Social Media as a Possible Tool for Containing the Impacts of Religious Activities on Environment in Nigeria

Adebayo Victor Ogunbadejo[1], Olusegun Noah Olawoyin Ph.D.[2], and
Kehinde Oluwatoyin Adabembe Ph.D.[3]
[1]Department of Liberal Arts (Religious Studies Unit), Bamidele Olumilua University of
Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria
[2]Department of Religious Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria
[3]Department of Religious Studies, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Existing literatures have largely focused on the role of social media in environmental awareness with insignificant attention paid specifically to the prospect of social media in creating environmental awareness among religious practitioners. The attitude of religious practitioners in Nigeria towards the environment is unbecoming, and it is most often hinged on a one-sided interpretation of scriptural verses like Gen. 8:28 and Psalm 8:6-8, according to which man is believed to have been bequeathed a purported "domineering place" in the ecosystem. Given the concomitant dominion mentality of the erroneous scriptural praxis, and the observed influence of religious activities in the pace of the environmental degradation bedeviling Nigeria, this study analyses the prospects of social media as a possible effective tool in containing the negative impacts of religious activities on environment in Nigeria. Banking on the assumptions of Hungerford and Volk's behavioural change theory, the study specifically explored the potential of social media in helping to promote the knowledge of environmental variables, and boost positive attitude towards the environment, towards engendering a sustainable environment in Nigeria. The paper equally identifies some of the potential challenges of social media that could hinder the effectiveness of digital advocacy in Nigeria. The study adopted the analytical approach, and used secondary sources to elicit information. It was discovered that social media is a promising mechanism for promoting the knowledge of environmental variables and positive attitudes towards the environment if properly leveraged.

Keywords: Social Media, Possible Tool, Religion, Environment, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Environment plays a vital role in the lives of its inhabitants whether human or animals. The type of environment a people live in contributes to their total well-being (Ogunbadejo, 2024). Environment refers to the circumstances, objects or conditions by which one is surrounded. It is the complex of physical and biotic factors (such as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community, and ultimately determines its forms and survival. It is the aggregate of social and cultural conditions that influence the life of an individual or community (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Okposin (n.d.: p.7) views 'the environment as the totality of physical, economic, aesthetic and social circumstances and factors that surround and affect the desirability and value of property or which also affects the quality of people's lives. It is the physical and cultural spaces in which human species live, reproduce and die, including the water, the atmosphere, land and all living and non-living things that inhabit these spaces. Quoting the section 37 of the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act (NESREA), Ogunbadejo (2024) defined

environment simply to include, 'water, air, land, all plants and human beings or animals living therein and the inter-relationships which exist amongst or any of them'

The foregoing explicitly showcases that man's well-being is inextricably linked with the quality of his environment. It also clearly shows that a healthy and habitable environment is an inevitable requirement for the sustenance and continuous well-being of generations of mankind on the planet earth. However, today, as in many other countries of the world, Nigeria is facing the problem of persistence environmental damage, which is also partly the cause of the climate change problem the country currently battles with. Meanwhile, apart from natural disasters, anthropogenic factors are also identified in the pace of the environmental challenges that are affecting Nigeria. The economic activities prompted by untamed increase in human population, which have led to an increase in the demand for food and industrial raw materials are usually often being associated with the environmental challenges being experienced in the country.

However, apart from the various economic activities that are associated with the pace of unhealthy exploitation of the environment in Nigeria, it has been observed that cultural activities, especially, religious activities, also constitute another significant factor of environmental damage in the country. It is observed that religious practitioners in Nigeria do indulge in numerous environmentally unwholesome religious activities that are also contributing to the level of environmental depletion in the country. In this regard, Ugwu (2013) noted that "respective practices of the major religions in Nigeria; African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam, have been contributing to the deterioration of the environment in the country". Okeke and Okafor (2019) also confirmed that Christians in Nigeria do indiscriminately cut down trees on the belief that they are evil. Meanwhile, according to Edem (2018), "the deforestation of the environment that often comes through felling of threes usually goes in many, if not all instances, without the responsibility of care and replacement". The environmental concomitance of the indiscriminate deforestation, noise nuisances and unhealthy exploitation of Nigeria's environment if not checked, portends a calamitous future worse compared to what is being experienced currently. The attitude of religious practitioners, as reflected in the numerous environmentally unwholesome religious activities in Nigeria at this critical time of urgent need to revive the environment, point to the urgent need for environmental education in the country. Based on this understanding, this study, banking on the assumptions of Hungerford and Volk's behavioural change theory, analyses the potential of social media in helping to promote environmental awareness and positive attitudes towards the environment, towards engendering a sustainable habitable environment in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study was theoretically informed and inspired by the Hungerford and Volk's Behavioural Change theory propounded in 1990. The reasoning of the Hungerford and Volk's Behavioural Change theory is directly associated with the supposition that if people were better informed, they would become more aware of environmental problems and, consequently, would be motivated to behave in an environmentally responsible manner. According to Akintunde, (2017), many other similar theories/models associate knowledge to attitudes and attitudes to behaviour. Thus, when knowledge increases, environmentally favourable attitudes that lead to responsible environmental actions are developed. Invariably, lack of knowledge of environmental variables will lead to environmentally unfavourable attitudes.

The behavioural change theory, which was propounded in 1990 by Hungerford and Volk, provides a basis for the consideration of possible relationship existing between environmental knowledge, environmental awareness and attitude, and how these can translate to action or inaction. However, some scholars denied the possibility that only the knowledge and awareness of environmental problems would lead to or increase environmentally friendly behaviour. They argued that a good knowledge of environmental variables may not necessarily imply good and sustainable environmental behaviour just as the lack of environmental knowledge or awareness may also not necessarily imply a poor environmental practice. Hines *et al*., cited in Akintunde (2017), argued that other intervening factors like the locus of control, intention to act and personal responsibility play significant roles in people's attitudes and actions towards the environment. While a line of possible relationship can be deciphered through this model, reality is far more complex than this linear trend...

Be that as it may, the behavioural change theory is relevant to this study. This study drew inference from the theory as the suppositions of the theory seem to explain the reasons for the poor attitudes of Nigerians towards the environment. The implication of the Hungerford and Volk's "behavioural change" theory within the context of this study is that, the lack of knowledge of environmental challenges and the lack of awareness of the urgent need for environmental protection and sustainability among religious practitioners in Nigeria are possible reasons for the numerous environmentally unwholesome religious activities among religious practitioners. This theory provides the basis for the assumption of this study that the lack of awareness of environmental challenges and lack of the knowledge of positive environmental behaviour are responsible for the persistence of the negative impacts of religious activities on the environment in Nigeria. The assumption of the study is in agreement with the position of Ogunbadejo (2024) when he argued that:

> "even though there are pro-environment teachings embedded in the doctrines of the major religions in Nigeria, and a handful of governments' environmental regulatory policies that could have helped to shape the attitudes of Nigerians towards the environment, the question that still begs for answer is the question of awareness of Nigerians about environmental problems, and the urgent need for environmental protection, on one hand, and on the other hand, the question of the awareness of Nigerians about the teachings of their respective religions on what should be the right attitude towards the environment, and that of environmental regulatory policies of governments. In Nigeria where there are no deliberate efforts targeted at educating citizens about environmental problems and the need for pro-environment behaviour, there is the likelihood that religious practitioners might have fallen short of the expected positive attitude towards the environment due to lack of knowledge of environmental challenges and the need for pro-environment behaviour".

The above clearly showcase the need for the promotion of the knowledge of environmental variables. Hence, the need for assessing the potential of social media in helping to promote positive attitudes towards the environment, as a possible effective mechanism of containing the numerous unwholesome religious activities that are impacting the environment in Nigeria.

Empirical Studies

Okeke and Okafor (2019) examined the positive and negative attitude of Nigerians to the Nigerian environment. They observed that Nigerians abuse the environment (land, air and water) through littering and indiscriminate dumping of refuse, unmindful and illegal constructions, and excessive noise in social activities which often constitute noise pollution, and the undue emphasis on dominion mandate over the environment at the expense of stewardship mandate drive the careless attitudes. The authors noted that in Nigeria, religion,

health and economic factors sometimes influence the attitudes of people to the environment. Thus, some Nigerians are environmental friendly, while the perceptions of some towards the environment are clouded by disregard. They also noted that in recent times, certain Nigerians who are Christians indiscriminately cut down trees on the belief that they are evil…

Ekhator, (nd) probed the effects of the noise nuisance caused by religious houses in Nigeria and discovered that Noise from religious activities in Nigeria has become a peculiar and predominant menace suffered quietly by people. The entrenchment of religious freedom in Section 38 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 and other Human Rights Instruments is responsible for the proliferation of religious houses and religious activities, Nigeria has, therefore, become a country with one of the largest number of churches and relatively high number of mosques in the world, and a fertile soil for the growth of independent churches. This increase in numbers of religious houses is to the extent that it has now become a common sight to see a minimum of fifty different churches on a street of four kilometers long in Nigeria. Such is the present level of church proliferation in the country as pointed out in the study. Meanwhile, all of these are not without the attendant emotional and psychological effects on individuals and the society at large. Outside speakers and music instruments used by these churches and mosques constitute a heavy source of noise. According to the study, it is usually unfortunate to live close to a church organising a vigil all through the night with the attendant singing, and drumming. Usually the vigil ends at between 4.00am and 5.00am. The chain of noise, as noted by the author, continues with noise from mosques calling the Muslim faithful to partake in the early morning prayers. The Noise from these religious activities often disturbs sleep, and when sleep is disturbed, it affects mental functioning and judgment. In line with Ekhator's view, Adabembe (2024) also noted that the entrenchment of religious freedom in the Section 38 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, other Human Rights Instruments, and the commercialization of Christianity which is caused by high proportion of unemployed population are responsible for the proliferation of religious houses, and religious activities in Nigeria.

Akoni (2024) also reported that in an effort to achieve an improved, safer and sustainable environment in Lagos State, the Lagos State government, through the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency LASEPA sealed about 250 organisations that included worship places for noise pollution and other environmental infractions in a space of three months in the year 2024. The religious houses shut included some branches of Redeemed Christian Church of God, RCCG. Many of the buildings were originally residential buildings converted to worship centers and used for other purposes without prior approval by the appropriate government agencies. According to the study, the activities of these religious centers have continued to constitute noise nuisances in the various residential environments in which they operate.

Adesanya (2011), in her work titled *"Environmental Effects of Church Proliferation: The Redeemed Christian Church of God as a Case Study"* found that Noise Pollution, fragile structural integrity of abandoned buildings, inhalation of related air pollutants as a result of traffic jam at the Redemption Camp, improper ventilation and unexpected collapse of structure beside river banks are key environmental hazards associated with constant proliferation of The Redeemed Christian Church of God. The health implications of all the itemized environmental issues, according to the study, include various health hazards like suffocation, stress induced ailments like hypertension, diabetes, hearing loss, alterations in cardiac functioning and the likes. Oyetunji, Olukolajo and Omorogbe (2018) also appraised the locational effect of religious campsite of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) along Lagos/Ibadan Expressway, Nigeria, on the neighbouring residential properties' values and found that the presence of the campsite development does pose severe traffic congestion,

noise and air pollution on its surrounding environment which in turn has significant impact on property values. The socio-economic and environmental characteristics identified in the work include: noise pollution, air pollution, traffic congestion, crime, among others.

Adebayo (2013) studied how religious activities have resulted in excessive burning of fossil fuels, artificial heat generation, deforestation, and land clearing, all of which are causes of environmental pollution. The work revealed that in Nigeria, the adherents of Islam and Christianity constantly compete to exploit the environment. The study further revealed that the adherents of African indigenous religion do also carry out activities that cause environmental degradation, and the new religious movements also joined the band of environmental polluters in their evangelisation bids in Nigeria. The study finally concluded that the adherents of religions, particularly Islam, Christianity and African Traditional religion, are contributing to environmental pollution through their activities. The study also made it known that religious clerics act contrary to the scriptural teachings of their religions regarding their relationship with the environment. Some practices and attitudes of adherents of religions which are not environment-friendly are not in tune with the teachings of the major religions in the country. Odudele, Familugba, Akinwumi and Ayegunle (2024) in their work stated that even though environmental sustainability is a critical global concern, Nigeria, with its rich biodiversity and growing population, faces significant obstacles and challenges in achieving and maintaining a sustainable environment. The work recommended that environmental sustainability in Nigeria is imperative to evade earth warming for ecological preservation and economic resilience with a roadmap towards a more balanced and resilient future for Nigeria.

Odunola, Odufuwa, Odunsi and Morenikeji (2021) in their work observed that many religious centers in Nigeria are located and operate in locations that are not lawfully allocated to them. The study revealed that most religious centres that cluster Ibadan metropolis were without planning development permits, and were by law restricted to operate in the residential areas they were sited. The religious centres are being encouraged in residential areas by use of fines as against the enforcement of regulations as contained in appropriate planning laws. They therefore constitute significant source of unwanted noise nuisance in the residential environments where they operate. The evidences from previous studies, as reflected in the foregoing point to the urgent need for environmental education, knowledge of environmental variables, and the imperative of promotional programme among Nigerians in order to contain the negative impacts of religious activities on environment in Nigeria. The subsequent section of the study therefore analyses the potential of social media as a possible measure of promoting environmental consciousness towards controlling the impacts of unwholesome religious activities on environment in the country.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media refers to a variety of technologies that facilitate the sharing of ideas and information among their users (Suganya, 2023). Historically, "social media is a group of internet-based applications that evolved by building on the ideological and technological foundation of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Contents. It refers to a group of online platforms or tools through which users create, share, and interact with content, information, or other users in a virtual environment" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). "Social media are interactive technologies that facilitate the creation, sharing and aggregation of contents (such as ideas, interests, and other forms of expression) among virtual communities and networks" (Wikipedia). The term "social media" is a very broad term that encompasses a wide range of online platforms and services. It includes but it is not limited to:

i. Social Networking Sites (such as Facebook, Twitter or X handle, LinkedIn and Instagram)

ii. Microblogging Platforms (e.g. Tumblr and Mastodon)

iii. Video-Sharing Platforms (e.g. YouTube, TikTok and Vimeo)

iv. Blogging Platforms (e.g. WordPress and Blogger)

v. Photo Sharing Platforms (e.g. Flickr and Pinterest) and

vi. Social Bookmarking Sites (e.g. Delicious and StumbleUpon), among others (Wikipedia).

Advantages of Social Media

Social media has become part and parcel of contemporary social life globally. Paljug (2025) confirmed that over 5 billion people worldwide, representing about 62% of the world's population use social media. Even though it has its other sides, social media has been contributing immensely to the enhancement of global socio-economic life. The various social media platforms also serve as outreach avenues for social, religious and political advocacies. "Some appeal to hobbyist, others to people in their work lives, people use some to find other people around the globe who share their political or other views. Entertainers also use social media to engage with fans, politicians with voters, and charities with donors. During emergencies, governments do make use of social media opportunities to convey vital information" (Wikipedia). Social medial is also very effective in business execution. It is a key marketing tool that manufacturers and retailers alike use to locate and engage with customers. It is used by these categories of users to drive sales through advertisement and promotion of products and services. Social media platforms allow timely access to information, to connect with people, and to find niche communities. Through social media, every part of the world has become more interconnected (Wikipedia; Paljug, 2025). Government may also use social media to communicate their opinions to the public, interact with citizens, foster citizens' participation, monitor and analyse public opinion and activities, and educate the public about risk and public health. It is also useful for individuals as news source; people obtain information via social media sources like Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, etc., rather than the traditional media platforms like the newspapers or live TV broadcast (Wikipedia). The audiences that engage with social media platforms differ significantly from those of conventional media. Unlike passive consumers of television or print, social media audiences are active participants in a democratized and interactive digital environment (https://jurnalism.university/digital-media/characteristics-dynamics-social-media-audiences/).

Advocacy and Promotional Suitability Characteristics of Social Media

Unlike the traditional media, social media has specific essential characteristic that make it more suitable for the outreach of social advocacies and promotional programmes. Some of these attributes of social media are as follows:

i. High Connectivity

This is one social medial feature that marks it out as an effective mechanism for social advocacy and promotional programmes. Through the various social media platforms, the users gain high connectivity. Social media platforms are built to connect people, regardless of geographical location, creating virtual communities that transcend boundaries. The connectivity allows for instantaneous communication and the sharing of information across the globe.

ii. Avenue of Content Creativity

Social media give room for the creation, uploading and sharing of contents. They allow for a seamless process of generating innovative, engaging and valuable contents that may

attract the attention of a targeted audience. It is always readily available for the creation and sharing of educational contents, it is an invaluable source of educational ideas. It is a veritable tool for transmitting expert insights, tutorials and interactive learning experiences. It is, therefore, a very effective mechanism for the expansion of knowledge.

iii. Empowerment of Social Causes and Activism

Another essential attribute of social media is that it makes activism seamless, it removes the barrier of awareness creation, and enables groups and individuals to raise awareness, advocate for causes, and mobilize people for social reformation and progress (Mahbub, 2023).

iv. Rapid spread of Information

Information and content can be spread rapidly due to the availability of sharing features that allow generated ideas and information to travel fast and wide, allowing for viral engagement with innovations within the shortest period.

v. On-the-fly Update and Immediate Notification

This means that social media often give room for prompt alert and immediate notifications about prevailing situations and changing circumstances. It provides room for the situation whereby users can share and receive updates instantaneously. This is the reason social media is a very effective mechanism for information dissemination (https://www.quora.com/what-are-the-unique-features-of-socia-media).

Social media's numerous features are not limited to those enumerated in the foregoing. Apart from the features itemized above, social media has several other useful features. Only the suitable ones for activism and advocacies are relevant to this study. Despite all the good features of social media discussed above, Omotayo & Folorunso (2020) identified some factors impeding the use of social media to maximize its potentials in Nigeria. Such factors include: poor internet connectivity, which may in turn hinder the transmission of information to the targeted audiences, frequent power outage, high cost of internet access, digital literacy gaps, internet accessibility, and potential resistance from religious leaders could hinder the effectiveness of digital advocacy in Nigeria.

Leveraging Social Media for the Promotion of Environmental Consciousness among Religious Practitioners towards Engendering Sustainable Environment in Nigeria

In the prevailing circumstance of environmental challenges that are threatening the attainment of environmental sustainability in Nigeria, the various social media platforms can be employed to raise the bar of environmental knowledge and consciousness among Nigerians. They would help to familiarize religious practitioners in Nigeria with both the scriptural and doctrinal ethical teachings of their respective religions, and the various government policies and laws that are meant to safeguard the environment and promote sustainability. Precisely, social media can be employed through the following ways to drive awareness about environmental problems, awareness about attitudes that can complicate ecological issues, and awareness of the urgent need for environmental protection and sustainability:

a. Creation of Engaging Content

Positive attitudes towards the environment can be encouraged among religious practitioners in Nigeria through the creation and sharing of informative posts, videos and infographics about environmental problems, their likely effects on human health, and the possible role of religion in promoting environmental sustainability. Engaging visual contents that explain environmental concepts like environmental pollution, climate change, and deforestation will help to promote the knowledge of their implications among people. Educative contents on the ecocentric meaning of scriptures can be generated and shared via social media. All these will help to raise the bar of awareness among people.

b. Online Advocacy

Again, religious practitioners in Nigeria, and of course, the entire Nigerian populace, can be made to consciously embrace positive attitudes towards the environment through the launching of planned online campaigns, such as "Eco-Friendly Lent" or "Green *Ramadan*". This will go a long way in helping to raise awareness about environment and encourage only environmentally friendly practices.

c. Utilization of Hashtags

Relevant hashtags such as #GreenMuslimNigerians, #GreenChristianNigerians, #EcoFriendlyNigeria, #ReligionAndEnvironment, #GreenFaith, among others, can be employed to create and drive awareness, and to increase the visibility of awareness campaign and reach a wider range of audience.

d. Environment-focused e-Sermon

Religious leaders can create videos on environmental stewardship that can be shared on social medial to encourage their followers to adopt eco-friendly practices.

e. Collaboration with Influencer Partners

Through collaborative online efforts with social media influencers, religious leaders, and organizations, environmental consciousness can also be promoted among people.

CONCLUSION

This study has analysed the prospects of social media in helping to contain the Negative impacts of unwholesome religious activities on the environment in Nigeria. The study was based on the assumption that the lack of knowledge of environmental issues, which is further complicated by erroneous scriptural praxis among religious practitioners, is responsible for the poor attitudes of Nigerians towards the environment. However, despite the social media's prospects in helping to contain the negative impacts of unwholesome religious activities on the environment in Nigeria, the study pointed out some potential challenges of social media that could hinder the effectiveness of digital advocacy in containing the impacts of harmful religious activities on the environment in Nigeria. Potential challenges such as: high cost of internet facility in Nigeria, frequent power outages, poor connectivity, digital literacy gaps, internet inaccessibility, and potential resistance from religious leaders that may view environmental advocacies as a threat to their authority and teachings. The study built on the assumptions of Hungerford and Volk's behavioural change theory to explore the potential of social media in helping to promote the knowledge of environmental variables, and to boost positive and ecologically friendly attitudes among Nigerians. The study recommends that social medial be maximally leveraged, and that digital literacy should be encouraged for effective environmental education, in order to promote environmental consciousness among Nigerians, and to facilitate sustainability.

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