal and non-formal education, adult literacy and supporting the education of children, and messages aimed at fostering community harmony, religious tolerance, and promoting peaceful co-existence (see Table 1.2 above). An earlier finding by Nwosu (2016), emphasises that social media has dismantled boundaries and broadened the reach of Nigeria's theatre and film events beyond traditional audiences, this greater accessibility, has led to a more varied audience base and more access to information, especially Theatre for Development activities students of Theatre Arts.

The last objective of the study assessed the impact of the messages of the 2024 and 2025 community theatre performance of students of Theatre Arts Department, Plateau State University, Bokkos shared via social media. Here the study showed that the messages were very impactful (see Figure 1.3 above). The finding is in tandem with that of Kumar (2019), who found that theatre can be converged with new media which provides greater opportunities for the development of communities.

CONCLUSION
Based on the findings, the study concluded that social media remains an important tool for the expansion of Theatre for Development (TfD) activities. Social media is a potent participatory tool for community engagement, capable of transforming awareness into sustained collective action. Across the local government areas examined, the integration of social media in TfD fostered critical reflection, dialogue, and collaboration, for sustained community development. The research demonstrated that TfD's effectiveness lies in its integration of new communication platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, X, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

i. The use of social media into Theatre for Development should be formally integrated into school curriculum, and also local and national development agencies.

ii. Relevant government ministries and agencies, particularly those responsible for health, education, and community development, should adopt social media use in TfD as a complementary method for grassroots mobilisation and policy implementation. Institutional integration will ensure that TfD through the integration of social media will expand more.

iii. Capacity building is crucial to sustaining the transformative potential of the use of social media in TfD. Communities require trained facilitators who can design, implement, and evaluate how they can properly use social media for development purposes.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

I conceived the study, including the design, I collated the data, and handled the analysis and interpretation with the help of a colleague, Mr. Bernard Lucas. I have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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