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Social Media, Stakeholders' Engagement and Rural Community Development in Akwa Ibom State: A Perceptual Study

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Abstract: This study investigates the potential of social media platforms to facilitate stakeholder engagement for sustainable development in rural communities within Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Despite the government's efforts, sustainable development in these regions remains inadequate, necessitating a collaborative approach involving individual stakeholders. The study aims to determine if social media can enhance stakeholder interactions, leading to the identification and resolution of developmental challenges. The research employs a quantitative design, utilizing an online survey method to collect data from a sample size of 385 residents, derived through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The instrument, a researcher-structured online questionnaire, was validated and achieved a reliability score of 83% via the Cronbach Alpha method. Descriptive statistics and Spearman Rank Correlation were used to analyze the data. The study addresses key questions, including the extent of social media usage among stakeholders, the perceived convenience and effectiveness of different platforms, and the types of sustainable development activities facilitated through these interactions. Findings will reveal the correlations between social media usage and stakeholder engagement, as well as between engagement levels and sustainable development activities implemented in rural communities. This research underscores the importance of leveraging social media to foster continuous and effective stakeholder collaboration, moving beyond reliance on government interventions. It contributes to the discourse on digital tools in community development, proposing a theory of sustainable development through stakeholder collaboration facilitated by social media. The study advocates for increased stakeholder participation in rural development, highlighting the role of social media in achieving this goal.

Keywords: Social media, stakeholder engagement, sustainable development, rural communities, Akwa Ibom State.

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INTRODUCTION

There is still countless concern regarding the attainment of sustainable development in rural communities in Nigeria. Being part of the country, Akwa Ibom State shares this dilemma. Regardless of the actualisation of certain sustainable development goals here and there across a handful of communities in the country, as well as the state mostly sponsored by government and its functionaries (Nairametrics, 2024; Vanguard, 2025; BusinessDay, 2025, UNDP, 2025), a lot is yet to be done to record a moderate level of sustainable development achievements within these rural regions. Looking at the massive areas of rural community development that remains unattended, it is needless to argue that the government cannot handle this single-handedly. The realisation of this idiosyncrasy triggers the need to raise a clarion call for more individual stakeholders to join the crusade to emancipate rural communities from the ever-continuous developmental decays.

Be that as it may, if these stakeholders, who are in most cases heterogeneous, need to form alliances and think-tank groups to foster sustainable development in their respective communities, they must leverage the dynamism of a medium that can accommodate their

location and time differences. While traditional face-to-face approaches such as physical meetings have been adopted ab initio and recorded some results, a more dynamic media such as social media needs to be leveraged on to engender more stakeholders' engagement towards attaining sustainable development for their communities (Alobele, 2024, Ibrahim, 2024). The social media seems to strategically fit into the kind of mass media that can create room for this extent of interaction in a cost-effective and convenient manner (Ahmad & Joseph, 2023). Social media are veritable tools to facilitate smooth and convenient, frequent, location-barrier-less and time-zone-regardless interactions when their challenges are properly mitigated (Iwuchukwu, Eke, Arigbo, & Chukwudum, 2023).

This leads to the assumption of this paper that; if through social media platforms stakeholders can come together in unity of purpose more often to interact about their communities, there are great chances for them to bring up discussions that will lead to the identification of some development challenge facing their community (Mbagwu, Ekwealor, & Okide, 2019; Aondover *et al.*, 2024, Elele, Okocha, Saidu, & Ebi, 2024). This problem identification has the tendency to stimulate more engagement among the stakeholders. The more these stakeholders engage with each other on a regular basis

tendency exist that they begin to tinker around what possible solutions they can offer for the identified problems collectively (Madu, 2021; Uwalaka, 2023). As they engage more, they develop a sense of unity of purpose and oneness which can trigger them to garner resources to implement the solutions proffered to the identified development challenge.

It is as a result of this assumption that this paper aims to ascertain whether social media platforms can facilitate more frequent stakeholder engagement that can translate into the proffering of solutions to identified developmental challenges facing rural communities in Akwa Ibom state; as well as to use these findings to formulate a theory of attaining basic sustainable development through stakeholder collaboration rather than overall dependence on government and its functionaries.

Statement of the Problem

Unarguable, it is crystal clear that the government of Nigeria across all tiers has bitten much more than it can chew. With their so many policy promises geared towards the urbanization of city centers, only very little attention is left, if any, to give heed to the waging public cry of rural communities for succor in terms of development. This becomes a very serious challenge to 'urbaners' who from time to time make trips back to their respective communities to unavoidably share in piece of the under-development cake that government negligence has served these rural dwellers. Most often than nothing, the 'urbaners' immediately resort to blaming the government for not giving sufficient attention to rural development.

Amidst great complains, rancor and several failed governments promises as well as only-useful-for-commissioning projects scattered across various rural communities, the fact still remains that rural communities are largely underdeveloped. Occasion demands that we begin to look away from what the government can do for our communities and start looking at how we can come together as individual stakeholders in community development to join forces to take little but consistent steps towards the development of our communities. It is as a result of thinking in this line that the need for this paper arose to find empirical support to answer the question: to what extent can social media platforms enhance stakeholders' engagement towards community development?

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. To what extent do individual stakeholders in rural community use social media platforms to interact about sustainable development?
2. Which social media platform do individual stakeholders in rural community perceive to be more convenient for interactions about sustainable development?

3. To what extent do individual stakeholders in rural community perceive social media to be easier to use than physical means for interactions about sustainable development?
4. Which sustainable development activity are mostly facilitated among individual stakeholders using social media platforms for interactions?
5. How effective do individual stakeholders perceive the use of social media in enhancing engagements that lead to sustainable development in rural communities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Stakeholder Engagement in the Digital Era

In the digital era, social media has transformed stakeholder engagement by facilitating real-time, interactive communication and collaboration between organisations and their stakeholders (Ukpog, 2014; Times of Startups, 2025). Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), LinkedIn, and Instagram, have become essential tools for organisations to engage with various stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, suppliers, and communities (Growett, 2025). The unprecedented reach of these platforms has also enabled global interactions, allowing stakeholders from different geographic locations to connect and communicate effortlessly (Times of Startups, 2025).

One of the most significant benefits of social media is its capacity to foster transparency and openness, which is crucial for building trust with stakeholders. Social media is always a tool for various types of advocacy such as gender equality advocacy (Etumnu, Onyebuchi, Jumbo, Ukpog, & Okpongpong, 2023), health sensitisation (Ukpog, Anyanwu, Oliora & Onyebuchi, 2021). Organisations can use social media to share information, respond to queries, and address concerns directly. This helps to build stronger relationships and enhance stakeholder loyalty (Sustainability Directory, 2025). For example, when an organisation is transparent about its business practices and decisions, it reduces the risk of misunderstandings and potential conflicts (Shi, Yeung, & Dmello, 2024). Furthermore, social media provides an opportunity for stakeholders to participate in decision-making processes by offering feedback and suggestions, leading to a more inclusive approach to governance.

Social media's real-time nature has also changed how crises are managed and how organisations engage with stakeholders during emergencies. A swift and appropriate response on social platforms can help mitigate negative impacts and maintain stakeholder confidence (Psychology Today, 2025). For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, companies leveraged social media to provide updates on health protocols, operational changes, and support for affected communities (Kwok, Lee, & Han, 2022). This

engagement was crucial in maintaining positive relationships and ensuring transparency during a period of uncertainty.

Social media analytics have further revolutionised stakeholder engagement by providing organisations with insights into stakeholder sentiment and behaviour (Kietzmann, Paschen, & Treen, 2021). Through data analysis tools, organisations can track engagement levels, identify key concerns, and tailor their communication strategies to address specific issues (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2022; Sprinklr, 2025). The ability to measure engagement effectiveness has improved the way companies interact with their audiences, making it easier to meet stakeholder expectations (Shi, Yeung, & Dmello, 2024). Social media platforms have thus enabled a two-way communication process where organisations can not only disseminate information but also gather feedback, allowing for more responsive and dynamic relationships (Sprinklr, 2025).

However, the rise of social media has also presented challenges. The instant nature of communication can sometimes result in misinformation or the spread of negative publicity at a rapid pace (Barikui, & Ikon, 2018; Cinelli *et al.*, 2020; Warnke, Maier, & Gilbert, 2024). Organisations must, therefore, remain vigilant and proactive in managing their social media presence to avoid reputational damage. For instance, companies have had to adapt to new modes of crisis communication, where addressing misinformation swiftly becomes critical to sustaining stakeholder trust (Warnke, Maier, & Gilbert, 2024; Sprinklr, 2025).

In the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR), social media has become an essential platform for organisations to showcase their sustainability initiatives and community engagement efforts (Elving, 2013; Morsing & Schultz, 2022). By communicating CSR activities on social media, companies can demonstrate their commitment to ethical business practices, which is increasingly valued by consumers and investors (Morsing & Schultz, 2022; Shi, Yeung, & Dmello, 2024). Studies have shown that stakeholders are more likely to support organisations that are socially responsible and transparent about their environmental and social impacts (Victoria News, 2020; Sprinklr, 2025).

Stakeholder Engagement and Community Development in Rural Communities

In rural communities, stakeholder engagement plays a vital role in promoting community development, particularly in areas where resources are limited, and the population may face unique social and economic challenges (Ukpogon, 2019a, OECD, 2022). Stakeholder engagement in rural settings involves collaboration between various actors, including local government, community members, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private sector entities (FAO, 2023). This

approach aims to address local needs, enhance infrastructure, and improve the quality of life for rural populations (World Bank, 2023).

The participatory nature of stakeholder engagement is crucial for rural community development. In many cases, rural communities are characterised by a close-knit social fabric, where local stakeholders are deeply invested in the wellbeing of the community. Engaging these stakeholders in development initiatives ensures that their voices are heard, and their concerns are addressed, which can lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes (Chambers, 2023; Pretty, 2022). For example, when local farmers are involved in agricultural development projects, they can contribute valuable knowledge about local conditions and practices, resulting in more tailored and successful interventions (FAO, 2023).

One prominent example of stakeholder engagement in rural development is through public-private partnerships (PPPs), where governments collaborate with private companies and community organisations to implement development projects. These partnerships often focus on improving infrastructure, such as roads, schools, and healthcare facilities, which are essential for the socio-economic advancement of rural areas. A study by Williams and Davies (2022) highlights the success of PPPs in rural India, where collaborations between government agencies and private firms have resulted in the construction of new schools and the provision of clean drinking water, directly benefiting local communities (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2022).

In addition to infrastructure development, stakeholder engagement in rural communities often focuses on enhancing economic opportunities. For example, engaging with local businesses and cooperatives can stimulate job creation and support small-scale enterprises. In many rural areas, the agricultural sector is a primary source of livelihood, and involving farmers in decision-making processes related to agricultural policies and practices can lead to improved productivity and income generation. Programmes such as the Farmer Field Schools (FFS) initiative, which promotes collaboration between farmers, researchers, and extension officers, have been shown to improve agricultural techniques and boost rural livelihoods (FAO, 2023; van den Berg & Jiggins, 2021).

Furthermore, NGOs often play a crucial role in facilitating stakeholder engagement in rural communities by acting as intermediaries between local populations and external actors. NGOs can help mobilise resources, provide technical expertise, and advocate for the needs of rural communities. In some cases, they may also help organise community forums or workshops where local stakeholders can express their views and contribute to the planning and implementation of development projects

(World Bank, 2023; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022). This inclusive approach not only empowers rural communities but also ensures that development initiatives are aligned with their priorities (Pretty, 2022).

However, rural stakeholder engagement is not without its challenges. One significant issue is the lack of access to digital technologies, which can hinder communication and coordination between stakeholders, especially in remote areas (Warren *et al.*, 2021; GSMA, 2023). While social media and other digital platforms have become important tools for stakeholder engagement in urban settings, rural areas often lag in terms of internet connectivity and digital literacy. As a result, face-to-face meetings and traditional forms of communication remain essential for stakeholder engagement in many rural regions (OECD, 2022).

Another challenge is the potential for power imbalances between different stakeholder groups. In some cases, more influential stakeholders, such as government officials or large corporations, may dominate the decision-making process, marginalising the voices of local community members. To address this, it is essential to adopt inclusive engagement strategies that prioritise the participation of vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as women, indigenous populations, and smallholder farmers. Ensuring that these groups are adequately represented in stakeholder discussions is key to promoting equitable and sustainable development in rural areas (Chambers, 2023; UNDP, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the quantitative research design using online survey method. Online survey was the most appropriate method given the nature of the study, its cost effectiveness and perceived ease of use. Accordingly, the population of this study comprised of residents of Akwa Ibom State. From the estimated population of 3,902,051 (1,983,202 males and 1,918,849 females) for the state as reported by NPC, 2006; a geometric projection of the 2024 population for the state using 2.5% annual growth rate is 6,085,868. Using the Australian sample size calculator, the derived sampled size for this study was 385. The purposive and snowballing sampling techniques were adopted for this study. First, the researcher purposively selected residents of Akwa Ibom State who were available and willing to participate in the study voluntarily. Second the researcher solicited with the selected participants to invite people from their circle and groups who would also wish to be a part of the study voluntarily.

With this technique, the research was able to conveniently gather 385 participants for this study. the

instrument used for data collection was a researcher-structured online survey questionnaire created using Google Form. The instrument was validated by a development communication expert who vetted the instrument and later approved it after vetted revision were made. A test retest approach calculated using Cronbach Alpha was used to test the reliability of the validated instrument. An Alpha co-efficient of 0.83 was gotten after the pretest and posttest responses of 10 pilot study participants was calculated. A reliability score of 83% was ideal for the instrument to be used. The Google form link of the instrument was shared through a WhatsApp broadcast message to all who indicated interest in participating in the study. They were given a period of five days to fill it in. After which collated data were descriptively analysed using frequency counts and percentage.

DATA AND RESULTS

A total of 385 participants were initially recruited for this study, aimed at exploring engagement in rural community development. Of these, 373 responses were deemed valid and included in the analysis, while the remaining 12 were excluded due to incomplete responses, where participants left certain options blank. This final sample of 373 respondents provides a reliable basis for examining patterns of participation and involvement in community development activities, both online and offline.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Under 18	29	7.8
18-24	91	24.4
25-34	100	26.8
35-44	85	22.8
45 and above	68	18.2
Total	373	100

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents are within the age range of 25-34 years. This suggests that key contributors to rural community development discussions are young adults, who are likely to have more time, access to technology, and willingness to engage in such discussions.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	179	48.0
Female	194	52.0
Total	373	100

Table 2 shows nearly equal gender representation, with a slight majority being male. This balance implies that both men and women are actively involved in discussions regarding rural community development.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Student	101	27.1
Employed	150	40.2
Self-employed	47	12.6
Unemployed	41	11.0
Retired	34	9.1
Total	373	100

Table 3 shows that employed individuals and students make up the largest portion of respondents. This highlights that people in employment and those studying are most active in rural development discussions.

Table 4. Membership in Group or Association

Membership	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	221	59.2
No	152	40.8
Total	373	100

Table 4 shows that about 59% of respondents are members of a group or association discussing rural community development indicating the importance of formal or informal groups in driving development initiatives.

Table 5. Mode of Operation of Association

Mode of Operation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Online meetings only	109	29.2
Physical meetings only	72	19.3
Both	192	51.5
Total	373	100

Table 5 shows that 51.5% of respondents' groups use both online and physical meetings to discuss rural community development. This preference for a hybrid approach suggests that both face-to-face interaction and digital communication are essential for fostering meaningful discussions. Groups relying solely on one method may miss out on broader engagement, and a balanced approach may yield better results in participation and outcomes.

Table 6. Association's Use of Social Media

Usage Extent	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high extent	79	21.2
High extent	131	35.2
Moderate	82	22.0
Low extent	44	11.8
Very low extent	37	9.9
Total	373	100

Table 6 shows that 56.4% of respondents' groups make use of social media platforms to a high or very high extent in discussing rural community development. This reflects the importance of digital platforms in mobilising community efforts for community development.

Table 7. Community Development Endeavours facilitated via Social Media

Endeavour	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Road repairs and construction	121	32.4
Renovation of dilapidated school roofs/blocks	81	21.7
Medical outreaches for the aged	66	17.7
Provision of water supply	92	24.6
Provision of electricity and its facilities	74	19.8
Educational supports such as scholarships	57	15.3
Welfare packages for members	46	12.3
Business support for community members	55	14.7

Table 7 shows that the most frequently discussed community development endeavours are infrastructure-related, such as road repairs (32.4%) and provision of water supply (24.6%). This suggests that basic infrastructure remains a top priority in these communities. However, the lower focus on educational support, welfare, and business support indicates potential gaps in addressing broader community needs.

Table 8. Extent of Participation via Social Media

Participation Extent	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high extent	61	16.4
High extent	119	31.9
Moderate	101	27.1
Low extent	62	16.6
Very low extent	30	8.0
Total	373	100

Table 8 shows that 48.3% of respondents report participating to a high or very high extent in social media discussions about rural development. This indicates a generally good level of engagement, although the 24.6% reporting low or very low participation suggests that some members of the community may be disengaged or unable to participate.

Table 9. Social Media Platform Mostly use for Community Association

Social Media Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	139	37.3
Telegram	71	19.0
WhatsApp	121	32.4
X (formerly Twitter)	42	11.3
Total	373	100

Table 9 shows that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most commonly used social media platforms for community discussions, with Facebook slightly ahead. These platforms are likely preferred for their wide accessibility

and ease of use. However, less reliance on Telegram and X (formerly Twitter) indicates that these platforms may not be well-suited for community discussions, or that their potential has yet to be fully tapped.

Table 10. Aspects of Engagement via Social Media

Contribution Method	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Identifying community development challenges	122	32.7
Suggesting solutions to identified development challenges	99	26.6
Giving financial support to implement suggested solutions	69	18.5
Monitoring the implementation of suggested solutions	83	22.3

Table 10 shows that most respondents contribute by identifying challenges and suggesting solutions. However, financial contributions and monitoring of solutions are less common. This may indicate a gap between discussing issues and actively supporting or overseeing their implementation.

Table 11. Engagement in Discussions on Social Media

Participation Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very active	49	13.1
Active	121	32.4
Moderate	112	30.0
Not active	61	16.4
Not very active	30	8.0
Total	373	100

Table 11 shows that while most respondents rate themselves as active or very active participants in community discussions, there is still a notable 24.4% who consider themselves not very active or not active at all. This suggests that while many are engaged, some may feel disengaged, possibly due to lack of time or interest.

Table 12. Attendance on Meetings via Social Media

Attendance Extent	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high extent	119	31.9
High extent	91	24.4
Low extent	51	13.7
Very low extent	112	30.0
Total	373	100

Table 12 shows that 56.3% of respondents attend social media meetings to a high or very high extent, indicating a high level consistent in attendance of online meetings held on social media platforms. This may reflect issues like scheduling conflicts, technical difficulties, or perceived irrelevance of the meetings.

Table 13. Sharing Ideas and Suggestions

Sharing Extent	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high extent	69	18.5
High extent	113	30.3
Low extent	119	31.9
Very low extent	72	19.3
Total	373	100

Table 13 shows that only about half of the respondents share ideas and suggestions during meetings. This points to a need for fostering a more inclusive and engaging environment where participants feel comfortable contributing. Lack of contribution could stem from shyness, uncertainty about the relevance of ideas, or dominance by certain voices.

Table 14. Financial Contributions

Contribution Extent	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high extent	59	15.8
High extent	81	21.7
Low extent	121	32.4
Very low extent	112	30.0
Total	373	100

Table 14 shows that financial contributions to group projects are generally low, with 62.4% of respondents contributing to a low or very low extent. This could reflect economic constraints or scepticism about how funds are used. Improving transparency in fund management and showcasing successful projects could build trust and encourage more people to contribute financially to community development efforts.

Table 15: Physical Presence at Projects

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very high extent	39	10.4
High extent	77	20.6
Low extent	182	48.8
Very low extent	75	20.1
Total	373	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 15 shows that physical presence at projects is limited, with nearly 69% of respondents participating to a low or very low extent. This suggests that geographical or time constraints may prevent many individuals from being physically involved in project monitoring.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

To what extent do individual stakeholders in rural communities use social media platforms to interact about sustainable development?

Table 6 was used to answer this research question. The results show that 56.4% of respondents reported that their groups or associations use social media platforms to a high or very high extent to discuss rural community development. This demonstrates that social media is a key tool for mobilising community

efforts, with platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp facilitating these interactions. However, the 43.6% reporting moderate or low usage highlights barriers such as limited access to technology, digital literacy, or poor internet connectivity, which must be addressed to increase participation.

These findings are consistent with empirical studies such as McCormick *et al.* (2015), who observed the growing importance of social media in enabling rural community development efforts. According to the **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**, two key factors—perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use—determine the adoption of technology. The results align with this model, as respondents likely perceive social media platforms to be useful and relatively easy to navigate, thereby driving their high adoption in community discussions.

Which social media platform do individual stakeholders in rural communities perceive to be more convenient for interactions about sustainable development?

Table 9 was used to answer this question. The results show that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most commonly used social media platforms for community discussions, with Facebook slightly ahead. This preference may be attributed to the ease of use and familiarity of these platforms, which offer flexible tools for both group and one-on-one interactions, such as file sharing, group chats, and video calls.

The widespread adoption of these platforms is consistent with TAM's assertion that perceived ease of use significantly influences technology adoption. Facebook and WhatsApp, which are user-friendly and widely accessible, are perceived as the most convenient tools for engaging in development discussions. This finding also resonates with Dwyer *et al.* (2017), who found that these platforms are frequently used for community engagement in rural settings.

To what extent do individual stakeholders in rural communities perceive social media to be easier to use than physical means for interactions about sustainable development?

Table 5 shows that 51.5% of respondents reported using both online and physical meetings for discussing rural community development. This suggests that while social media is a valuable tool, many still see the importance of physical interactions, likely for more detailed discussions or decision-making processes. However, a significant portion relies on social media, indicating that it is perceived as an easier and more efficient way to facilitate frequent interactions.

According to TAM, perceived ease of use is critical in the acceptance of technology. While social media is viewed as easy to use for general communication, physical meetings may be preferred for

interactions that require more nuanced, face-to-face engagement. This dual preference reflects a balance between the convenience of digital tools and the value of in-person discussions, a finding echoed in studies such as Ellison *et al.* (2016), which highlight the complementary roles of both mediums.

Which sustainable development activity is mostly facilitated among individual stakeholders using social media platforms for interactions?

Table 7 shows that infrastructure-related activities, such as road repairs and the provision of water supply, are the most frequently discussed community development endeavours. This suggests that basic infrastructure remains a priority for rural communities and that social media is effectively used to mobilise discussions and actions around these needs.

This finding supports the **Technology Acceptance Model**, as the perceived usefulness of social media platforms is evident in their ability to coordinate efforts for high-priority development projects. The emphasis on infrastructure aligns with studies like Olanrewaju *et al.* (2020), which highlight the critical role of technology in enabling communities to address their immediate needs. However, the lower focus on educational support and welfare packages indicates potential gaps in leveraging social media for a broader range of community development activities.

How effective do individual stakeholders perceive the use of social media in enhancing engagements that lead to sustainable development in rural communities?

Table 8 reveals that 48.3% of respondents reported participating to a high or very high extent in social media discussions about rural development. This reflects a generally positive perception of social media as an effective tool for engagement. However, the 24.6% who reported low or very low participation suggest that not all community members find social media discussions equally engaging or effective. Barriers such as time constraints, digital literacy, or trust in the process may limit some individuals' active involvement.

TAM's principle of perceived usefulness can explain these findings, as stakeholders are more likely to engage with social media if they believe it will lead to tangible benefits for their community. When people see the outcomes of their online interactions—such as completed infrastructure projects—they are more inclined to continue participating. This pattern is supported by Norris *et al.* (2019), who found that the perceived effectiveness of social media in community discussions is closely tied to the visible impact of these discussions on development projects.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the growing role of social media in fostering rural community development,

providing a platform that facilitates collaboration and engagement among stakeholders. The widespread use of platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp underscores the convenience and effectiveness of digital tools in driving discussions on sustainable development. Many respondents reported frequent use of social media for community development interactions, reflecting its perceived usefulness and ease of use, consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). However, the study also revealed certain limitations in the effectiveness of social media. While many individuals are actively involved, a notable percentage of the community remains disengaged. This suggests that barriers such as digital literacy, internet access, and economic constraints still limit the inclusiveness of online platforms. Additionally, despite the increasing reliance on social media, respondents expressed a preference for a hybrid approach that combines both online and physical meetings, indicating the continued importance of in-person interactions.

The study also found that community discussions on social media primarily focus on infrastructure projects, such as road repairs and water supply. Although these are critical needs, the limited attention given to education, welfare, and business support suggests that social media could be used more effectively to address a broader range of development challenges. While social media has proven to be a valuable tool for rural community development, its full potential has yet to be realised. Efforts to bridge the digital divide and broaden the focus of community discussions will be essential to maximising the impact of social media on sustainable development in rural areas. By addressing these challenges, social media can play an even greater role in facilitating meaningful and inclusive community progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It was therefore recommended that:

- Local governments and community leaders enhance digital infrastructure and support systems in rural areas, and implement targeted awareness campaigns and training sessions to encourage more active participation on social media platforms.
- Community organisations and social media managers optimise Facebook and WhatsApp for community interactions by developing specific guidelines and best practices, and integrating features that align with community needs.
- Community development groups and organisers adopt a hybrid approach that integrates both social media and physical meetings to leverage the benefits of both methods and address diverse stakeholder preferences.
- Development agencies and advocacy groups encourage discussions and initiatives on a broader range of sustainable development activities, such as education, health, welfare, and business support.
- Project leaders and social media coordinators increase transparency, demonstrate the tangible impacts of social media-driven initiatives, and provide clear feedback mechanisms to build trust and reinforce the effectiveness of social media in driving sustainable development.

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