RESEARCH ARTICLE

Communication, Media Literacy and Sustainable Social Development: Experience of Middle Belt Residents in Nigeria

Akpan Udo Usiere[a*], Imaabasi Aniema [b]

Abstract

This research started from the topic of Communication, media literacy and sustainable social development exploring the experiences of residents of the Middle Belt states in Nigeria. The objectives were to find out the main contributions of media to social development; the level of media literacy of the population and the relationship of media and development in the affected states of Nigeria. Two theories were carried in the process of research as the diffusion of innovations and the Uses and Gratification theories. The population of the study was 18, 963,717 with a sample size of 400 persons. The instrument of research was questionnaire shared proportionately and distributed to residents physically. The method of research was by survey and the results calculated in percentages using pie charts. Part of findings was that the relationship of the media and sustainable development, it was noted at an average level. This shows that the media has to an extent done its part of work but still left with much to do for the facilitating of development in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. The conclusion had that the media in the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria contribute definitely on social development, but the prospective remain underutilized. The recommendations included that policymakers and practitioners should also emphasize participatory and inclusive communication strategies to strengthen public engagement and trust.

Keywords: Communication, Media, Literacy, Social, Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication has always been central to human existence and societal progress. It serves as the foundation upon which societies build relationships, share ideas, and foster development. In the 21st century, effective communication, supported by media literacy, has emerged as a vital tool for promoting sustainable social development across nations (McQuail, 2010; Okoro & Agbo, 2019). The role of communication extends beyond mere information dissemination—it involves education, persuasion, mobilization, and empowerment, which are essential components for transforming individuals and communities (Servaes, 2013). Within the Nigerian context, particularly among residents of the Middle Belt region, communication and media literacy have become strategic instruments for addressing social challenges, enhancing civic participation, and fostering unity amidst diversity.

The Middle Belt region of Nigeria, comprising states such as Benue, Plateau, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, and parts of Kwara and Taraba represents a mosaic of ethnic, religious, and cultural identities (Ibrahim, 2017). This diversity, while enriching, has also been a source of socio-political tension, ethnic conflicts, and developmental disparities (Kwaja, 2015). In this context, communication becomes not merely a channel for information exchange but a mechanism for conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and social integration. Media literacy, on the other hand, empowers citizens to critically evaluate, interpret, and engage with information from traditional and

digital media sources—an essential skill in today's information-driven world (Porter & Heppelmann, 2018, Livingstone, 2008).

Media literacy involves the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages in various forms (Hobbs, 2010). It enhances the audience's capacity to distinguish between factual and misleading information, especially in an era of misinformation and social media manipulation. According to Buckingham (2019), a media-literate society is better positioned to make informed decisions, resist propaganda, and participate meaningfully in democratic and developmental processes. In the Middle Belt region, where issues of insecurity, political marginalization, and ethnic divisions are prevalent, the need for media literacy is particularly urgent. It provides residents with the tools to interpret the motives behind media messages and to engage constructively in dialogue that promotes social cohesion and sustainable community development (Okafor & Nwosu, 2020).

Sustainable social development entails the continuous improvement of social well-being, human rights, equality, and justice within a society. It focuses on inclusiveness, empowerment, and the creation of systems that allow individuals to live productive and fulfilling lives). Communication plays a fundamental role in achieving these goals, as it enables stakeholders—governments, civil society, and citizens—to collaborate, share knowledge, and coordinate developmental initiatives (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). For instance, communication for development (C4D) approaches have been widely employed to promote education, health, gender equality, and peace in developing societies (Mefalopulos, 2008). When residents possess high media literacy, they can participate more actively in such initiatives, ensuring that development outcomes are not only effective but also sustainable.

The growth of digital technology and social media in Nigeria has significantly influenced communication patterns and media consumption habits. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter) have become major sources of information for Middle Belt residents (Asemah, 2020). While these platforms promote connectivity and civic awareness, they also expose users to misinformation, hate speech, and divisive narratives that can undermine social stability (Ekeanyanwu & Okoye, 2018). Consequently, the ability to navigate the media environment critically is essential for protecting democratic values and ensuring sustainable social cohesion.

In addition, sustainable social development cannot be achieved without informed and active citizens. Media literacy enhances individuals'

capacity to understand public issues, evaluate policy information, and hold leaders accountable (Jenkins et al., 2016). Through community radio, local newspapers, and social media, residents of the Middle Belt can access development-oriented information—on agriculture, health, education, and peacebuilding—that fosters inclusion and participation. However, the impact of such communication depends on the audience's literacy level, critical thinking, and ability to differentiate credible sources from manipulative ones (Ojebode & Akinwale, 2020).

Moreover, in the context of Nigeria's socio-political structure, media literacy strengthens democratic engagement and civic participation. It enables citizens to question narratives, demand transparency, and contribute to policy discourse on issues affecting their communities. As Ndimele (2019) posits, a media-literate population is a socially responsible one—capable of interpreting societal issues through the lens of truth and national interest. Thus, communication and media literacy collectively act as catalysts for peace, equity, and social progress in plural societies such as the Middle Belt.

The intersection of communication, media literacy, and sustainable social development in the Middle Belt of Nigeria underscores the need for a holistic approach to development. Beyond infrastructural projects, sustainable development requires the empowerment of individuals with the communicative competence and media awareness necessary to build inclusive, informed, and resilient communities. Therefore, understanding the experiences of Middle Belt residents regarding communication practices and media literacy provides crucial insights into how information exchange can serve as a driver of peace, empowerment, and social transformation in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the global recognition of communication as a key driver of sustainable social development, many communities in Nigeria's Middle Belt continue to face socio-economic and political challenges that hinder progress. The region, often described as Nigeria's cultural melting pot, has over the years experienced persistent issues such as ethnic conflicts, insecurity, poverty, and marginalization. These problems have weakened social cohesion and limited citizens' participation in developmental initiatives. While communication channels—both traditional and modern—exist in the region, their potential to foster peace, civic awareness, and social transformation remains underutilized. This raises concerns about the adequacy of communication strategies used to engage residents in sustainable development efforts.

Furthermore, the rapid expansion of digital and social media platforms has created a new information landscape characterized by both opportunities and risks. On one hand, digital communication enables faster access to development-related information and facilitates interaction between government and citizens. On the other hand, the absence of strong media literacy skills among residents exposes them to misinformation, hate speech, and manipulation. This has often aggravated ethnic divisions and mistrust among communities in the Middle Belt, undermining developmental initiatives. Thus, while media platforms could serve as tools for enlightenment and inclusion, their misuse or misinterpretation contributes to social instability and poor development outcomes.

Another dimension of the problem lies in the limited efforts to integrate media literacy education into community communication and development programs in the region. Studies have shown that media literacy enhances citizens' ability to critically analyze and evaluate media content, thereby promoting informed participation in governance and development. Akpan (2021) states that people increasingly rely on media to voice concerns, mobilize support for social causes and monitor government accountability. However, many residents in the Middle Belt still lack the skills to differentiate credible information from biased or harmful content. Consequently, developmental messages disseminated through various media channels often fail to produce the desired attitudinal and behavioral changes among the populace. This gap points to the need for a deeper understanding of how media literacy influences the residents' ability to engage meaningfully in social development processes.

In addition, empirical data on the relationship between communication practices, media literacy, and sustainable social development within the Middle Belt context remain scarce. Most existing studies focus broadly on Nigeria as a whole, paying limited attention to the peculiar social realities of the Middle Belt—a region marked by multiethnic diversity and recurrent conflicts. There is, therefore, a pressing need to investigate how communication processes and media literacy levels shape residents' perceptions, participation, and experiences in sustainable social development initiatives. Understanding this relationship will not only contribute to scholarly discourse but also provide practical insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and communication experts seeking to promote peace, inclusion, and social transformation in Nigeria's Middle Belt.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the main area of social contributions role of communication in promoting sustainable social development among residents of the Middle Belt region of Nigeria.
2. To assess the level of media literacy in understanding in social development among resindets of Middle Bely in Nigeria
3. To evaluate the relationship between communication practices, media literacy, and sustainable social development in the Middle Belt region.

Media Literacy: An Academic Overview

Media literacy refers to the ability to critically access, evaluate, analyze, and create media content across various platforms. It encompasses the knowledge and skills needed to interpret messages, understand the purposes behind them, and engage constructively in a mediated society (United Nations Development Programme. 2021). According to Kellner and Share (2019), media literacy involves "critical inquiry" into how media messages shape perceptions, values, and identities within cultural and political contexts. This means that individuals who are media literate not only consume media but also question the power structures, ideologies, and biases embedded in media representations.

Jolls and Wilson (2023) argue that media literacy education is a key strategy for fostering critical thinking and informed participation in democratic societies. They emphasize that in the era of disinformation and algorithmic manipulation, developing citizens' media literacy skills is essential to safeguard against propaganda and misinformation. Similarly, Tandoc and Maitra (2022) highlight that while many people exhibit moderate levels of media literacy, there remains a significant gap in higher-order competencies such as critical evaluation, content verification, and responsible media production.

Furthermore, Leaning (2024) underscores that media literacy now extends beyond traditional media forms to include digital, social, and AI-generated content, making it indispensable in promoting digital citizenship and ethical media engagement. This evolution demonstrates that media literacy is not a fixed set of skills but a dynamic process of learning and adaptation aligned with technological changes and societal needs. Thus, media literacy enhances individuals' capacity to understand media influence, engage responsibly, and contribute meaningfully to knowledge societies. It therefore represents a crucial element of modern education and social development.

Media Contributions to Social Development

The media play an increasingly critical role in driving social development through dissemination of information, fostering civic engagement, and enabling community empowerment. As communication technologies expand, media channels serve not just as passive conveyors of news but as active agents in shaping knowledge, attitudes, and actions among citizens. For example, recent studies in Nigeria show that media literacy interventions and digital hygiene education are important for helping young people resist disinformation and fake news, which are harmful to social trust and community cohesion (Chidozie, 2023).

Information dissemination is one of the most fundamental contributions of the media to social development. Media outlets—traditional and digital—offer platforms for health education, public policy updates, and awareness of environmental and gender issues. In Nigeria, educational curricula that include media and information literacy have shown effectiveness in enabling students to detect fake news and misinformation (Nasir & Ciroma, 2022). These findings underscore how equitable access to credible information is foundational for informed decision-making and enhanced social welfare.

Media also facilitate social mobilization and behavior change. Digital media platforms, especially social media, have become powerful tools for mobilizing civic participation, advocacy, and political engagement. Empirical work on political participation among adult and vocational learners in Nigeria notes that media literacy is significantly associated with increased online political participation, especially among marginalized populations (Okok, Oroka, Ladan, Olori, & Iniobong, 2025). By shaping how people perceive and act on social issues—be it corruption, governance, or rights—media contribute to sustainable social development.

Really, media contribute to social inclusion, cultural preservation, and community building. Emerging research on the role of social media in development communication highlights both opportunities and challenges in Nigeria—platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram enable broader public engagement, giving voices to previously marginalized communities, while also raising issues such as digital divide and misinformation (Sanusi, Ifedolapo, & Ayinde, 2025). Thus, media's contribution involves not only delivering messages but empowering individuals with critical literacy, enabling social cohesion, participatory governance, and sustainable development.

Media Literacy and Development

Media literacy has emerged as a crucial factor in advancing social, political, and economic development in the digital age. As societies become increasingly mediated by technology and information flows, the ability of citizens to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages critically determines how effectively they can participate in governance, education, and sustainable development. Scholars have observed that in today's knowledge-based economy, media literacy represents both a civic skill and a developmental resource that enables citizens to make informed choices, resist misinformation, and engage meaningfully in social transformation (Nasir & Ciroma, 2022). Media literacy contributes directly to development by empowering individuals with the competence to use media for self-improvement, education, and collective progress. In Nigeria and other developing countries, insufficient media literacy frequently marks in the distribution of fake news, political manipulation, and reduced involvement in social issues. When individuals possess the skills to critically evaluate media content, they can discern credible information, adopt healthy social behaviors, and demand accountability from leaders. According to Sanusi, Ifedolapo, and Ayinde (2025), enhanced media literacy among citizens improves civic awareness, facilitates inclusivity, and promotes digital participation—key indicators of sustainable development.

Furthermore, media literacy strengthens democracy and social justice by bridging the knowledge gap between citizens and decision-makers. Through participatory media use, citizens become active contributors rather than passive consumers of information. For example, media-literate citizens are more likely to engage in community journalism, contribute to development-oriented debates, and leverage digital tools to advocate for policy reforms (Chidozie, 2023). This empowerment translates into stronger institutions and more transparent governance, both of which are essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Media literacy also promotes social and cultural development by encouraging cross-cultural understanding and tolerance. The media, when used responsibly, foster mutual respect and peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies like Nigeria's Middle Belt, where ethnic and religious diversity often leads to misunderstanding. A media-literate population can interpret media content contextually, avoiding stereotyping and misinformation that could threaten social cohesion (Adebayo & Olayinka, 2024). Moreover, digital literacy programs that emphasize ethical media use are now integrated into education systems and community initiatives, preparing

individuals to use media tools constructively for development communication.

In essence, media literacy acts as a foundation for inclusive and participatory development. It empowers individuals to critically engage with the media ecosystem, counter disinformation, and use communication tools to solve community problems. As the media environment continues to evolve, fostering media literacy at all societal levels—schools, communities, and policymaking institutions—remains central to achieving equitable and sustainable development.

Media Literacy and Development

Media literacy has become increasingly recognized as a critical lever for socio-economic and political development in Nigeria. Recent studies by Nkenchor & Maciver,(2024) Okop, Oroka, Ladan et al (2025) indicate that media literacy empowers individuals to critically assess media messages, discern between credible and misleading information, and participate more effectively in civic life. In this way, media literacy contributes to better governance, public health, and educational outcomes by enabling citizens to reject false narratives and make informed choices.

In particular, media literacy enhances educational development. For instance, Nwoji, Gada, & Alqahtani (2025) found that children ages 8-12 who use digital media with supervision show improved learning outcomes and social interaction. This suggests that when media literacy is embedded in the educational process, it helps learners use media as tools for learning, not merely for entertainment, thus driving social development.

Media literacy also has links with political participation and democratic development. This suggests that while media literacy can enhance awareness and potential for participation, its effects are mediated by other factors like basic literacy, learning styles, and access to resources. Still, the presence of media literacy is associated with higher engagement with political content and more active citizenship.

Furthermore, media literacy is being leveraged for sustainable development goals (SDGs) beyond education and politics. Nkenchor & Maciver (2024) shows that proficiency in media literacy is significantly associated with awareness of sustainable practices and willingness to engage in community sustainability initiatives. This underscores that media literacy plays a broader developmental role—shaping not just information processing but behaviors that align with social, environmental, and economic sustainability.

Review of Related Literature

Afolabi (2015) wrote on "Modeling relationship between media literacy competencies and use of new media for civic engagement among youths in new digital media environment (Kwara State, Nigeria). This study gathers data from youths in both rural and urban areas of Kwara State, Nigeria, aiming to test the relationship between media literacy competencies and the use of new media for civic engagement. Using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the findings show a significant positive relationship: ownership or access to devices (gadgets), possession of media skills, critical understanding, and communicative competences strongly correlate with youths' participation in civic engagement via new media. The study concluded that media literacy is a key factor enabling youths to use new media effectively for civic participation, with implications for policy in Nigeria and similar developing countries.

Adeoye, & Lawal (2022) in Digital media literacy and the utilization of social media among postgraduate students in Kwara State, Nigeria stated that with digital media becoming increasingly integral in all spheres of human life, this study assesses digital media literacy and its influence on how postgraduate students in selected universities in Kwara State use social media. Anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the research adopts a quantitative survey method. From 372 respondents randomly sampled across three universities, 354 valid responses were analyzed. The results indicate that postgraduate students are generally media literate, and this literacy significantly influences their choice of social media platforms and content used. The study provided evidence that higher media literacy correlates positively with more discerning and purposeful social media use. Key recommendations included expanding media literacy education and providing better access to digital tools for advanced and meaningful social media interaction.

Theoretical Framework
Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory, developed by Everett Rogers (1962, revised 2003), describes how new ideas, technologies, or practices spread within a society over time. The theory identifies five stages of the diffusion process: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation, and categorizes adopters into innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards (Rogers, 2003). The spread of innovations depends on communication channels, social systems, and the perceived benefits of the innovation.

This theory is highly applicable to communication and sustainable social development

in the Middle Belt region. For instance, the adoption of media literacy programs, digital communication tools, agricultural innovations, or peacebuilding campaigns relies heavily on effective communication networks within the community. If communication is inclusive, participatory, and culturally sensitive, residents are more likely to adopt new ideas that enhance their livelihoods and promote development. However, when communication is weak or inaccessible, innovations may not reach marginalized groups, thereby slowing social progress (Servaes, 2013; Mefalopulos, 2008).

In relation to media literacy, the Diffusion of Innovations Theory suggests that individuals who are more media-literate often act as "early adopters" of new technologies and social ideas. They interpret, evaluate, and disseminate information to others, serving as change agents in their communities. Thus, enhancing media literacy among Middle Belt residents can accelerate the diffusion of development-related innovations—such as civic education, gender empowerment programs, or environmental sustainability practices—leading to long-term social transformation.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), focuses on the audience's active role in selecting and using media to satisfy specific needs. Unlike earlier theories that viewed audiences as passive recipients of media influence, UGT emphasizes that individuals are goal-oriented and consciously choose media content that fulfills their psychological, social, and informational needs. These needs include information-seeking, entertainment, personal identity formation, integration, and social interaction (McQuail, 2010).

In the context of the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, this theory is highly relevant in understanding how residents use various media platforms—radio, television, newspapers, and especially social media— to meet their social and developmental needs. People in the region often depend on community radio stations and online networks to obtain information on peacebuilding, agriculture, education, and health initiatives. Such media usage patterns influence how effectively development information is received and applied to daily life (Asemah, 2020). Moreover, the theory aligns closely with media literacy, as it assumes that audiences make conscious and evaluative choices in their media consumption. A media-literate population can therefore identify credible sources, avoid misinformation, and use media content constructively to promote social cohesion and development.

The Uses and Gratifications perspective also highlights the diversity of media needs among different social groups within the Middle Belt. For instance, youths may use social media platforms for self-expression and political participation, while adults may focus on information related to economic empowerment or health. Understanding these patterns helps policymakers and development communicators design targeted communication programs that address specific audience needs and contribute to sustainable social development. Thus, UGT provides a valuable framework for analyzing how communication and media literacy enable residents to use media purposefully for self-improvement and community advancement.

Method of Research
Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for investigating the relationship between communication, media literacy, and sustainable social development among residents of Nigeria's Middle Belt region. The descriptive design enables the researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data from a large population to describe existing conditions, opinions, and patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The choice of this design stems from its strength in allowing data to be gathered directly from respondents to examine their experiences, perceptions, and levels of media literacy as they relate to social development.

Population of the Study

The population of this study at 18,963,717 comprises residents of all 6 states in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, The states are Benue, Kogi, Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger, and Kwara States. These states are characterized by cultural diversity and a mix of urban and rural populations, which makes them suitable for examining how communication and media literacy influence social development outcomes. The study population includes adults aged 18 years and above who are exposed to traditional and digital media within the region. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2024), the combined population of these six states is approximately 18 million people. From this population, a representative sample was drawn for data collection.

Here are the populations (from the 2006 official census) of the states:

State	Population
Benue	4,253,641
Kogi	3,314,043
Plateau	3,206,531
Nasarawa	1,869,377

Niger   3,954,772
Kwara   2,365,353
Total = 4,253,641 + 3,314,043 + 3,206,531 +
    1,869,377 + 3,954,772 + 2,365,353 = 18,963,717

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size for this study was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations:

N/1 + N(e)^2}

where N is the population, and e is the level of precision (0.05). Based on this, a sample size of approximately 400 respondents was selected.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, three states was purposively selected from the Middle Belt based on population size and media activity as Benue, Kogi, and Plateau. In the second stage, two local government areas (LGAs) was randomly selected from each chosen state. Finally, systematic random was used to select respondents from communities and households within each LGA. This approach ensures equitable representation and minimizes sampling bias (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

Research Instruments

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire divided into four sections: Demographic information of respondents; level of media access and exposure; assessment of media literacy skills (information evaluation, critical thinking, and responsible media use); perceptions of the role of communication and media in sustainable social development.

The questionnaire went through content and face validity by three experts in mass communication and development studies. Reliability was tested on 32 persons using the percentage method, showing a reliability threshold of 0.80 considered acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The questionnaire were distributed proportionately based on population size of states as below:

Benue   4,253,641   ÷ 18,963,717 × 400 = 89.8 = 90
Kogi   3,314,043   ÷ 18,963,717 × 400 = 69.9 = 70
Plateau 3,206,531 ÷ 18,963,717) × 400 = 67.7 = 68
Nasarawa 1,869,377 ÷ 18,963,717 × 400 = 39.4 = 39
Niger   3,954,772   ÷ 18,963,717 × 400 = 83.4 = 83
Kwara   2,365,353   ÷ 18,963,717 × 400= 49.9 = 50

Method of Data Collection

Data collection was carried out by trained research assistants across the selected states. The questionnaires were administered physically to ensure broad coverage and participation. Prior to full-scale data collection, a pilot study involving 40 representing 10% of respondents was conducted to identify ambiguities and improve the instrument's clarity.

Ethical considerations such as informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation was strictly observed throughout the research process by informing the respondents that the answers were for academic purposes only rather than for taxation.

Method of Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected was analyzed using the descriptive statistics frequencies and percentages, and highest and least scores used to summarize data to test the relationships among communication, media literacy, and sustainable social development.

Pie Chart 1

Respondents' Views on Media Contributions to Development (N = 400)
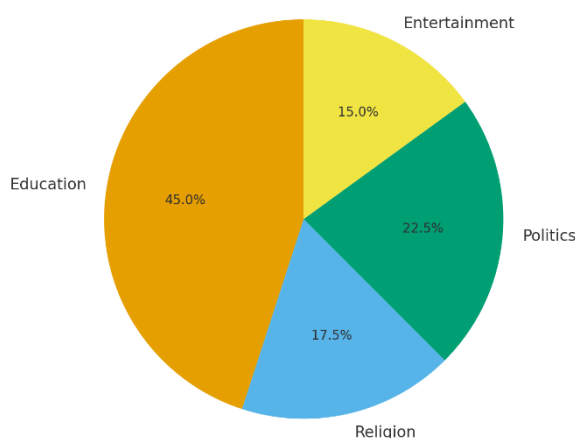
The pie chart 1 shows Education supersedes other categories, reflecting that most respondents view the media's greatest contribution to development as educational – 45% (180 respondents), Politics – 22.5% (90 respondents), Religion – 17.5% (70 respondents), Entertainment – 15% (60 respondents). The dominance of education (45%) as the primary area where media contributes to social development suggests that the media is widely perceived as a powerful tool for promoting knowledge acquisition, awareness, and human capacity building. Several factors could be responsible for this outcome as Nigerian radio and television stations, especially public service broadcasters, have intensified their focus on educational content — including literacy campaigns, health awareness, and entrepreneurship education tailored to rural and semi-urban audiences in the Middle Belt. Others can be Digital Media and Online Learning Expansion, decline in Political and Religious interest.

Pie Chart 2

Level of Media Literacy for Development among Respondents
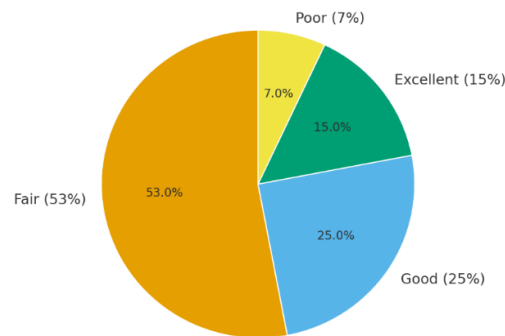
The pie chart 2 illustrates the level of media literacy for development among respondents Excellent had 15%, Good 25%, Fair 53% and Poor had 17%. From the data Fair (53%) represents the majority of respondents, showing that over half have a moderate understanding of media literacy. This suggests that while they possess some awareness and skills, there is still room for improvement in effectively interpreting and utilizing media content for developmental purposes. Good (25%) indicates that about a quarter of respondents have a strong grasp of media literacy concepts and can apply them meaningfully to development communication.

Excellent (15%) shows a smaller proportion of respondents who demonstrate a very high level of media literacy — these individuals are likely proficient in analyzing, evaluating, and creating media content critically. Poor (7%) accounts for the least number of respondents, reflecting a small group with limited awareness or ability to use media effectively for development.

Interpretation shows that while media literacy is generally fair among the population, there is a significant gap toward achieving a higher level of proficiency. Educational interventions, media training, and awareness programs may be necessary to move more respondents from the "fair" category to "good" and "excellent" levels, thereby enhancing the developmental impact of media use in the region.

Pie Chart 3

Relationship of Media and Sustainable Development
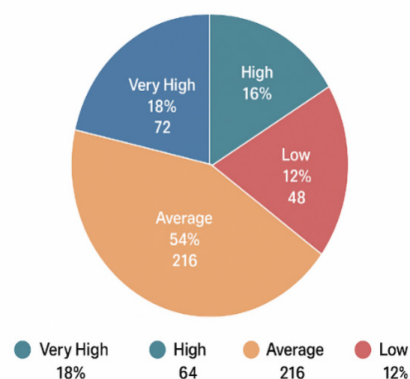
The pie chart 3 above shows that in the relationship between media and sustainable development, out of 400 respondents, Very High had 72 or 18%, High had 64 or 16%, Average had 216 or 54% and low had 48 or 12% scores.

Discussion of Findings

Findings were done based on the objectives of the study earlier raised. On the main contributions of the media to social development. Pie chart 1 shows that education supersedes other categories, reflecting that most respondents view the media's utmost contribution to development was educational at 45% or 180 respondents, Politics 22.5% or 90 respondents, Religion – 17.5% (70 respondents), Entertainment – 15% (60 respondents). The dominance of education (45%) as the primary area where media contributes to social development suggests that the media is widely perceived as a powerful tool for promoting knowledge acquisition, awareness, and human capacity building. There are many factors accountable for this outcome as Nigerian radio and television stations, especially public service broadcasters, have intensified their focus on educational content — including literacy campaigns, health awareness, and entrepreneurship education tailored to rural and semi-urban audiences in the Middle Belt. Others can be Digital Media and Online Learning Expansion, decline in Political and Religious interest. The outcome of this work on this objective is in line with the position of some authors. For instance it is in tandem with the work of Frauhammer & Dreston (2025) that, learning through (social) media becomes possible and effective when media content stimulates cognitive elaboration, helping users to meaningfully process information and thereby acquire knowledge. Similarly, Munir & Ahmed (2025) had found out that (social) media platforms are effective in raising health awareness and increasing health education among health care professionals and paramedics, demonstrating media's role in capacity building in health contexts. Also, this work agrees with Iwegbue & Kediehor (2025) show that youths in Africa use (social) media to acquire skills and build entrepreneurial capacities, illustrating human capacity building through media tools. This is to say that of the many social areas, media make contributions on education of the people more than on any other sector.

Concerning the level of media literacy, answers can be obtained from pie chart 2 which illustrated the level of media literacy for development among respondents of Middle Belt states. Excellent had 15%, Good 25%, Fair 53% and Poor had 17%

From the data, Fair level had (53%) which represented the majority of respondents, showing that over half have a moderate understanding of media literacy. This suggests that while they possess some awareness and skills, there is still room for improvement in effectively interpreting and utilizing media content for developmental purposes. Good (25%) indicates that about a quarter of respondents have a strong grasp of media literacy concepts and can apply them meaningfully to development communication. Excellent (15%) shows a smaller proportion of respondents who demonstrate a very high level of media literacy — these individuals are likely proficient in analyzing, evaluating, and creating media content critically. Poor (7%) accounts for the least number of respondents, reflecting a small group with limited awareness or ability to use media effectively for development.

Findings was that media literacy remain generally at the fair level among the population, there is a significant gap toward achieving a higher level of proficiency. This agree with the position of Shalgan, Moses and Obateru (2025) highlight that low media literacy in Plateau State (a Middle Belt region) worsened the spread of misinformation during elections, making individuals more susceptible to manipulation and undermining democratic integrity. They emphasize the urgent need for targeted media literacy campaigns and policy interventions to address these challenges

On the relationship of the media and sustainable development, it was noted at an average level. This shows that the media has to an extent done its part of work but still left with much to do for the facilitating of development in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. The reflection was that out of 400 respondents about the relationship between media service and sustainable social development in the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria:

Very high = 72 (18%)
High = 64 (16%)
Average = 216 (54%)
Low = 48 (12%)

The relationship was predominantly that of a "moderate" influence of the media on social development. The modal response (average, 216 or 54%) indicated that most people see media playing a useful but limited role in achieving sustainable social development. It means that media contribute information and awareness, yet the impacts are not seen as strong or transformational. The positive-but-not-dominant view was with 72 or 18% and 64 or 16% making 136 or 34% rating the role as high/very high, show a significant minority view that media are important, but outnumbered by those who see only average effect. This suggests that media efforts exist but face barriers that limit reach or effectiveness.

Relatively a small negative perception exist with 48 or 12% who rate "low" to show that a minority

set of respondents experience media as ineffective. It is likely those in poorly served, conflict-affected, or marginalized communities who feel the ineffective influence of the media in social development. There are plausible, evidence-backed reasons that produce the result pattern.

This tells that there is unequal access to broadcast, internet, electricity and affordable devices which reduces how well media can support development. In addition, there is Low media & information literacy that many people cannot fully use media content for civic action, health or livelihood improvements. Moreso, conflict and social fragmentation in the Middle-Belt with recurrent ethno-religious tensions undermine trust, limit media penetration in some areas, and make development messaging less effective. Further, economic and structural constraints such as poverty, weak local institutions, and poor public services reduce information from media and cannot by itself produce sustainable development for listeners/ readers to act on messages. In the same vein, media ownership, bias and agenda limitations, politically and commercially constrain the pursuit of depth or local relevance development reporting that can prompt citizen action. These findings or statements align with Servaes and Malikhao (2010) position that "Communication is necessary for sustainable development but its effectiveness depends on context, participation and supportive structures and as emphasized Collins-Dike, Amadi, Whyte, Justice, & Kawo (2025) as well as Comfort (2019) ethnic/ religious conflict and weak infrastructure reduce media's positive effects on social development. This work also aligned with the position of Akpan and Aniema (2025) that the media plays a dire role in determining public opinion, influencing policy, and nurturing democratic governance.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between media services and sustainable social development in the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria, where communication infrastructures, cultural diversity, and social challenges coexist. The investigation was anchored on the premise that the media play a crucial role in promoting awareness, knowledge acquisition, and behavioral change necessary for social and economic transformation. However, the extent of this role depends on contextual realities such as access to media resources, levels of media and information literacy, and the socio-economic conditions of the population.

Findings from the survey of 400 respondents revealed that the perceived relationship between media services and sustainable social development is predominantly average. Only a combined 34% of respondents rated the relationship as high or very high. These results suggest that, although media platforms in the Middle-Belt contribute to public enlightenment and development communication, their influence remains moderate rather than transformative. This pattern aligns with the views that the media's contribution to sustainable development depends not only on content but also on participatory engagement and enabling institutional frameworks.

Several factors account for this moderate assessment. The most prominent challenge include limited access to reliable broadcast and digital media, weak infrastructure notably electricity and internet connectivity, low media and information literacy, and persistent ethno-religious conflicts that characterize parts of the region. In addition, structural inequalities and poverty restrict the ability of citizens to act upon media messages, thereby constraining the social impact of communication efforts. These realities affirmed that media and information literacy stay indispensable for citizens to transform information into meaningful participation in sustainable development initiatives. The study concluded the media in the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria contribute positively to social development, their potential is underutilized.

Recommendations

It came out with recommendations that:

1. For media services to achieve stronger developmental outcomes, greater investment is required in public communication infrastructure, community radio, and media literacy programmes.
2. Policymakers and practitioners should also emphasize participatory and inclusive communication strategies to strengthen public engagement and trust.
3. There should be pairing of media campaigns with public service institutions as public clinics, markets for information transmission into tangible development outcomes.

References

1. Adebayo, K., & Olayinka, A. (2024). Media literacy and civic empowerment in Nigeria's digital age: Bridging gaps for sustainable development. African Journal of Communication Research, 15(2), 112–130.
2. Adeoye, M. A., & Lawal, O. O. (2022). Digital media

literacy and the utilization of social media among postgraduate students in Kwara State. Library Philosophy and Practice, 2022(1), 1–17.

3. Afolabi, O. E. (2015). Modeling relationship between media literacy competencies and use of new media for civic engagement among youths in new digital media environment (Kwara State, Nigeria). New Media and Mass Communication, 37, 1–10.

4. Akpan, U. U., & Aniema, I. (2025). Media usability and advancement of regional political agenda in West Africa: Appraising knowledge gap among residents of Ghana and Senegal. Critical Journal of Social Sciences (CJSS), 1(1), 62–76.

5. Akpan U. (2021). Social Media and Citizens' Participation in E. Governance Of Edo and Imo states of Nigeria. Mkar Journal of Mass Communication 6(2) pp 105 -124, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362555313_Social_Media_And_Citizens'_Participation_In_E_Governance_of_Edo_and_Imo_States_of_Nigeria

6. Asemah, E. S. (2020). Principles and practice of mass communication. Jos University Press.

7. Buckingham, D. (2019). The media education manifesto. Cambridge: Polity Press.

8. Chidozie, O. E. (2023). Building resilience against disinformation: Media literacy and digital hygiene interventions for Nigerian youth. Journal of Media, Journalism & Mass Communication, 12(1), 55–70.

9. Collins-Dike, J., Amadi, R. N., Whyte, D. H., Justice, N. C., & Kawo, H. M. (2025). Use of digital media platforms for social change in Nigeria. Konfrontasi: Jurnal Kultural, Ekonomi dan Perubahan Sosial, 12(2), 100–114. https://doi.org/10.33258/konfrontasi2.v12i2.330

10. Comfort, O. O. (2019). Constraints to community and social development projects (CSDP) implementation in rural communities in North-Central Nigeria. International Journal of Contemporary Applied Researches, 6(6).

11. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (6th ed.). USA: Sage Publications.

12. Ekeanyanwu, N. T., & Okoye, I. (2018). The new media and democratic participation in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. Journal of Communication and Media Research, 10(1), 34–46.

13. Etikan, I., & Bala, K. (2017). Sampling and sampling methods. Biometrics & Biostatistics International Journal, 5(6), 215–217. https://doi.org/10.15406/bbij.2017.05.00149

14. Frauhammer, L. T., & Dreston, J. H. (2025). How cognitive elaboration fosters knowledge acquisition on social media — a field experiment. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 30(5), zmaf014. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmaf014

15. Hobbs, R. (2010). Digital and media literacy: Connecting culture and classroom. USA: Corwin Press.

16. Ibrahim, J. (2017). The politics of identity and conflict in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. African Journal of Political Science, 11*(2), 45–62.

17. Iwegbue, I. N., & Kediehor, C. (2025). Utilization of social media in skill acquisition and entrepreneurial development among youths in Africa. Journal of Management and Science, 15(1), 115–122. https://doi.org/10.26524/jms.15.9

18. Jenkins, H., Ito, M., & boyd, d. (2016). Participatory culture in a networked era: A conversation on youth, learning, commerce, and politics. Cambridge: Polity Press.

19. Jolls, T., & Wilson, C. (2023). Media literacy education in a post-truth world: Strategies for critical thinking and civic engagement. London: Routledge.

20. Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973–1974). Uses and gratifications research. The Public Opinion Quarterly, 37(4), 509–523. https://doi.org/10.1086/268109

21. Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2019). The critical media literacy guide: Engaging media and transforming education. Netherlands: Brill Sense. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004404534

22. Kwaja, C. M. A. (2015). Conflict and community resilience in Nigeria's Middle Belt. Abuja: Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD).

23. Leaning, M. (2024). Digital literacy and media education: Rethinking engagement in the age of AI. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

24. Livingstone, S. (2008). Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies. Communication Review, 7(1), 3–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714420490280152

25. McQuail, D. (2010). McQuail's mass communication theory (6th ed.). USA: Sage Publications.

26. Mefalopulos, P. (2008). Development communication sourcebook: Broadening the boundaries of communication. Washington: World Bank Publications.

27. Melkote, S. R., & Steeves, H. L. (2015). Communication for development: Theory and practice for empowerment and social justice (3rd ed.). USA: Sage Publications.

28. Munir, M. M., & Ahmed, N. (2025). Using social media platforms to raise health awareness and increase health education in Pakistan: Structural equation modeling analysis and questionnaire study. JMIR Human Factors, 12, e65745. https://doi.org/10.2196/65745

29. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2024). Nigeria's population distribution by states and gender: 2024 report. Abuja: NBS Publications.

30. Nasir, M. J., & Ciroma, A. (2022). Impact of media and information literacy in Nigerian colleges of education curriculum: A case of detecting fake news. American Journal of Communication, 9*(4), 88–101.

31. Ndimele, O. (2019). Media literacy and the social responsibility of the press in Nigeria. Portharcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.

32. Nkenchor, I. C., & Maciver, J. (2024). Media literacy skills for promoting sustainable development in Rivers State. British Journal of Mass Communication and Media Research, 4(4), 13–26.

33. Nwoji, Q., Gada, B. A., & Alqahtani, Z. M. (2025). New media, learning outcomes, and social development of children: A case study of digital technology use in Nigeria. Journal of Educational Technology and Learning Creativity, 3(1), 185–193. https://doi.org/10.37251/jetlc.v3i1.1854

34. Ojebode, A., & Akinwale, A. (2020). Audience participation and media literacy in development communication. African Journal of Development Studies, 10(3), 67–82.

35. Okafor, G., & Nwosu, I. (2020). Media literacy and conflict management in plural societies: Implications for sustainable development in Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Communication, 17(2), 112–130.

36. Okok, E. O., Oroka, O. V., Ladan, B., Olori, C. N., & Iniobong, G. (2025). Exploring the efficacy of media literacy on online political participation of learners in adult and vocational education in Nigeria. Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik, 38(1), 58–71.

37. Okoro, N., & Agbo, B. (2019). Communication, governance, and national development in Nigeria. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press.

38. Porter, M. E., & Heppelmann, J. E. (2018). Why every organization needs an augmented reality strategy. Harvard Business Review, 96(6), 46-57.

39. Rogers, E. M. (2003). Diffusion of innovations (5th ed.). NY: Free Press.

40. Sanusi, B. O., Ifedolapo, S., & Ayinde, L. O. (2025). The role of social media in development communication: Opportunities and challenges. Lead City International Journal of Library, Information & Communication Sciences, 2(1), 43–58.

41. Servaes, J. (2013). Sustainable development and communication: A critical overview. London Palgrave Macmillan.

42. Servaes, J., & Malikhao, P. (2010). Communication for sustainable development: Concepts and strategies. Rome: FAO Roundtable.

43. Shalgan, L., Moses, L., & Obateru, T. (2025). Media literacy, misinformation and disinformation on social media during the 2023 elections in Plateau State. International Journal of Social Science Research and Anthropology, 7(6). https://doi.org/10.70382/tijssra.v07i6.028

44. Tandoc, E. C., & Maitra, J. (2022). Assessing media literacy in the digital age: Challenges and opportunities. Journal of Media Literacy Education, 14(3), 25–40. https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2022-14-3-3

45. Tavakol, M., & Dennick, R. (2011). Making sense of Cronbach's alpha. International Journal of Medical Education, 2(1), 53–55. https://doi.org/10.5116/ijme.4dfb.8dfd

46. United Nations Development Programme. (2021). UNDP strategic plan, 2022–2025: Putting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the centre of our efforts. UNDP. https://www.undp.org/publications/undp-strategic-plan-2022-2025

47. Yamane, T. (1967). Statistics: An introductory analysis (2nd ed.). New York: Harper & Row.

Eleyon Publishers