Social Media Platform: Osun State Government Communication on X Handle

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Abstract

Often considered an informal means of communication and a playful medium solely occupied by the young and adventurous, social media has since made unprecedented and shocking inroads into the narratives of journalism and mainstream communication channels. Today, it is almost unthinkable to have a government without a running social media platform with which it is expected to engage the citizenry as against the traditional newspaper or radio stations owned by the government and used in pro-government information dissemination. This paper is predicated upon a need to examine the prevalence and effectiveness of social media as a government communication tool. Relying on the Agenda-Setting Theory and applying a blend of quantitative and qualitative analysis, it subjects ten randomly sampled X posts from the Osun state X handle between June to November, 2023 to content analysis. It found among other things that the X handle of Osun state government has a wide reach but a disproportionately low engagement statistics. More often than not, the critics of the government engage the posts more and the criticisms are often targeted at the handler and the personality of the governor. Yet, the paper concludes that the posts are effective at engendering communication between government and the people although the agenda is often defeated as the cordiality expected by the government is often thwarted while the issues often get thread jacked, criticized and thrashed. The paper suggests a more effective engagement in the form of responses to replies as well as a clearer feedback mechanism from the handle.

Keywords: Social media, X, Government-citizen communication, Journalism, Feedback

Introduction
In recent years, the advent of social media has transformed the landscape of journalism and communication, ushering in new possibilities for interaction between governments and citizens especially by charting an unprecedented course for citizens' direct access to government. Traditionally, government communication either internally in the government offices or between the government and the people has always been via "official" channels including intra-parastatal memos, inter-ministerial gazettes, notices and bulletins, radio and television broadcasts and such other conventional channels. However, the turn of the present century which witnessed the rise of the Internet, its growth into a communication tool and its explosion into a means of interaction which today rivals the conventional person-to-person interaction patterns has raised new patterns, practices and therefore new issues in government-citizen communication.

More succinctly put and to avoid the snare of overstatement and preposterous claims, the use of Internet and modern ICT for government communication can be safely claimed to have grown pari-pasu with the adoption of same by the corporate world, hence the currency of terms like 'corporate governance' 'ICT-driven governance' and 'paperless government'. Around the last

five decades, governments, even in Africa, began to adopt the use of technology in communication via the agency of electronic mail popularly called e-mail, mailing lists and other web-based technologies. Yet, a lot of internal structures in the form of proscriptions and prescriptions existed to guide the use of these technologies in order to ensure that officials in charge of government communication maintained the highest level of confidentiality, decorum and 'officiousness' by avoiding information leaks or other forms of lassez-faire release (or use) of information. By and large, communication between governments and citizens was still rigid, one way and largely government-controlled. It was always the prerogative of government officials to determine which email gets read, responded to or even opened. Websites bearing government bulletins were always mono-directional with hardly any effective form of feedback from the citizenry. Narratives pushed by journalists in the employ of government radio and TV stations as well as newspapers were always forever tilted in favour of the government and political party in power with little or no allowance for dissenting voices or alternative opinions.

All the while, the rise of social media had picked up pace and by the year 2010, it is estimated that there were more social media accounts than the 6 billion population of the world. According to an estimate by the Nigerian Communications Council, the number of phone users with internet access in Nigeria has surpassed the entire population of China. In fact, there is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is currently one of the biggest mobile phone markets in the world and it goes without saying as well that this large number of phone users access the internet via their cell phones and smartphones. A report by the Mobile Data Association shows that 1.7 billion text-messages were exchanged in Britain in May 2013- a cumulative annual total of some 8 billion messages. (Bellis, 2002; Statista, 2024) These citizens, nay citizens, had become 'unignorable' in their various virtual communities where they have become veritable forces in the determination of citizen's responses to government policies, the direction of voters in elections as well as a rallying point for opposition, protests and rallies. In fact, a number of them culminated in physical non-violent and sometimes violent public gatherings (Oyadiji, 2020; Skinner, 2011; CNN, 2011)

Governments, the world over, and by all means, African governments inclusive were forced to come down from their high horse and engage the citizens where they habit and thrive: the social media. By the turn of the present decade, governments' social media handles began to spring up across the world, Africa and Nigeria, and in the last seven or eight years, it would be grossly out of place to have a government without a Facebook presence, a Twitter (now X) handle or a WhatsApp number. The social media age has taken government communication by storm and thus blowing away the shrouds of secrecy and air of officiousness that has hitherto characterized government-citizen communication. With this development, the communication patterns of social media including enforced 'hyper transparency' and lack of control over the trajectory of discussion threads became commonplace in government-citizen communication. In fact, one of the most notable features of social media communication, hyper-personality where interact and get too informal and unrestricted in interactions with supposed superiors, became a repeated feature of government-citizen communication.

This paper therefore explores the dynamic relationship between the Osun State Government and its citizens through the lens of the government's X handle. By examining the role of social media as a tool for government-citizen communication, this paper seeks to shed light on the implications, challenges, and potential benefits associated with the use of platforms like X in the

context of public administration within the larger context of emerging trends in journalism. The Osun State Government's approach to X communication vis a vis the citizens' response to it serves as a compelling case study, offering insights into the evolving nature of journalism vis-à-vis governance in the digital age.

Social Media in Government Communication

Scholars such as Castells (2013) argue that social media platforms play a pivotal role in transforming traditional models of government communication. They serve as direct channels for information dissemination, enabling governments to reach wider audiences in real-time. Further, Chadwick (2017) emphasizes the interactive nature of government-citizen communication on platforms like Twitter. The two-way communication facilitated by social media allows citizens to actively participate in discussions, voice concerns, and contribute to the decision-making process. These literatures lend significant insights to the present study which oeuvre is around the viability of X as a means of communication between government and citizen. Most importantly, they single out the uniqueness of this interaction patterns in that it takes the control of information away from the government alone while placing this control midway between the people and their government. As such, citizens can respond, talk back or even clap back at the government as has never experienced before except through some official or violent means. While several works have attempted to identify such interactions and describe them, little attention has been paid to their efficiency especially from the angle of citizens' responses and patterns of such responses in both content and statistics.

The concept of transparency in government communication is explored by Roberts and Taylor (2019), who highlight the role of social media in enhancing transparency and fostering trust between governments and citizens. The instantaneous nature of platforms like Twitter provides opportunities for governments to share timely information.

Various challenges in utilizing social media for government communication are identified by Khan et al. (2020), including the risk of misinformation, maintaining a balance between openness and security, and addressing issues related to digital literacy among citizens. Examining best practices, Van Dijck and Poell (2013) argue for the importance of strategic content creation and active engagement to optimize the impact of government communication on social media. These insights offer valuable guidance for governments seeking to enhance their online presence.

Relevant Studies in African Context

Within the African context, studies by Alemneh and Rorissa (2019) highlight the unique challenges and opportunities governments face in using social media for communication. These insights contribute to understanding the specific dynamics that may influence the Osun State Government's approach. In Igbanshangev et al (2023) attention is paid to the advancement of democracy in Nigeria through social media as a tool. Utilising Agenda Setting and Technological Determinism theories, the research analysed 100 responses of social media users drawn from support bases of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressives Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP) and other parties. They find among other things that social media is a free for all and the fracas ad accusation generated often have positive impacts on governance as the politician and government officials by extension often change policy directions towards assuaging the

grievances of the social media users. The major insight from this study is its attention to users and their pattern of response. The present study aims to delve further into the pattern of responses to a dedicated government handle with a view to see what level of engagements occur as well as how these redound on the channel's efficacy as a communication and engagement tool.

Agenda-Setting Theoretical Perspective to Government-Citizen Communication

Agenda-setting theory, as proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that media play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions by influencing the salience of issues. The theory suggests that the media do not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about.

In the context of government communication through social media, agenda-setting theory takes on a new dimension. The Osun State Government's X handle, as a form of media, influences the public agenda by determining which issues are highlighted and given prominence in the eyes of the citizens. The government's choice of topics and the emphasis placed on specific issues through tweets contribute to the agenda-setting process. By consistently addressing particular themes or concerns, the government shapes the public's perception and understanding of key matters. Through the strategic use of social media, governments can amplify their priorities and initiatives. The Osun State Government's X communications can be analyzed to discern patterns in agenda-setting, shedding light on whether certain issues receive more attention and how this impacts public discourse.

Interaction with Citizen Agendas
Agenda-setting theory also invites examination of the reciprocal relationship between government-set agendas and citizen priorities. Analyzing the responses, comments, and interactions on the government's X handle provides insights into how citizens perceive and respond to the issues presented by the government.

Challenges to Agenda-Setting in Social Media
Challenges such as information overload, algorithmic biases, and the potential for competing narratives can affect the government's agenda-setting efforts on social media. Understanding these challenges is crucial for assessing the efficacy of the Osun State Government's X handle in shaping public perceptions. The application of agenda-setting theory to government communication through social media thus underscores the intricate dynamics that influence the relationship between the government and its citizens. This theoretical framework provides a lens through which to evaluate the role and impact of the Osun State Government's X handle in setting and influencing public agendas.

Research Methodology
This study employs a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively explore the utilization of the Osun State Government's X handle for government-citizen communication. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods ensures a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Twitter Analytics: Reposts, likes, and replies were analysed to gauge the level of engagement. Content Analysis of Tweets from the Osun State Government's X handle was systematically analysed to identify recurring themes and patterns. Attention was placed on the level of reception to the perceived agenda of the handler/government as well as the depth of the citizenry's comments about the posts in each thread.

A purposive sampling technique was done to select ten (10) posts on the timeline of the Osun State Government X between June to October, 2023. Key tweets related to significant events or initiatives were singled out for in-depth analysis. Descriptive Statistics was used to quantitatively summarize the data. Correlation Analysis was also used to test the relationships between engagement metrics and communication effectiveness. Thematic Coding was used to categorise the social media contents based the focused theme. Narrative Analysis was measure alongside the citizens' perspectives on government communication.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The Osun State X handle: Background Analytics
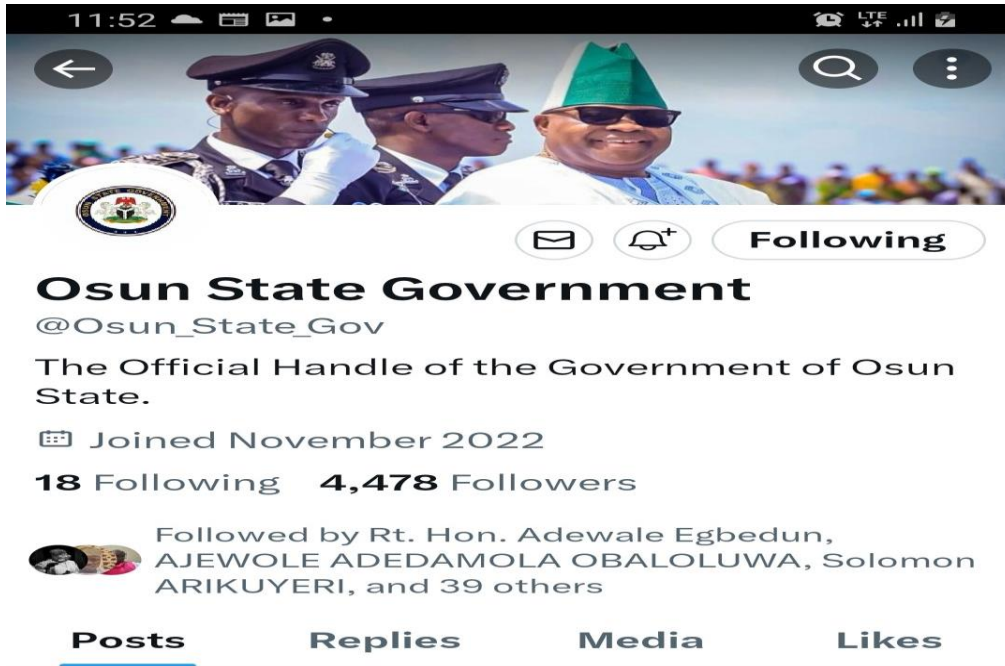
Source: Osun State X handle (2024).

According to X's analytics, the Osun state X handle was formally opened in November, 2022 which, from available and accessible information, coincides with the inauguration of the incumbent governor, Ademola Adeleke. Hence, it can be taken as a relatively new handle although the state had existed since 1991. While the former government had a Twitter handle, it is obvious to the citizens and followers that the former handle which was expected to have migrated to the new government's handle was summarily discontinued. This development could be attributed to the fact that the new government I from a different political party: a fact which has a lot of bearing on the attitudes of the 'new' followers of the handle. As at the point of data collection, the handle has a relatively paltry following of 4,485. Though an unverified handle, a meticulous scouring of X revealed no other handle attached to the government while the presence of verified followers including the state's House of Assembly speaker, the government's spokesperson and other notable handles from Osun state was used as tool to verify the authenticity of the handle.

The frequency and nature of posts from the Osun State Government Twitter handle

For a handle that began in less than twelve months, the Osun state X handle demonstrates a sizeable posts size. Analytics on the micro blogging site reveals that over 800 posts have been released from the handle with a number of reposts available. In summary, the Osun state X handle's performance within the research milieu can be statistically presented as follows.

Month	Number of Posts	Nature of Post	%	Number of Reposts
June	49	Politics Education Infrastructure	50 30 20	10
July	41	Inter-communal clash Kingship tussle Politics	60 30 10	33
August	50	Politics Infrastructure Entertainment	40 40 20	21
September	71	Politics Education Women and Girls	40 39 21	19
October	39	Infrastructure Judiciary Parliament	52 33 15	29
November	21	Judicial matters Palliatives	87 23	11
TOTAL	271			123

State Government's X Handle's Post Performance Between June and November, 2023

Given its status as a government handle with a highly predictable large followership composed majorly of citizens of the state, party members of the incumbent government, members of the opposition within and beyond the state as well as any politically-conscious person who desires to follow-up with events within the state, the handle seems to have performed optimally within the period under consideration. In fact, a closer scrutiny and breakdown reveals that hardly does a week pass without a post from the handle while almost every notable activity of government within the period got a mention on the micro-blogging site. Notable issues in the posts include but are not limited to political matters like the appointment of commissioners and other government functionaries, official visits and functions, educational issues like school openings and commissioning of facilities, distribution of materials and sundry issues like empowerment and so on. Other posts contain directives like the imposition of curfews on warring communities, transport schemes directives and other important issues which citizens would otherwise need to access via the traditional means like radio and television. Suffice to claim that the X posts were often timely and sometimes emanate directly from the scenes of the events and the offices of government long before they reach the conventional media.

In many instances, the conventional media have been known to quote the Osun state government X handle as the source of its news and announcements. This lends credence to this paper's claim of timeliness and reliability of the X handle as a source of information for the citizenry. Further, blogs and other X handles (often private) have been observed to follow and amplify the posts of the Osun state government's X handle via reposts, tags and copying on other timelines. This therefore boosts the visibility and statistical performance of the handle and thus contributing effectively to its claim to being a veritable source (or tool) of information for the citizenry.

Assessing the Level of Citizen Engagement and Interaction with Osun State Government's X Posts

Across the ten posts in the sample collected, there are varying statistics regarding the level of engagement of the posts emanating from the Osun state government X handle. The recurring theme in this regard is how the nature of posts seems to dictate the level of engagement. Interestingly, posts perceived as deceitful or ridiculous were observed to draw more engagement: an observation which drives our conclusion that the critics of the government are more active in engagement of the handle than the regular citizens or the supporters of the government. The following is a statistical summary of the engagement levels in the data sample.

s/n	Post	Views	Reposts	Quotes	Likes	Comments	Bookmarks
1	Judiciary Matter	11,900	37	7	73	13	1
2	Politics/Appointment	24,000	20	18	48	11	1
3	Politics/Culture	5,815	19	7	64	5	0
4	Politics/Cabinet	16,600	28	6	135	9	0
5	Power/Social	7,944	13	0	58	4	0
6	Welfare/Pension	1,762	7	0	33	0	0
7	Politics/Appointment	65,900	88	75	258	42	7
8	Empowerment	12,500	21	20	49	5	1
9	Social	10,000	44	12	32	6	0
10	Education	5,100	10	11	9	3	0

A Summary of Osun State X Handle's Engagement Statistics

As can be observed from the table, there is no paucity of viewership of the posts sampled. Rather, the number of views consistently surpasses even the followership. However, there is always a dip when compared with engagement, especially comments. The reason attributable to this is that certain posts are considered normal and worth any comments as the trajectory of the commenters' behaviour portrays that positive views are hardly expressed beyond likes and emojis while negative comments are expressed in verbal behaviour including insults, name-calling and flaming directed at either the government or the handler of the X handle.

Observably also, posts serving to give major announcements like appointment of government officials, sacking of officials as well as information of cabinet meeting gathered the most views and comments. This clearly attributable to the breaking news nature of these announcements given the number of followers, who must have waited long periods to confirm their expectations about such appointments, sacks and other such issues. Citizens are also quick to express their preferences, disappointments and approvals as the handle is close to their only opportunity to air such views both to members of the public and to the government. In our observation, the citizens utilize the X timeline as both their own platform to address fellow citizens and interact on government policies while at the same time interfacing with the government. Government can therefore be presumed to use the timeline of its X as a means of feeling the pulse of the public on its policies and activities.

Examining the Perceived Transparency in the Communication Efforts Facilitated by the Osun State Government on X

Relying on an emic analysis perspective, the interactions of the citizens with the Osun state government on X can be explicated as transparent. While the citizens often take the information posted as transparent an engaging the government on the strength of the information given, their reservations on the quality of the activities being reported are often critical. Yet, this does not invalidate the observation that citizens consider the posts as true, transparent and a true reflection of the activities of the government. As stated, whether the citizens think the policies are in good standing with their expectations is another issue entirely. Observably, there are comments criticizing the policies and activities of government, attacking the personality of the governor vis-à-vis the X handler. There is also a prevalence of critical statement on the handler's style of posting. Yet, there is hardly any significant reference to lack of transparency of the posts or even the government per se.

Often, the attitudes of the commenters display a semblance of expectation of responses but which are never forthcoming. In a way, the X handle of Osun state government seems to have created a covert norm that information is to be given while responses are not to be made to comments. This would be understandable given the high possibility that the handler is not the governor or any high-ranking government functionary with sufficient authority or information to give responses to the kinds of queries expressed by the citizens on the handle. This scenario slightly takes away from the claim of transparency of information yet in a way that can be explained away as information/authorisation deficit.

Attitude of the citizens to the government's messages on X

After scrutiny taking account of both statistical figures and qualitative scrutiny, the data reveals a prevalence of negative attitude, critical evaluation and covert opposition sentiments over the instances of solidarity, praise and support for the government. All these are expressed via the agency of comments on the posts of the Osun state X handle. Predominantly, the majority of citizens are wont to describe the governor as an infantile party-loving misfit while a number of them consider the handler and b extension the government as incompetent in their activities. The plate above clearly demonstrates how the critical voices drown out the government's supporters as they express varying shades of opinions expressing their dissatisfaction with the government and its handlers.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the use of X as a tool of government-citizen communication by the Osun State government of Nigeria. It found that X is a quite popular and effective tool for enhancing interface between the government and the people on one hand and the people and other citizens on another hand. It found also that criticism of government is a common feature of the Osun state government X followers' comments while the government seems to have accepted its role to gather the thoughts and use it in subsequent policies as there is hardly any form of riposte, counter-accusation or justification given by the handler when citizens criticize it. We however recommend that responses acknowledging the praises, criticisms and comments of the citizens can serve to douse tension, create a sense of belonging, draw out the life of interaction and serve as a feedback mechanism to the people and thereby encouraging them to further interact with the handle in the future.

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