

Assessment of the Use of Social Media for Sports Communication in South-East States of Nigeria

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Abstract

In many parts of the world, the use of social media for sports communication is increasing speedily. Individuals and organizations are expending huge time and resources on social media sites to keep track of events or developments in the sporting world. It is on this backdrop that this paper assesses the use of social media for sports communication in Nigeria. The discourse centred on the extent social media users in South-East Nigeria are applying the social media to create and consume sports news and information, and the potential influence the application is having on Nigeria's sports industry. The study used the descriptive survey method to collect data from six hundred (600) respondents drawn from the five South-East states of Nigeria. The findings show that although the use of social media is growing across the states, the application is still below expectation. However, the study observes that social media are exerting tremendous influence on the sports industry despite the numerous factors that stifle their

application. The paper recommends that social media users in Nigeria particularly in the South-East should be enlightened on the possibilities or opportunities offered by social media in the area of sports.

Keywords: Social Media, Sports, Sports Communication, New Media, South-East, Nigeria

Introduction

Sports is an age long phenomenon that dates back to ancient days. It is one of the most shared experiences in the world today. Sports is admired by everyone irrespective of class, sex or age. It provides great opportunities for people from diverse cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds to connect and interact without prejudice. The passion that accompanies sports is permeating and overwhelming. Sports promotes peace, unity, solidarity, interaction, friendship and understanding among individuals, groups, organizations, communities and nations, and serves as a conduit for entertainment and relaxation. Sports expresses our human, mental and physical capabilities. As an educational resource, sports helps us to develop teamwork principles and skills and instils in us the sense of discipline and perseverance. Economically, sports is a vital force. Organizations and marketing professionals are using sports to reach their diverse customers and to market their products. The impact of sports on human development is enormous. Some of the notable sports include football, basketball, table tennis, athletics, volleyball, rugby, cricket, wrestling, boxing, hockey, swimming, lawn tennis, and badminton.

Nevertheless, sports is meaningless without

communication. “Communication and sports are intertwined” (Pedersen, 2012). Communication is pivotal to how we understand, interpret, or appreciate sports. Communication shapes our attitude or disposition to sports. “Sports communication is the engine that reaches out to sports fans and its audience in the sports industry. Without sports communication, the many facets of covering sports scores, news updates and issues within the industry would not be communicated in a timely manner”. (Rein, Kotler & Shields, 2007).

Nevertheless, Sports communication has undergone tremendous changes in recent times with advancements in media and communication technologies. The emergence of social media in particular has led to a more responsive and lustrous method of sports communication in which fans and other sports stakeholders across the world can easily connect with one another to interact, create and consume sports news and information without the barriers of language and distance.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, social media have grown in usage across the sports world and have become vital tools for communicating sports news and or information. Since the emergence of social media, the means and methods available for producing and delivering sports messages have not only increased but also have greatly improved. However, despite the burgeoning popularity and usefulness of social media especially in sports, Nigerian social media users have not truly utilized them for sports communication. It is therefore the intention of this study to assess the use of social media for sports communication by social media users in the South- East states of Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to assess the use of social media for sports communication in Nigeria. Other objectives of the study

are as follows:

1. To ascertain how social media are facilitating sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria.
2. To find out the level of application of social media in sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria.
3. To ascertain which social media platform has the highest engagement in sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria.
4. To find out which critical factors inhibit effective use of social media for sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria.
5. To evaluate the use of social media for sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions.

1. How are social media facilitating sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria?
2. What is the level of application of social media in sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria?
3. Which social media platform has the highest engagement in sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria?
4. Which critical factors inhibit the use of social media for sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria?
5. What is your evaluation of the use of social media for sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria?

Literature Review

“Social media are online communications that use special techniques that involve participation, conversation, sharing, collaboration, and linkage” (Dominick, 2011, p. 25). They “are online networks used to reach friends, generate new friends and share experiences, information and insights” (Fills, 2009, p. 796).

Social media “focus on building and reflecting of social relations among people who share interest and activities” (Wikipedia, 2008). They provide a platform for users to share information, ideas, interest, and experiences without the constraints of language, ethics affiliation, culture, geography, or time. Social media provide opportunities for individuals to use a multimedia mix of text, pictures, videos, and audio to interact, share, and discuss information about subjects, issues, and ideas of common interest.

The sports industry has witnessed remarkable changes since the emergence of social media. The new media including 2go, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Foursquare, Google+, Blogs, live chats and Pinterest to mention a few, have not only widened the spectrum and method of sports communication but have brought new possibilities or opportunities in their wake.

Rothschild (2011), in a survey observed that there has been an increase in social media use for sports communication in recent times leading to a massive decline of the traditional mass media. Rothschild noted that the decline of the traditional communication methods is traceable to the rising profile of social media especially their ability to facilitate fan interaction and commentary.

Sanderson & Kassing (2011), on their part, added that the increase in social media engagement over the years has relegated the mass media and has made them to lose their edge as a potent force in sports communication. According to Wysocki (2012), the introduction of social media in sports communication has enhanced the way sports news and information are collected and communicated. He observed that the new media have improved sports media and their consumption, and have allowed users more power over the production and dissemination of sports news. Corroborating Wysocki's view, Idumange (2012) remarked that the media reformations with regards to social media have essentially and irrevocably transformed the nature of sports

journalism. He submitted that the new technology came with it new approaches which are immediate and interactive. Kietzmann *et al* (2011) in their research further stated that social media are effective in communicating the sports public promptly, with sufficient amounts of information and with the ability of interaction.

Davies (2012), in a work titled “How social media has changed sports, parts 1” posited that social media have widely united fans across the world even overcoming the barriers of language, religion and beliefs. Davies observed that social media have increased the passion for sports, and have made the public more ardent and enthusiastic in their support for sports, clubs, or players.

Generally, it can be inferred from existing literature that social media are having tremendous impact on the global sports industry. However, the level of impact varies from place to place depending on the extent of social media awareness and application as well the passion for sports.

Theoretical Framework

This paper derives from two theoretical perspectives namely: Technology Acceptance Model, and Uses and Gratification Theory.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Technology Acceptance Model is a theoretical construct developed by Fred Davis in 1989 (Davis 1989, Bagozzi, Davis & Warshaw 1992). It is an information systems theory that illustrates how prospective or potential users of a new information system come to accept and use it. Technology Acceptance Model postulates that when a new information system (like social media), is introduced, the likelihood that the target users will readily adopt it, is consequent upon two key factors, the perceived utilities and the perceived ease-of-application. The former refers to the extent

to which a user thinks the new technology would be useful to him while the latter is the extent to which he hopes that use of the new system would be simple and free from constraints. In this model, Fred Davis presupposes that there is a relationship between an individual's propensity to accept and use a new technology and his perceptions of the system. According to him the attitudes or behaviours of users towards a new technology is determined by its perceived usefulness and ease-of-application.

Technology Acceptance Model therefore helped this study to examine how users' perceptions of social media as a new information and communication system affect their attitudes towards the acceptance and use of the new technology for sports communication. The model essentially helped in this context to analyse the level of acceptance and application of social media for sports communication in the South-East states of Nigeria.

Uses and Gratification Theory

The public often have a wide range of media needs and interests. In addition, they always seek information and communication channels that can satisfy these desires. Uses and Gratification Theory presupposes that consumers of media messages are naturally discriminatory in their approach to media selection and application to the extent that they select and use only the medium or media that can guarantee the satisfaction of their communication needs or those that can provide gratifications of their perceived media needs.

In this context, Uses and Gratification Theory was used to analyze how the public especially sports fans, in South-East States of Nigeria are taking advantage of social media platforms to satisfy their sports communication needs. The theory helped to examine the nature of gratifications the new media can afford the sports fans that can induce them to engage in it.

Method

This study adopted description survey research method. Descriptive survey is a brand of survey study that “attempts to picture or document current conditions or attitudes” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 445). Descriptive survey was chosen for this study because of its ability or propensity to investigate current issues, trends and behaviours, as is the case in this study.

The target population of the study comprised all sports stakeholders in South-East states of Nigeria (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States), in others words, all sports fans, players, journalists, sports administrators, sports educators and managers of clubs in these states.

From the population, a sample size of six hundred (600) respondents drawn from the five states was used for this study. In selecting the sample, four sampling methods were applied. They are stratified, cluster, quota and purposive sampling techniques. Through stratified sampling, the respondents were subdivided into males and females to ensure fair gender representation. Cluster sampling ensured that respondents were drawn from among the various sports stakeholders earlier mentioned, all to ensure fair representation. Quota sampling was used to determine the total number of respondents that were drawn from each state (one hundred and twenty (120) respondents were selected from each state). In the end, purposive sampling was used to pick the individual respondents. Purposive sampling ensured that adept users of social media and those with informed views or opinions about the potentials of social media in sports communication were selected.

Questionnaire was the major instrument of data collection for this study. The questionnaire comprised four demographic and twenty psychographic questions. The psychographic questions were made up of eleven close-ended and nine open-ended questions, constructed in simple and clear language to ease comprehension. Copies of the questionnaire were administered

with the help of research assistants.

The data from the returned copies of the questionnaire were presented using simple frequency and percentage tables while the analysis was done quantitatively and qualitatively for utmost interpretation and understanding.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Six hundred (600) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to six hundred respondents across the states. Out of this number, five hundred and seventy (570) copies were returned indicating a return rate of ninety five percent (95%). Of the five hundred and seventy (570) copies returned, four hundred and thirty (430) representing seventy five percent (75%) were males while one hundred and forty (140) or twenty five percent (25%) were females. This disparity may be as a result of females' natural apathy or indifference towards sports.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How are social media facilitating sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria?

This research question was designed to ascertain the utilities provided by social media and the positive changes that can accompany their application.

To answer this research question, responses to questions 11, 12 and 17 of the questionnaire were analysed.

Question 11 of the questionnaire: Do you think the introduction of social media has improved sports communication in South-East Nigeria?

Table 1: Respondents' view as to whether social media have improved sports communication in South-East Nigeria or not.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	570	100
No	0	0
Total	570	100

Table 1 above shows that all the respondents believe that social media have improved sports communication in South-East Nigeria.

Question 12 of the questionnaire: How have social media improved sports communication in Nigeria?

In response to this question, many of the respondents (about 65%) were of the view that the new media have bridged the gap between sports journalists and fans, or other sports stakeholders.

The respondents stated that journalists, players, managers, and media organizations have created social media accounts, which enable them, reach out and interact with their various publics.

Some other respondents observed that social media have brought glamour into sports communication within the states allowing lively, viral, and immediate reportage of sports news. According to this group of respondents, social media have made it possible for sports news and information to be created and accessed very easily and quickly and cheaply too. Other respondents were of the view that social media have made it possible for individuals and groups to connect, interact, and share meaningful information about their favourite sports thus creating a form of fraternity that was never possible before. In addition, another group of respondents observed that social media have made fans to be more ardent or enthusiastic about and more interest and engaged in sports, especially in football.

Question 17 of the questionnaire: What roles can social media play in sports communication in South-East Nigeria?

In answering this question, some of the respondents said

that social media are an intermediary between the actual sporting activity and the public in terms of the consumption of sports information. Other respondents opined that the new media have greatly enhanced sports development in Nigeria by connecting people of shared interests to build sports communities and to promote sportsmanship and friendliness.

From the data presented above, it is found that social media are truly facilitating sports communication in South-East Nigeria. The respondents quite agree that the new technology has actually improved sports communication in the country. Their responses or views are reminiscent of this.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What is the level of application of social media in sports communication in South-East Nigeria?

To ascertain the level of application of social media in sports communication in South-East Nigeria, respondents' answers to question 10 of the questionnaire were analysed.

Question 10 of the questionnaire: To what extent do you think social media have been adopted for sports communication in South-East Nigeria?

Table 2: Respondents' views as to the extent social media are used for sports communication in South-East Nigeria

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	64	11
High	342	60
Moderate/Average	142	25
Low	18	3
Very low	4	1
Total	570	100

The data presented in table 2 above indicates that sixty-four (64) persons representing eleven percent (11%) of the respondents were of the view that the use of social media for sports

communication is VERY HIGH. From the information presented in Table 2, it can be inferred that according to the study groups, that social media are widely used for sports communication in the country. The fact that eleven percent (11 %) and sixty percent (60%) of the respondents indicated VERY HIGH and HIGH respectively (71% of the total respondents) is suggestive that the use of social media for sports communication in South-East Nigeria is after all high. This development according to the respondents is attributable to the increased interest in sports especially football among the people, the influx of mobile phones as well as their ease of use and affordability and the increase in social media awareness especially in connection with sports communication among others.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: Which social media Platform has the highest engagement in sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria?

Questions 8 and 9 of the questionnaire sought answers to this research question. **Question 8 of the questionnaire: Which social media platform do you think is mostly used for sports communication in South-East Nigeria?**

Table 3: Respondents' views as to the most engaged social media platform in sports communication in South-East Nigeria

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	256	45
Twitter	220	38
LinkedIn	5	1
WhatsApp	26	5
2go	46	8
Others	17	3
Total	570	100

Table 3 shows that two hundred and fifty six (256) persons out of the five hundred and seventy (570) respondents identified Facebook as the most engaged social media platform.

Question 9 of the questionnaire: Why do you think so?

This question sought to ascertain the reasons why the respondents think a particular social media channel is the most engaged in sports communication in South-East Nigeria.

From the survey, those respondents that identified Facebook as the most commonly used channel in South-East Nigeria, said their view is based on the premise that Facebook has the highest number of users or followers and by implication should have the highest number of sports followers. Those that ticked Twitter, maintain that though Facebook may have more followers, Twitter is at the forefront in sports communication. They stated that Twitter enables sports fans to obtain sports information with immediacy and directly from their sources more than Facebook. To them, Twitter allows users to receive up-to- the second information about their favourite sports.

From the preceding data, it is obvious that Facebook and Twitter are the two most engaged social media channels in sports communication in South-East Nigeria.

However, Facebook seems to be the more popular and the more successful; and given its recent acquiring of WhatsApp, it will most likely attract more sports followers.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4: Which factors inhibit the use of social media for sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria?

This research question was planned to find out the problems that hinder effective use of social media for sports communication in the states. To answer this research question, responses to item 13 of the questionnaire were analysed.

Question 13 of the questionnaire: Which factors do you think hinder the use of social media for sports communication in South-East Nigeria?

Table 4: Respondents' views on the factors that hinder effective use of social media for sports communication in South-East Nigeria.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Ignorance	162	28
Poor social media infrastructure	196	34
Illiteracy	16	3
Poverty	130	23
Extraneous application	66	12
Others	0	0
Total	570	100

Table 4 shows that one hundred and sixty two (162) persons or twenty eight percent (28%) of the respondents were of the opinion that ignorance is the major impediment to effective use of social media in sports communication in South-East Nigeria.

From the data provided in table 4, it can be adduced that poor and inadequate social media infrastructure particularly lack of Internet facilities and ignorance of the possibilities or opportunities offered by the new media have hindered the effective use of social media for sports communication. Also, the poverty level in the society which has made it difficult for potential or intending social media users to afford the necessary devices like mobile phones and service charges among others, have hampered the use of social media for sports communication in South-East Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTION 5: What is your evaluation of the use of social media for sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria?

Question 15 of the questionnaire provided answer to this research question

Question 15 of the questionnaire: What is your assessment of the use of social media for sports communication in South-East Nigeria?

Table 5: Respondents' assessment of the use of social media for sports communication in South-East Nigeria.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	62	11
Very good	214	38
Good	282	49
Poor	12	2
Very poor	0	0
Total	570	100

Research question 5 was intended to ascertain respondents' assessment of the use of social media for sports communication in South-East Nigeria. From the data presented in table 5, sixty two (62) respondents said the use is excellent. From the above data it can be inferred that the use of social media for sports communication in South-East Nigeria has been good.

Summary of Findings

This study assessed the use of social media for sports communication in Nigeria. It particularly sought to ascertain the level of application of social media and how they are facilitating sports communication and development in South-East states of Nigeria.

The findings reveal that the use of social media for sports communication is increasing rapidly in South-East Nigeria due to an increased awareness of the utilitarian values of social media in sports communication. The findings also indicate that social media have significantly decentralized sports journalism and have narrowed the gap between sports journalists and consumers of sports information, and have made access to sports information easy and quick. The findings also show that social media have improved sports administration and management by enhancing

the relationship between sports administrators and their publics. The new media have equally increased the people's passion for and engagement in sports. More and more fraternities are now formed in which members share common interest in sports.

The study also found that although the use of social media for sports communication in South-East Nigeria is increasing, such factors as inadequate Internet facilities, poor social media infrastructure, high cost of service charges, and extraneous use on the part of social media users, arising principally from ignorance, and lack of interest in sports among others, have hindered effective use of social media for sports communication in Nigeria. Hence, the use of social media for sports communication in South-East Nigeria is not as successful as it is expected.

Conclusion

Despite the several factors that hinder the use of social media for sports communication in South-East states of Nigeria, the application has been considerably successful. Moreover, with the rate at which the new technology is penetrating our sports communities, it is hoped that the sports industry in Nigeria particularly in the South-East will blossom.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following in line with its findings.

1. There should be increased enlightenment and education of the public on the potentials or imperatives of social media for sports communication.
2. There should be adequate social media facilities and affordable service charges by providers.
3. Online communities should be developed specifically for sports communication in Nigeria.
4. Nigerian Social media users in the South-East should show more interest in sports especially local and national sports issues and events.

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