



# THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS OF DIGITAL MEDIA ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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<p><b>Received:</b> 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023 <b>Accepted:</b> 26<sup>th</sup> December 2023 <b>Published:</b> 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024</p>	<p>The digital media has often been described as the bastion or watchdog of an economy which brings about sustainable development, a set of public and private institutions that daily inundate large audiences with information, education, entertainment and national agenda setting by stimulating debate on various social, political and economic issues that could facilitate national development. The media is however part of the socio-political and cultural milieu in which it operates. This paper examines the influence of the socio-political and cultural context of digital media on sustainable development in Nigeria. The sources of data collection are mainly secondary. The characterized pluralization of the Nigerian system - class, ethnic and other social diversities is also adherence to the digital media. It was found that the media has a responsibility to look beyond the official clichés of balanced reporting, investigative journalism, objectivity and verification of facts before publication and focus on the higher virtue of defending the fundamental rights of the common people, economic democracy and the consistent exposure of official corruption, abuse of office and resource mismanagement as means of achieving sustainable development. The paper concludes that the media needs to be constantly aligned with the poor and down-trodden who constitute the primary objects of development rather than the elite who have the capacity for extending gratification and patronage to media practitioners. A compromised media could constitute a clog in the wheel of national progress and sustainable development if awareness of the SDGs is halted or not properly galvanized. Therefore, it recommends that, the government and various stakeholders should allow the press to work freely and make the SDGs target modulus available to the common man.</p>

**Keywords:** Digital media, cultural context, socio-political, sustainable development, national interest,

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In September 2000, World leaders from 189 countries assembled at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva, and signed the momentous Millennium Declaration, which led to the adoption of the eight measurable time-bound Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), ranging from halving extreme poverty and hunger to promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, HIV/AIDS and ensure environmental sustainability, by year 2015 (Nigeria 2015 Millennium Development End-point Report, 2015). Each Millennium Development Goal (MDG) had indicators to monitor progress from 1990 levels. The MDGs gave all countries across the world, including low and middle-income countries, a framework against which to measure progress. Countries made substantial progress regarding the MDGs, although, the achievement were uneven from country to country. While some countries made remarkable gains to meet specific goals at different times, others fell behind (World Health Organization, WHO, 2018).

Neither the final report of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UNDP, 2015), nor previous similar studies by the UN and other commentators have been able to determine whether the goals drove national progress on the measured indicators or developments would have occurred in their absence (Sarwar, 2015). Afterwards, prior to the

existence of the MDGs thematic areas, national governments and international development efforts were focused on the MDG areas which recorded significant progress. Some governments may have made excellent efforts towards the achievement of the goals, but were prevented from doing so because of extraneous factors (Sarwar, 2015).

United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development of June, 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, stimulated a process to develop a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which will carry on the thrust generated by the MDGs and fit into a global development framework beyond 2015. World surveys was conducted by the United Nations Development Group, as well as organizing specialized panels of global consultation, carried out both online and offline in order to create a new development agenda that will be people-centered. This survey cut across all facets of life specialties and domains. The UN General Assembly Open Working Group (OWG) in July 2014, suggested a document containing 17 goals to be put forward for the General Assembly's approval in September, 2015. This document set the ground for the new SDGs and the global development agenda for 2015-2030 (Sustainable Development Goals Fund website). With the expiration of the MDGs in December 2015; the SDGs took the lead as global agenda on development for the next 15 years. The United Nations SDGs model was designed to wipe out global challenges such as climate change, food security, biodiversity loss, resources wastage, child mortality, and non-availability of adequate resources within a fifteen years period (2015 to 2030) Olaide (2023).

In the Nigeria 2015 Millennium Development End-point Report (2015), the Nigerian President acknowledged that although, Nigeria achieved some targets on the MDGs, Nigeria still has a lot to do to improve access to good sanitation facilities and curb the menace of climate change and other environmental challenges such as pollution, desertification, erosion, and flooding. Consequently, Nigeria as a signatory to the UN SDGs is contributing and progressing towards attaining the goals. Challenges such as poverty, inequality and environmental degradation are still very significant in Nigeria. According to the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2023) over 65% of Nigerians are dimensionally poor, with food insecurity, high child/maternal mortality, increased out of school children, among others. All these are connected to the low awareness of the SDGs by the Nigerian populace. This awareness can be facilitated through the use of digital media amongst others. Digital media can play an enormous role in highlighting these challenges and creating vigorous enlightenment on the side of the people and the government. Even at this, there is still need to ensure that digital media coverage on SDGs is accurate, with inclusivity and accessibility to all including those in rural areas and communities.

Digital media is any channels of mass communication that reach large audience through electronic devices with news, information, education, communication, entertainment, fun, advocacy, propaganda, advertisement, public relations, and so on, on a daily basis. Nigerians depend greatly on the news media for daily information, enlightenment and public education on events across the nation and beyond. It is simply unimaginable what the Nigerian society would be without the digital media. Despite, the crucial role of media in promoting sustainable development, there is limited documentations on how digital media coverage and framing of SDGs could be influenced by the socio-political and cultural tenets of Nigeria. According to Olaide (2023), sustainable development and SDGs is a development that meet the needs of the present generation without affecting the need of the future generations.

This paper focused on the influence of socio-political and cultural context of digital media in the struggle for achieving, sustainable development in Nigeria. Despite the recent passage of the Freedom of Information Act (FIA) by the National Assembly there is still so much secrecy, impunity, maladministration, poor leadership, gender exclusion, lack of vision, inequity, corruption, ethnic polarization, information suppression, manipulation and lack of popular participation in governance resulting from socio-political and cultural affiliation of the government and the press. These are serious impediments to actualizing the sustainable development. Understandably the official media is the oracle of the government, but the independent media has a responsibility and is indeed capable of setting and pursuing a new national agenda that transcends these national vices, an agenda of prudence in economic management, rule of law, and transparency; that would ensure sustainable development is attained. This cannot be done or attained if there is so much connectivity between the social-political and cultural norms of the society. Therefore, this study dwell on the role of digital media in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards SDGs with respect to disassociating the digital media from the rancor of the socio, political and cultural connects. This study aims at filling this gaps in the literature and explore the influence of digital media in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach using literature research technique was adopted for this study. Qualitative approach according to Saragih, Edo Afriandi, (2024) is a methodology in understanding a phenomenon in-depth by using data collection methods that are also in-depth. In qualitative research approach, the procedures commonly used include conducting interviews, observing, and using written documents with great emphasis on symptoms found in social life experienced by humans. In literature research technique, data collection is done through sources that are usually stored in libraries such as books, journals, relevant news, documents, scientific magazines, dissertations and theses.

## 3.0 DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Sustainable Development Goals and National Development of Nigeria

SDGs is meant to achieve national development, hence, this made United Nations contribute financially and resource wise to ensure these goals are achieved before 2030 (Arulpragasiam, 2019). According to Adedokun and Faregun (2019), SDGs is a continuous promotion of the well-being and welfare of the people in a way to make them attain their

maximum potentials. The progression and acceleration of SDGs lies on digital media ability to share information regarding development for them and for this to be achieved, all media and communication stakeholders must co-operate and collaborate together. This is so because the use of digital media platforms promotes SDGs through information dissemination (Nwosu and Nwuke, 2020)

Importantly, the socio-political and cultural activities of the country should be geared towards SDGs achievement. Effective SDGs implementation ensures success, growth and development of a country, if appropriate digital media and strategies are adopted (Naggita and Mwesige, 2018). Adoption of digital media towards SDGs is the key priority for national development and news should be used in propagating SDGs as it's a powerful instrument to bring people together; information is a powerful human interaction tool to inform and educate people (Adeboye and Dairo, 2018). In the same vein, lack of information about the goals brings about peoples' ignorance in the society and importantly, it is a setback in development anytime, when news does not get to people in the society accurately and timely both in rural and urban areas of the country it leads to disinformation (Chiluwa and Ibrahim, 2019). In the opinion of UNESCO, (2018), education is an action that encourages changes in knowledge, skills and values and attitudinal for a sustainable and equitable society. This education cannot be isolated from digital media of a nation who carries information and burden of communication to the public especially on the political and social issues that concerns development.

### 3.2. Roles of Digital Media in Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

According to Abu (2018), there are many authors that have written about SDGs from different perspectives in enlightening and creating public awareness about the realization of the global goals by 2030 which digital media has been termed to play a pivotal and significant role in achieving these goals. The author noticed that, there are many barriers standing as a cog in the wheel of promoting the awareness and achievement of the goals. Furthermore, Oso (2012), emphasized that digital media is a very impactful and powerful medium to increase the awareness of people about the benefits of sustainability practices in the society. The cardinal functions of the digital media include informing, educating, and entertaining which strengthened the achievement of SDGs in any nation.

- (a) *Information:* Media is noted to disseminate information to people in line with keeping them abreast of the happenings in the society. Digital media information affects all the areas of human life - socially, politically, culturally and economically, as people relies on media for an important decision making as its influences the achievement of the SDGs in Nigeria by 2030. Digital media interprets every information regarding sustainable development in terms of explaining to them proper terms for adequate understanding and suggestions to guide and prepare their mind and structure their thinking towards contemporary issues in sustainable development.
- (b) *Education:* Media is noted to be an educator as people in the society relies on its information so much to change people perspective and societies. Hence, it is noted by UNESCO, (2018), media contents goes a long way to effectively educate people about the objectives, goals, targets and strategies implementation processes to sustain SDGs. Media assist to instruct and socialize the members of the society through knowledge, expertise and skills that enable people to be independent and acceptable into the society.
- (c) *Entertainment:* Digital media entertained people through its contents packaged in form of films, music, cartoons, drama, humor and general interest for people's consumption. Basically, the content of content of entertainment are drama from local, national and international themes that portrayed SDGs inclusion into music by local musicians, as music is a powerful medium to spread messages about and also, brand ambassadors can be used to help spread information about the sustainability practices.
- (d) *Interpretation:* Media plays the role of interpreting actions, events and development in the society, hence, media both survey and interprets the meaning of events in the context of the reality.
- (e) *Socialization:* Media ensures people's interaction and acquisition of basic standard required in the society, as its shape individual's socialization process.
- (f) *Surveillance:* This concerns media dissemination of information in the society, as its combines the act of observing what is happening in the community and inculcates behavioural and attitudinal change of people towards sustainability practices, hence, through digital media governments, private sector and the society to cue into the realization of this global agenda by 2030.

### 3.3 Influence of Cultural context of Digital media on Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Cultural values and beliefs played a significant role in shaping a people in all ramifications - attitudes and behaviors, including the preservation of sacred areas that should be touched by the press or media. Cultural beliefs and practices have a significant influence on how individuals perceive and interact with economy and media (Ezeudu and Chukwudubem, 2023). For instance, some cultures do not allow their people to view or listen to some messages from other cultures or sources considered unfit for them. Whether this source carries the lubricant of life for them, they cannot compromise. Studies have shown that cultural beliefs regarding the sacredness of nature, traditional knowledge, and cultural rituals play a crucial role in shaping development of a peoples' attitudes and practices (Afolayan *et al.*, 2020; Ayanlade *et al.*, 2019; Bankole *et al.*, 2022; Egunjobi *et al.*, 2020; Uzoka and Asiegbu, 2020). For example, in some Nigerian cultures, certain resources are considered sacred, leading to their preservation and sustainable use

(Afolayan *et al.*, 2020), such sacred resources will be made to the public with limited information. Understanding these cultural beliefs and practices is essential for effective development and integrate local cultural values in the media. Cultural rituals and ceremonies further play a significant role in sustainable development (Isichei *et al.*, 2021; Oni *et al.*, 2021; Ogueri and Ajaero, 2020). These rituals often incorporate practices that promote the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources and ecosystems. For instance, the annual "Arugungu Fishing Festival" in northern Nigeria celebrates the abundance of fish in the Sokoto River and includes fishing competitions and strict regulations to protect the fish population during the event (Afolayan *et al.*, 2020). This event if coordinated properly by the media could serve as a means of creating awareness on sustainable development goals to the people, thus, educating them on what needs to be done to achieve the targets. Through the digital media, recognition on the sacredness attached to certain resources and integrating cultural rituals that can align with the values and aspirations of the community could help in fostering the goals among the people (Bankole *et al.*, 2022; Egunjobi *et al.*, 2020; Ogueri and Ajaero, 2020). This cultural integration fosters a sense of ownership and enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of the developmental initiatives (Ezeudu and Chukwudubem, 2023).

### 3.4 Influence of socio-political context of Digital media on Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Man is known to be a political animal. In every country, there is struggle for political ascendancy because those who control the polity, control the resources, determine who gets what, when and how. The struggle is vicious in developing countries especially Nigeria because political control gives undue advantages to its possessors. This is so because there are no effective institutional controls on those who wield power. The National Assembly, for instance, which is vested with oversight functions, has been clearly unable to confront executive impunity and clear lawlessness. Alayode (2006) has attributed this situation to decades of military rule which weakened all institutions and subordinated them to absolute military power. During the military era, individual rights were brutally abused to the extent that it would take decades to recover from the psychological trauma of that dark era.

The power of the media is often brought to the fore when they are able to unravel serious misdemeanor of those in power. This is usually through investigative Journalism. In the United States where society is developed, journalism is also advanced because it has constitutional protection through the first amendment to the American Constitution which declares that Congress shall make no laws abridging the freedom of the press. Nwanne (2008) recalls a piece of investigative journalism in the United States of America which led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, thus:

"Tagged The Watergate Scandal, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein both reporters of *The Washington Post*, did the earth shaking story about some unbecoming activities of the Richard Nixon administration. After months of sniffing around poring through documents and interviewing sources, the report was published in 1972. The impact of the story was immediate and devastating. All the damage control measures of President Nixon failed. He just had to resign".

This is a case of direct power of the digital media against executive lawlessness. Perhaps the President would have survived in countries with weaker institutions like Nigeria. But not in the United States where political office holders are expected to be about board, just like Cassar's wife!

These are clear cases of the mass media being the conscience of a society and making the place more habitable and calling corrupt people to account for their actions. If such activities had continued it is doubtful if the level of corruption would have reached such 'fantastic' profile. The political leadership at the time should be commended for allowing the courts do their jobs because part of the problem is that political bigwigs often protect their friends and colleagues from being prosecuted, in a bid to avoid what some persons have referred to as 'class harakiri'.

### 3.5 Digital Media and Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable development goals are global goals formulated in 2015 with the vision and aim of reducing poverty, ensure safer planet, peace and prosperity, UNDESA, (2017). Hence, sustainable development goals comprise of 17 goals as follows:

#### *SDG1: No Poverty*

Media can raise awareness of poverty issues in Nigeria by helping to bringing these issues to the attention of the public and policy makers. The media can highlight the challenges to ending poverty such as inequality, corruption and lack of social infrastructures in Nigeria and promote initiatives and programmes that could address poverty such as microfinance initiatives, social safety nets and job creation programme. The digital media can hold the government and stakeholders responsible and accountable for their commitments in ending poverty.

#### *SDG 2: Zero Hunger*

Digital media can help to create awareness on the prevalence of hunger and malnutrition in Nigeria. Media can point out to the immediate causes of hunger such as conflict, poverty and climate change. The digital media can promote solutions to hunger such as access to nutritional foods, improving agricultural productivity and providing safety nets for poor populations. The media can hold the government and other stakeholders responsible for their commitments to address hunger. Digital media could be used to promote sustainable farming methods such as agro-ecology and organic farming. It could be used to create awareness of the importance of protecting natural resources and environment such

as soil and water. The press could be used to advocate for policies that supports sustainable agriculture like fair trade, land reform and access to credit. Media could be used to report on the social, environment and economic benefits of sustainable agriculture. Media can be used to promote the efforts of people towards sustainability practices in improving food security, reduce environmental degradation and support the livelihoods of farmers.

### *SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being*

Digital can provide accurate information about health issues like HIV/AIDs, Malaria and maternal mortality. Media could be used to encourage healthy behaviours like hand washing, physical activity and proper nutrition. Media could be used to create awareness of available health services and services such as hospitals, clinics and health insurance. Press could be used to promote accountability for health commitment made by the government and other stakeholders. Media is used to encourage individuals and societies to take actions to improve their own health and health of others.

### *SDG 4: Quality Education*

Mass media is used to create awareness on the importance of education and its role in improving individual and collective well-being. Media is used to highlight the challenges to education in Nigeria such as poverty, conflict and gender inequality. -Media is used to report the progress of education initiatives like universal Basic Education programme and Al-majiri Education. Press could be used to promote innovative approaches to education like distance learning, literacy campaigns and vocational training. The digital media could fosters public discussion and debate on the role of education in development.

### *SDG 5: Gender Equality*

Media reports issues related to gender equality like gender based violence, child marriage and gender pay gap. Media promote women's rights like reproductive rights, property rights and political participation. Media point out the successes and problems of women's empowerment like microfinance programmes and literacy campaigns. Press can be used to encourage public dialogue on gender equality and the need for societal and cultural change.

### *SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation*

-Media can be used to contribute effective awareness on the importance of water and sanitation for health, development and the environment. Media is used to report issues of water pollution, poor sanitation and aware scarcity. Media can be used to point out the success stories of water and sanitation projects like water sanitation and hygiene national outreach programme. Media is used as a strategy to promote the need for better water and sanitation infrastructure like policies to protect water resources.

### *SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy*

Digital media can support the goal through strong awareness on the importance of energy access for economic growth, poverty reduction and human development. Media can be used to report the challenges to energy access in Nigeria such as lack of finance, poor infrastructure and inadequate regulatory frameworks. Media could be used to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency initiatives like rural electrification agency's programme. Media are used to encourage public debate and dialogue on the role of energy in sustainable development.

### *SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth*

Digital media point out the importance of employment and decent work for achieving sustainable development. Media is used to promote entrepreneurship and small business development including initiatives of small and medium enterprises development agency of Nigeria. Media raises awareness of the need for policies and programmes that create more and better jobs, reduce poverty and boost economic growth.

### *SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure*

The press can be used to promote the role of innovation and technology in enhancing economic growth and development in Nigeria. Media can be used to report the state of infrastructure in Nigeria like roads, bridges, ports and airports. Media can be used to point out the importance of infrastructural development in creating jobs, reducing poverty and improving productivity. Media can be used to encourage public debate on the need for improved infrastructural planning and investment. Media can be used to create awareness on the importance of regional and international collaboration and co-operation in developing infrastructure.

### *SDG 10: Reduced Inequality*

Digital Media create awareness of the level and causes of inequality in Nigeria such as income inequality, gender inequality and regional inequality. Press report government policies and programme aiming at reducing inequality like National Social Investment Programme. Media promote the need for increased investment in social protection and social sciences like education and health care. Media encourages public discussion on the need for inclusive economic growth and equitable development. The press points out the importance of regional and international co-operation in mitigating inequalities.

### *SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities*

Digital media could be used in pointing out the challenges confronting urban areas in Nigeria like population growth, inadequate housing and poor urban planning. The press can be used to promote urban development policies and programmes aimed at improving livability, equity and sustainability. Media can be used to report the innovative approaches to urban development such as slum up grading, smart cities and transport oriented development programmes. Media are used as a strategy to encourage debate on the need for more sustainable and livable cities.

### *SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Productions*

Media can be used to create awareness on environmental and social impacts of production and consumption patterns in Nigeria. Media can be used to report the use of sustainable materials and processes in manufacturing and construction

industry. Media can be used to promote the benefits of sustainable consumption such as waste reduction, saving money and improving the health. Media can be used to encourage the use of sustainable products and services like locally produced goods, public transportation and organic food. Media are used to point out the need for policy change and public education to promote sustainable consumption and production

### *SDG 13: Climate Action*

The digital media can be used to increase public awareness on the causes and consequences of climate change in Nigeria. Media are used strategically to report the effects of climate change in Nigeria like extreme weather conditions, water scarcity and agricultural disruption. Media can be used to promote climate adaptation and mitigation strategies such as renewable energy climate resilient infrastructure, and sustainable land management. Media can be used to encourage public debate and dialogue on the need for ambitious and collaborative action to climate change.

### *SDG 14: Life below Water*

Media can be used to make significant impact in creating public awareness on the importance of healthy oceans and marine ecosystems. Press media can be used to report the impact of human activities on oceans such as over-fishing, pollution and habitat destruction. Media are used to promote the sustainable management of marine resources including fisheries, aquaculture and coastal development. Media can be used to encourage the protection of marine biodiversity like coral reefs, mangroves and other coastal ecosystems. Media can be used to emphasize the need for international collaboration and co-operation to safeguard the world's oceans and seas.

### *SDG 15: Life on Land*

Press can be used to increase public understanding of the importance of forests, biodiversity and ecosystem services. Media are used to report the causes and consequences of deforestation, land degradation and desertification in Nigeria. Media can be used to promote sustainable agriculture and land use practices on agro-forestry, integrated pest management and sustainable grazing. Media can be used to encourage the protection of the ecosystems like grasslands, wetlands and forests.

### *SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institution*

Media can be used to create public awareness on corruption issues, rule of law and human rights. Media are used to report the efforts made to improve good governance, accountability and transparency. Media are used to promote civic engagement and participation in decision making processes. Media are used strategically to encourage peaceful and inclusive dialogue on environmental, political, social and economic issues. Media are used to point out the importance of inclusive and representative institutions like free, fair elections, independent media and an independent judiciary.

### *SDG 17: Partnership to Achieve the Goal*

Digital media play a crucial role of pointing out the benefits of international collaboration and co-operation. Media can be used to encourage partnerships that are equitable, sustainable and inclusive. Media provide a platform for dialogue and collaboration among different groups. Media are used to promote accountability and transparency in partnerships. Media are used to strategically facilitate information sharing among various stakeholders. Media are used to foster partnerships among the government, business, civil society and other stakeholders to SDGs.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

The media is not insulated from the pervading culture of corruption. The digital media remains a battle-ground for winning the minds of the people and the government appears desperate to win this battle. Unfortunately the people have no weapons to prosecute this battle. The press should rise in defense of the people. National interest should be redefined away from government interest. The media was a potent weapon in the decolonization process. Today the oppressor is no longer a foreigner, but whether indigenous or foreign an oppressor must be prepared for the battle for emancipation and the media has a responsibility to lead this battle. Nigerians need freedom from poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, disease, destitution, low remuneration, decaying infrastructure, casualization, incessant avoidable accidents, which can bring about sustainable development. The rest of the world is moving fast forward while Nigeria remains stuck to petty quarrels, of socio-political and cultural rate along with countries. Until the people of Nigeria are freed from corruption, oppression, exploitation and ethnic manipulation democracy and economic sustainable development would remain a mirage.

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