



## **Social Media for Sustainable Development: Challenging Participatory Development Practices to Re-learn and Realign Stakeholder Practices in Tamale Metropolis, Ghana**

*Ismail Mohammed*

Department of Integrated Development Studies  
University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

*Jonas Kwabla Fiadzawoo*

Department of Language and Information Studies  
University for Development Studies, Tamale, Ghana

[Doi:10.19044/esj.2023.v19n14p35](https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2023.v19n14p35)

---

Submitted: 26 February 2023

Accepted: 29 April 2023

Published: 31 May 2023

Copyright 2023 Author(s)

Under Creative Commons BY-NC-ND

4.0 OPEN ACCESS

*Cite As:*

Mohammed I. & Fiadzawoo J.K. (2023). *Social Media for Sustainable Development: Challenging Participatory Development Practices to Re-learn and Realign Stakeholder Practices in Tamale Metropolis, Ghana*. European Scientific Journal, ESJ, 19 (14), 35.

<https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2023.v19n14p35>

---

### **Abstract**

This study aims at finding out how social media has been explored for the enhancement of sustainable development in the Tamale Metropolis. It was based on Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). It adopted a mixed approach and relied on questionnaires and interview guides for collecting data. Local community leaders (N. 25) were interviewed. A hundred questionnaires were also administered with Google Forms. The interview data were analysed qualitatively and the results were presented based on content and themes. The data obtained through the questionnaires were processed and presented descriptively in percentages. Findings showed that social media was highly used among the participants (92%). Those within higher education were 44% while those without higher education numbered 57%. It was found that there was males dominance in local community development support groups. Sixty-one percent of the participants used social media to support sustainable community development. They employed the media to foster citizens' participation and contribution to sustainable development. The study, therefore, proposed to community groups to have their social media groups registered with the authorities to promote their

visibility. The study also called for proper evaluation of citizens' media activities in order to support their contribution to sustainable development, which it argued will strengthen efforts to achieve SDGs 11 and 17.

---

**Keywords:** Social media; citizens participation, sustainable development, SDGs

## Introduction

The advent of the internet, web technologies, and social media in the late 90s and early 20s has significantly influenced efforts towards achieving needed contributions to sustainable development across the globe. This development has undoubtedly caused a revolution in the character, actions, and behaviour of citizens of every society across the world. For some, this development calls for worry since the power carried by web technologies and social media particularly are more pervasive to affect a downward performance syndrome for most people adopting them (Shen, 2008; Yunus, Nordin, Salehi, Amin Embi & Salehi, 2013). As again mentioned by Anderson and Rainie (2018), citing Rob Reich, professor of political science at Stanford University, digital life now threatens our psychological, economic, and political well-being. However, this argument is debatable judging from the critical roles of citizens in sustainable development through the use of social media. Social media is currently among the eleven drivers of corporate social responsibility (CSR) for governments, industry, NGOs, shareholders, boards of directors, managers, employees, customers, competitors, and stakeholders (Shayan, 2022). Thus, social media is harnessed to communicate CSR (Kvasničková Stanislavská et al., 2020).

Citizens are major stakeholders in any sustainable community development practices. To achieve a desired and sustainable development, there must be verifiable citizens' participation and contribution throughout all the phases of development initiatives: planning, implementing as well as evaluating any development intervention (Michels and De Graaf, 2010). Korti and Sassi Boudemagh (2018), argued that citizenship is more than just the act of voting to choose leaders as a right, but also encompasses the act of participating and contributing to societal collective decision-making processes concerning issues that ultimately affect individuals in society. Shah et al. (2005) and Huttunen et al. (2022) underscore the significance of citizen participation in community development as a component of sustainable community life, which is a behavioral characteristic associated with civic integration and involvement. They also pointed out that participation and community engagement in the development process plays a critical role in sustaining communities and democratic societies. It helps towards channeling collective action towards community building and this goes beyond the overall

development of the population (Shah et al., 2005). Therefore, much effort is needed in the aspects of citizens' participation in the development of local communities which aims at encouraging contributions from local citizens to ensure sustainability.

In these modern times, it is believed that to achieve sustainable development, social media technologies could be a tool for all stakeholders for the betterment of their societies. This means that social media can be used to gain better skills, and professional management and contribute to possibilities and development within a society (Bagarukayo, 2018; Marcolin et al. 2022). However, social media can also be employed for bad practices such as cyberbullying, spreading rumours, sharing media aimed at destroying reputations, and spreading profane content (Digital Marketing, 2021).

Nevertheless, there is a very strong assertion that social media has opened the gateways for information access and dissemination. It allows users to easily create, disseminate, or comment on existing information, or criticize the actions of others such as governments (Quansah et al., 2016; Yunus et al., 2013 & Fiadzawoo et al., 2018). This means that social media equips users with the power to have critical stakes in what goes around them, and can, therefore, influence the development desired. It is equally important to note that, building citizens' communication accessibility plays a major role in their information possession, especially with online information acquisition, and participation in developmental projects with stakeholders (McLeod et al., 2001). It is equally important to indicate that building citizens' social media accessibility plays a major role in their information acquisition especially with online information acquisition, engagement, and participation with other development stakeholders (McLeod et al., 2001). It is, therefore, essential to formulate innovative ways of engaging citizens online to enhance sustainable development initiatives and interventions by Governments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Considering the importance of community participation and the fact that it is not a new phenomenon but dates back to Plato's own concepts of freedom of association and fair representation (Milakovich, 2010), a lot of work and research has been done, paving ways for innovative involvement in that field over the years (Seltzer & Mahmoudi, 2013). Community participation has transformed traditional citizen assemblies into a more advanced technological form such as the use of the Internet and social media. This transformation has rewritten the architecture of community-based citizen engagements for soliciting contributions and support. This means that social media equips users with the power to have critical stakes in what goes around them and can, therefore, have an influence on things that affects them. Building citizens' communication accessibility plays a significant role in their information possession, especially, with online information acquisition, and

their engagement and participation with other development stakeholders (McLeod et al., 2001). Adopting technologies capable of enhancing participation is important because, “in contrast with traditional media, the Internet provides a source of political information and a sphere for political expression” (Shah et al., 2005, p. 532). Information availability further enhances citizens' participation in their communal activities in both political and developmental initiatives.

It should be emphasised that participatory development has been promulgated as the best form of development (De Groot, 1988; Moharran, 1988) due to its importance to development sustainability (Mason, 1999). Over the past years, there has been much attention to both research and practice by many scholars focusing much on how to ensure the needed local actor participation. Many types of research have been conducted by scholars (Arnstein, 2015; Moore & Elliott, 2016; Schuler & Namioka, 1993; Simonsen & Robertson, 2012; Wilksinson & De Angeli, 2014), leading to many reforms globally in many policy directives. These studies have proposed several reforms and approaches that are capable of enhancing citizens' participation to ensure sustainable development. However, there is still a primary fundamental problem to the whole participatory system that has still not been resolved. According to Arnstein's participation ladder, the problem is the inability of both citizens and stakeholders to reach the middle ground of partnerships, which for Arnstein, is the highest form of participatory process (Arnstein, 1969).

Stein and Harper (2003) admit that development policies that were previously centred on a top-down approach have evolved into more participatory approaches that are meant to enhance community involvement in development initiatives and policy-making. To them, this situation is due to the criticisms the top-down approach to development has received based on its incapacities to ensure the needed sustainable development in developing communities. Unfortunately, the abilities of social media and web technologies have not been adequately leveraged or harnessed to involve citizens in sustainable development processes (Bailey & Lumpkin, 2021). It is on this background that this study intends to explore social media avenues to enhance community participation in sustainable development in the Tamale Metropolis. This study, therefore, intends to explore the use of the social media as a significant tool for enhancing community participation in sustainable development in the Tamale Metropolis. It is intended to:

1. assess the rate of social media usage by community groups in the Tamale Metropolis
2. identify how online groups use social media to contribute to sustainable development in Tamale.

3. explore ways by which social media can enhance citizen support for sustainable development in the Tamale Metropolis.

### **Theoretical anchorage of the study**

The study has been executed taking into consideration the Uses and Gratification Theory of Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973-1974). This theory explains that due to patronage of social media, social factors that may generate media-related needs are discussed which may lead to tension and conflict reduction, information leading to the solution of problems, need satisfaction, reinforcement of values, and provision of information necessary to maintain group membership (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). This theory also states that as an audience, you know exactly what needs you are trying to satisfy, what type of media will do it, and that each selection is goal-oriented. Therefore, the goal can be for entertainment, socialisation, or about issues geared towards the development and attainment of SDG's. The choice of this theory requires a brief discussion of the advent of the internet and social media use in the context of this study, which is Ghana.

### ***Internet penetration and social media usage in Ghana***

As the Internet becomes more important for the success of many daily activities, information acquisition, and sharing, news updates, etc., its use gains more patronage by people of all categories. Joseph (2021) stipulated that the internet usage rate across the world from the end of 2020 to 2021 stood approximately at 51.4 percent of the world population. This represents 3.97 billion internet users worldwide. China has the biggest share of the figures, with 854 million users. This is followed by India, the United States, and East Asia. Alternatively, northern Europe records the region with the highest Internet penetration (Joseph, 2021). According to Kemp (2021), about 50 percent of Ghanaians were online as of 2021 and this represents 15.70 million of Ghana's total population of 31.40 million. The rate of user population increased by about 943 thousand, representing an increase of +6.4 percent between 2020 and 2021 (Kemp, 2021). It could be concluded that the increase in the internet user population predominantly influenced the social media user population by about 37 percent between 2020 and 2021. It is also projected that as many as 4.20 billion people globally, representing 53 percent would use various social media by the end of 2023 (Brian, 2021; Chaffey, 2016, 2021). Averagely, the growth of the social media user population has been estimated at 2.34 billion people representing 32 percent of the global population over the last decade (Emarketers, 2016). Females are said to be dominating in the use of social media (Brian, 2021), but this record is not yet conclusive in the case of Ghana.

### ***Citizens' Choices for Involvement in social media***

According to Quansah et al. (2016) and Yunus et al. (2013), several reasons account for youth involvement in social media usage. Some of the reasons are affordability and being an easy way for people to connect with other people (Quansah et al., 2016). An online social group refers to those whose environment or media operation is largely online or virtual (Preece et al., 2003). This community goes beyond physical boundaries. According to Preece et al. (2003), the activities of these groups are diverse and interest-based as it is centred on a variety of online activities. For a person to be part of an online social group, there must be a particular shared interest (Preece et al. 2003). The activities of online social groups are determined by many factors: the purpose of the group, the software that supports their operation, the governance structure, and the rules governing their operations (Preece et al., 2003). Other factors include group size, age of participants, the culture of members, physical presence (Tsao et al., 1999), and class (such as political, religious, elite, etc.). Similarly, activities centred on leisure such as people's hobbies and interests influence their affinity to participate in an online discourse (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). Deng and Tavares (2013) assert that, in contrast to face-to-face engagement, people are likely to participate readily in matters that are promulgated online. People's knowledge level of the subject matter, (Cheung et al., 2008; Preece et al., 2003), time availability (Barnett-Queen et al., 2005), overloaded information, preferences (Chang, 2006), learning styles, perception, and intrinsic motivation (Vonderwell & Zachariah, 2005), are some of the factors identified to be the determinants of people's participation in online activities.

### ***Factors Influencing Social media usage in the Tamale Metropolis***

Factors observed to be determining the level of social media usage in the Tamale Metropolis include the rate of social media adoption, accessibility to smart gadgets, technological and technical exposure of adopters, and the number of active online citizens. According to Arthur (2012), social media has proven to be a strong tool for citizens' political behaviour. It has the potential to increase citizens' supervision over public project implementation and sustainability. It is, therefore, important to submit that "Citizen-led engagements, which were largely facilitated by social media, have brought to the fore the latent potential of social media platforms to drive political participation" (Arthur, 2012, p. 1). A clear example in Ghana is the #FixTheCountry (Barker-Vormawor, 2021) social media campaign raised by citizens in Ghana toward the government. The captivating aspect of the campaign was that even when citizens were prevented by the police through a court injunction, about 10,000 social media users protested by posting pictures of their placards with pictures of the community development problems

bearing the tag: #FixTheCountry, on Sunday, the 9th of May, 2021. This campaign attracted swift attention from the government of Ghana to listen to the concerns of this group by first engaging them through a meeting. Social media can equally equip terrorists with a low-cost tool to enlist, train, coordinate and communicate with followers and potential recruits remotely” (Cox et al., 2020, p. 1). But the interest of this paper is limited to the use of social media to leverage community participation in developmental affairs.

## **Methodology**

The Mixed Methods Research Approach (MMRA) was used for this study. It helps to acquire findings with the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The purpose of the study was to critically and broadly explore the relevance of social media open collaboration as avenues for enhancing citizens’ contribution to sustainable development. Due to the strengths associated with this mixed approach to conducting social research, many researchers opt for it (Creswell, 2015; Leavy, 2017; Mahama, 2018). The Mixed Method Research Approach was used to conduct the study to, especially help do away with some of the limitations notably associated with the single use of qualitative and quantitative approaches (Jason & Glenwick, 2015).

The Exploratory Sequential (ES) mixed methods design was adopted for the study. This was ideal for the study considering the purposes of triangulation and cross-validation of the finding from the qualitative and quantitative results, and presentations. The study found relevance in this design since it entails the technical underpinnings of an entire research process. According to Leavy (2017), exploratory sequential design requires that a small number of sampled participants be purposefully interviewed. The insights obtained guide the construction of the quantitative data collection instrument, such as questionnaires for the second wave of quantitative inquiry.

The study targeted local community people who use social media for their community development support operations within the Tamale Metropolis. The target population for the study comprised Community-based IT mediated groups with unified ways of conducting their operation for either personal or general community development purposes. The main focus is on those groups who often carry out their activities like engaging with their members or soliciting needed contributions for the achievement of their goals using social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Zoom. Members of these groups are often heterogeneous, considering their skills, professions, and expertise.

Twenty-five (25) virtual groups were identified with a total of four-hundred and fifteen (415) members. However, the study could not capture all these, hence, data was acquired from sampled participants. The approach

consisted first of purposively sampled Community Development NGOs for the qualitative phase (Minor=25 interviewees) followed by randomly sampled social group members for the quantitative aspect (Major=100 participants). These were sampled to represent the entire population for generalisation's sake. The purposive sampling technique was adopted for the community leaders, while simple random sampling was used for the entire members of the virtual community-based groups. A purposive strategy was adopted (Leavy, 2017) as it allowed only participants with the required information or knowledge to take part in the survey. Simple Random Sampling, however, afforded every group member the opportunity of being selected for the study. One hundred and twenty-five (125) respondents were sampled for data acquisition out of the four-hundred and fifteen (415) total population of the twenty (25) community IT-mediated groups. One hundred (100) members of the randomly sampled youth groups in Tamale were contacted by questionnaire administration. Twenty-five (25) respondents were interviewed, consisting of twenty (25) group leaders.

An interview guide was used to collect qualitative data from the twenty-five (25) sampled interviewees representing local community leaders in the Tamale Metropolis. A structured questionnaire was similarly designed for the quantitative data collection. Both the interviews and the questionnaire were administered virtually. The questionnaire was administered through Google Form technology where the form was designed online, and a link was generated to be shared with respondents. Once participants clicked on the activated link shared to their WhatsApp platforms, it took them to the online questionnaire to answer the questions. The interviews were equally conducted virtually by way of social media (WhatsApp) after permission was sought. The groups were owned by local community leaders for interviewing purposes.

Thematic data presentation was adopted to present the qualitative results. In this way, all interview responses that fell within a particular thematic category were grouped and presented under that theme. It is generally understood that thematic analysis is one of the major qualitative means of analysing and presenting qualitative data (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2015; Guest & Namey, 2015; Leavy, 2017). The interviews were audio-responded for easy coding and analysis in context and content. The findings were analysed sequentially to enhance the interpretation of the study results. It was done by presenting the findings under sub-themes that build on the main theme. However, data from the questionnaire were analysed descriptively. An exploratory analysis of what is relevant for reporting was summarised in respective tabular forms for adequate representation and interpretation using analytical tools embedded in SPSS (version 23) and Microsoft Excel (MS Excel 2016) software.

## Presentation of results

### *Demographic Data of Respondents*

The demographic and preliminary data on respondents' sex, age, and educational qualification are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

**Table 1.** Sex of Respondents

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	73	73.0
Female	27	27.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The data as presented in Table 1 indicates that males were dominant in the community groups. Male respondents from the random sampling of members of the community-based online social groups scored seventy-three (73%) while the female respondents were twenty-seven (27%) of the 100 sampled respondents. This is a clear indication that males were more in the survey, indicating that males dominate females in community development groups in the Tamale Metropolis. This is possible as many females are not usually identified with leadership or community development activism in Tamale.

**Table 2.** Age of Respondents

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
20-29	65	65.0
30-39	34	34.0
40-49	1	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2 discloses the age categorisation of respondents. The following codes were assigned in the coding of respondents' age: Below 20=1, 20-29=2, 30-39=3, 40-49=4, 50-59=5. The table indicates that respondents generally were from age 20 to 50 brackets. Those respondents who were between the ages of twenty (20) to twenty-nine (29) were predominant, representing 65%. Those from 30 to 39 years were second with a 34% score. This result indicates that citizens who participate in community development support activities and groups are between the youth ages of 15 between 35 years (African Union Commission, 2006).

**Table 3.** Respondents' Educational Background

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No formal education	19	19.0
Pre-tertiary	37	37.0
Tertiary (Diploma and Bachelors)	35	35.0
Post-graduate	9	9.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The survey attempted to know the educational levels of respondents (members of community-based groups). While 19% of the respondents never had any formal education, 37% only attained below tertiary education. 35 % attained up to tertiary level (i.e., Diploma and Bachelor's degree) while 9% attained post-graduate studies (such as Post Graduate Diploma (PGD), Master, Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), or other professional training, etc.). It is, therefore, clear, as presented in Table 3 that community groups varied in terms of their members' educational attainments. This points to the fact that the majority of the respondents were educated across all the educational levels (81% cumulatively across Primary, JHS, and SHS levels). This indicates that the respondents have approximately attained some appreciable level of education capable of participation in their community development initiatives as stakeholders. It also indicates that they can be empowered to adapt to various social media platforms that can enhance their virtual contribution to the development of their communities through active virtual participation processes.

#### **4.1.0 Interview responses**

##### **4.1.1 Q 1: Do you think social media enhances your activities as a group?**

Social media's ability to enhance the general conduct, activities, and management of various groups was first explored through questions and responses obtained from the respondents. This was so because, to explore the viability of social media in conducting open collaborations with citizens in development processes, it is prudent to get their views on how social media helps them to achieve their goals as groups and how their members are coping with the platforms they use. Below are some of the responses:

###### **Respondent 1:**

*Some of the members are in almost all the regions of Ghana, but we are still able to reach out to support them when the need arises. This is possible through the adoption of media platforms we have.*

###### **Respondent 2:**

*Our members are widespread across the country. Some of the members are currently not even in Ghana, but they always participate in our projects because of social media. Sometimes, especially those outside the country, you may need us to participate in something, however, some of us may not participate due to the time difference between Ghana and those countries they find themselves in.*

**Respondent 3:**

*...So, all our members are using social media now because our group is mainly managed online, even when someone wants to join, and are not on WhatsApp, they first have to download it and learn how to use it for proper participation in our activities. This is an indication of high patronage of social media and usage, which is why we are here as a group.*

**Respondent 4:**

*As for the way social media helps us, I can't say everything. Our group comprises people from diverse backgrounds. Many of them do not even know each other physically, but the common uniting force is the group's goal. This is the strongest bondage that serves the interests of all the members.*

The above responses indicate an unending rise in the influence of social media, hence the continued rise in adoption and usage among citizens. In the view of Chen and Bryer (2012), social media had become popular as many people are now using it as a medium of instruction. As observed, “course content can be co-created by a community of learners, where the instructor is a learner along with students. The role of the instructor might then transform to become as much facilitator as subject matter expert” (Chen & Bryer, 2012, p. 97).

**Q 2: What was the main intent for the formation of your group?**

From the interviews conducted, it was clear that the groups are engaged in many development-oriented activities. Some of them were either in; 1) supporting the acquisition of jobs for the youth, especially their members, 2) supporting their community's development through personal sacrifices and financial contributions to undertake their projects, and 3) partnering with anybody who shares similar development views and intent. This is confirmed by the focal areas of operation obtained through the survey presented in Figure 3 of the quantitative results presented. These are presented in Figures 2 and 3 of the quantitative results. The following responses from the respondents confirm these:

**Respondent 1b:**

*The group was formed to help alleviate poverty and hardship among members of the group and the less privileged members of society. It was also formed to enhance the capacities of artisans such as musicians (underground artists) and actors in Dagbon. This is done by periodic sponsoring of artists to release or promote their music tracks. (Response from online with leaders of PWM group).*

**Respondent 2b:**

*Regarding your question about the goal of our group, it was formed to enhance peace, unity, and security in society. We often carry out activities to enhance the security of society by acting as watchdogs of society. The plan is that we want our members to gain employable skills and chances to gain employment in the near future.*

**Respondent 3b:**

*The intentions of our group are many; we have been able to get jobs for many members. We often engage in lobbying through some of the most influential people amongst us, like chiefs and opinion leaders. I cannot enumerate the achievements our group has gained so far.*

**Respondent 4b:**

*The group has also succeeded in supporting some of the members to go for musical competitions like the “Chop da Mic” TV music competition organised annually by the Sagani TV in Tamale. Similarly, members always endeavour to download new musical releases from some of the musically talented members of the group to promote them by sharing them widely for popular attention.*

It is clear from the responses that social and community groups are involved in community development support projects. Their projects are either targeted towards the personal development of their members and members of the society, social protection of the vulnerable in society, security, or physical development. The findings agreed with Tirmizi (2005) that the social capital that exists between members of the social groups has a significant impact on achieving community development. Similarly, Hamzah and Suandi (1994) conclude that the youth groups played an essential role in making Kampong (Kg) Endah the most developed place in Malaysia. These findings emanate from the support mechanisms youth groups give to their members and society in general. Youth development is critical to the sustainable development of every society and Tamale is not an exception. Therefore, when there is a high level of youth development, it translates to the general notion of good and right attitudes that are critical for sustainable development.

**Q3: Have you ever been invited by the government, local assemblies, or NGOs to participate in their developmental projects?**

The study also probed further to ascertain whether citizens (community group members) are often invited for consultation by either government or NGOs. The general response indicated that these groups have

never been invited by development partners or stakeholders for development partnerships or even consultations. This worrying reality is depicted in the responses below;

**Respondent 1c:**

*As for an invitation to participate in development planning and consultation, we have never received any invitation or recognition by any government agency or the NGOs working within the Tamale Metropolis.*

**Respondent 2c:**

*I cannot remember receiving an invitation as a leader by those in authority to participate in any development issues or implement their project in Tamale or my local area.*

**Respondent 3c:**

*Nobody has ever invited us to participate in any development issue. But I think we have not been invited due to the fact that we have not registered our group yet. So even if anyone wants to invite us or collaborate with us or engage in development planning, how will they get us? They don't even know we exist.*

**Respondent 4c:**

*As we all know, you have to be known before you are recognised or invited by stakeholders. If you are not known, how can you be invited or recognised? So, I think we have to first register the group before that can happen. I am certain that, even if the government does not invite us, NGOs would do due to the projects we undertake.*

The responses received indicated that development stakeholders (Governments, local assemblies, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) had not adequately utilised the opportunities possessed by these groups. Therefore, leveraging has not been encouraging enough. Leveraging here means establishing the needed open, collaborative systems to get the required contributions from these groups. As demonstrated already, these groups are already engaged in developmental projects at their levels, which, when identified and utilised, would be a tremendous positive impact on participation which could lead to sustainable development in the Tamale Metropolis. However, some other reasons have also been proffered by the respondents accounting for the lack of engagement with other stakeholders including;

1. Non-registration of groups with the necessary government and non-governmental agencies.
2. Not approaching organisations and stakeholders for possible partnerships
3. No proper advertisement and publicity of projects to the public utilising social media
4. Poor management skills such as record keeping, proposal writing, collaboration, lobbying skills, etc.

**Q 4: Is your group ready to participate virtually for development purposes?**

The study again enquired about the readiness of community-based groups to use virtual platforms to advance development. There is a general indication that members of community groups are always ready to participate through virtual platforms. This is generally supported by the findings of Gerbaudo (2021) who concluded that virtual platforms are more inclusive than traditional platforms for participation. The following were some of the responses from the members.

**Respondent 1d:**

*If stakeholders or government wants to engage us in development issues, why not? As you can see, whatever we do as a group is purely for development purposes. So, if we are then recognised by those obliged to ensure community development and want to engage us, we would even be happier. I think our burdens will be more reduced drastically.*

**Respondent 2d:**

*Our group is ready to partner with any NGO regarding development, which is already our core mandate. We are best capable of indicating the communities' most pressing needs because we stay in the communities. However, because we have not registered yet, we are not recognised by the organisations or government. Therefore, we have never participated in any community development consultation process. This hinders our work and the work of the stakeholders, as they incur extra resources to do so many things that we would do free for them or with fewer resources.*

**Respondent 3d:**

*We could also partner to implement their projects to their specifications through the training of our members. What we have*

*done so far means implementing projects for other organisations or even the government.*

The above narrations indicate that the groups have much enthusiasm to work with significant development stakeholders in Tamale. Therefore, it should be easy for all stakeholders to partner with them in their development agenda. It could be underscored that a solid partnership with them could lead to some benefits, some of them may include the following;

1. there would be true ownership of developmental projects in the communities.
2. there will be a good environment for the operation of NGOs and Assemblies.
3. the cost of projects implementation will be less compared to implementation devoid of these groups.
4. maintenance of these projects will be enhanced, and finally,
5. the sustainability of those projects will be assured.

These are in line with the position of Hamzah & Suandi (1994).

### **Discussion of findings**

This study was embarked on with the intent of finding out how the use of social media was explored in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana for the enhancement of sustainable development. It was anchored in the Uses and Gratification Theory of Katz, and Gurevitch (1973/1974) which emphasised that through the use of social media, development ideas can be harnessed for the betterment and wellbeing of individuals in the society. Ensuring the sustainable development of communities requires a comprehensive approach and the efforts of all stakeholders who implement or are affected by development projects are very important. It was against this background that the study embarked on an enquiry to find out the extent of the use of social media in Tamale. The study was also undertaken to uncover how social media has been employed as a tool for information propagation for enhancement of participation in decision-making for development sustainability. The findings through the demographic information of the respondents indicated that males dominated the community citizenship roles, which is manifested in community development support through joining groups that are likeminded. Similarly, it was found out that group members were predominantly in the youth age group, which is a positive signal for the government and organizations to utilize their capacities and expertise as well as their strong tendency to participate in social issues for community development programs. The study also indicated that the social media adoption rate in the Tamale Metropolis was high as compared to other peripheral communities and districts. For instance, there was a 100 percent adoption of the WhatsApp

platform in particular by online community groups. Therefore, it has created an avenue for most group leaders in Tamale to manage their members through the use of social media platforms with defined rules and regulations and roles assigned to members.

However, the study equally revealed that Non-Governmental Organisations and developmental agencies possessed various social media handles yet were not able to utilise them to harness the needed contribution from citizens. Comments made by followers from these platforms barely influenced the projects that were often developed and implemented for the use of citizens in the Tamale Metropolis. Therefore, the platforms were simply used as “advertisement” channels for upcoming events and also for entertainment. Project details were not posted on those platforms for the benefit of soliciting the views of beneficiaries of development projects. But the positive side was that the adoption of social media has enhanced the operational capacity and involvement of a great number of members of the society in Tamale. This was possible due to the remote/virtual operation form carried out through the social media platforms. The widely adopted platforms by the respondents were; 1) WhatsApp (100%) 2) Facebook (79%) 3) YouTube (63%) 4) Telegram (48%) 5) Instagram (41%) 6) Twitter (37%) 7) Snapchat (25%). These platforms could have been rich avenues that are adopted for the propagation of information on development projects and their possible sustainability measures. The study, therefore, agreed with the fact that with the right mechanisms and enabling support systems in place, the government and NGOs could get the needed citizens' contributions in the sustainable development agenda through open collaboration engagement models (Kumi, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

The study presents the following conclusions based on the finding. First of all, the study identified that social media adoption is still on the rise globally, and Tamale Metropolis is not excluded. The study also identified that youth/social/community groups positively contributed to the development of the Tamale Metropolis, but their activities were barely noticed by the governing authorities and NGOs. Also, organisations and governmental institutions do not adequately tap into the power of the social groups, therefore, those institutions lacked enough collaboration with these social groups. Finally, the adoption of social media to engage with citizens should be the most effective and cost-efficient way to ensure proper participation in sustainable development in the Metropolis. It was found out that most of the activities of the social groups were well established but potential beneficiaries such NGO's and Government/Institutions failed to explore them for developmental gains.

## Recommendations

The study recommended the following measures for proper utilisation of the social media platforms in the Tamale Metropolis for sustainable development. The results indicated that there was a general lack of clear understanding among group members concerning the use of social media to mobilise other people for sustainable development purposes. It is, therefore, necessary for group members to be educated on how to use social media for effective participation and contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) delivery by 2030. Local development actors must also be trained to identify the benefits of social media usage and most importantly, its effective use for people mobilisation to support the attainment of the SDGs. It is also obvious that the government and other stakeholders such as NGOs can leverage social media for consultative, public education, and information sharing purposes, especially in the participatory processes of citizens. Stakeholders such as NGOs should recognize the activities of these groups for effective partnership. Social media platforms could also be created to embrace all stakeholders for the general purposes of continuous engagement with citizens for information dissemination to harness needed support for development sustainability. WhatsApp, Facebook, Zoom, YouTube, etc., were identified to be generally useful platforms for members of the groups for operating their activities and undertaking their projects. Therefore, these platforms can be adopted to ensure successful citizen engagement for the development agenda. This study has just been a preliminary effort for further studies that will be geared toward social media leverage for language teaching and learning. As indicated by the Study Group's symposium in 2016, captioned 'Symposium on Language and the Sustainable Development Goals', the SDG's fall short due to their lack of attention to language and this is a result of general failure to recognize the consequences, both positive and negative, of linguistic diversity (Marinotti, 2017). Our future studies will attempt to fill the identified gaps.

## References:

1. African Union Commission. (2006). *African Youth Charter* (p. 21). African Union Addis Ababa.  
<http://tisierraleone.org/African%20Youth%20Charter.pdf>.
2. Anderson, J., & Rainie, L. (2018). The Future of Well-Being in a Tech-Saturated World. *Pew Research Center*.
3. Arnstein, S. (2015). A ladder of citizen participation. In *The city reader* (pp. 323–336). Routledge.
4. Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216–224.

5. Arthur, C. (2012). *Encouraging Political Participation in Africa: The potential of Social Media platforms* (p. 12) [Situation Report]. Institute for Security Studies.
6. Bailey, R. C., & Lumpkin, G. (2021). Enacting Positive Social Change: A Civic Wealth Creation Stakeholder Engagement Framework. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 10422587211049744.
7. Barker-Vormawor, O. O. (2021). *Fixthecountry (@Ghfixthecountry) / Twitter*. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/Ghfixthecountry>.
8. Barnett-Queen, T., Blair, R., & Merrick, M. (2005). Student perspectives of online discussions: Strengths and weaknesses. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 23(3–4), 229–244.
9. Brian, D. (2021). *How Many People Use Social Media in 2021? (65+ Statistics)*. Backlinko. <https://backlinko.com/social-media-users>.
10. Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. London: Oxford university press.
11. Chaffey, D. (2016) *Global social media research summary 2016*. Smart Insights: Social Media Marketing.
12. Chaffey, D. (2021, March 11). *Global social media statistics research summary [updated 2021]*. Smart Insights. <https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>.
13. Chang, N. (2006). E-discussions as a complement to traditional instruction: Did the students like online communication and why? *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 27(3), 249–264.
14. Chen, B., & Bryer, T. (2012). Investigating instructional strategies for using social media in formal and informal learning. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 13(1), 87–104.
15. Cheung, W. S., Hew, K. F., & Ng, C. S. L. (2008). Toward an understanding of why students contribute in asynchronous online discussions. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 38(1), 29–50.
16. Creswell, J. W. (2015). *A Concise introduction to Mixed Methods Research*. London: SAGE publications.
17. Quansah, D. J. Y., Fiadzawoo, J. K., & Kanyir, K. C. (2016a). Students' Engagement in Social Media and Its Mainstay for Teaching and Learning. The Case of the Wa Nursing Training College. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 9.
18. Emarketers. (2016). 'Nearly One-Third of the World Will Use Social Networks Regularly This Year' [Online]. <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Nearly-One-Third-of-World-Will-Use-Social-Networks-Regularly-This-Year/1014157>.

19. Fiadzawoo, J. K., Achanso, A. S. & Okyere, R. B. (2018). Reading in the Digital Age; An Overview of the Habits of Students of the Faculty of Education, UDS, Tamale. *Journal of Educational Review (JER)*, Vol. 10, No 2. (87-102).
20. Gerbaudo, P. (2021). Are digital parties more democratic than traditional parties? Evaluating Podemos and Movimento 5 Stelle's online decision-making platforms. *Party Politics*, 27(4), 730–742.
21. Guest, G., & Namey, E. E. (2015). Mixed Methods Research. In *Public Health Research Methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483398839>.
22. Hamzah, A., & Suandi, T. (1994). Factors contributing towards the sustainability of youth organizations as partners in community development. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 2(2), 87–93.
23. Huttunen, S., Ojanen, M., Ott, A., Saarikoski, H. (2022). What about citizens? A literature review of citizen engagement in sustainability transitions research. *Energy Research & Social Science (ERSS)*. Vol. 19, 02714.
24. Jason, L. A., & Glenwick, D. S. (Eds.). (2015). *Handbook of Methodological Approaches to Community-Based Research: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med:psych/9780190243654.001.0001>.
25. Joseph, J. (2021). *Topic: Internet usage worldwide*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/topics/1145/internet-usage-worldwide/>.
26. Kate, R., William, M., Jacopo, B., Antonia, W., Katerina, G., Sofia, M., & Giacomo, P. P. (2020). *Social Media in Africa—A double-edged sword for security and development* (p. 91) [Research Report].
27. Kemp, S. (2021). *Digital 2021: The latest insights into the 'state of digital'*. We Are Social. <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2021/01/digital-2021-the-latest-insights-into-the-state-of-digital>
28. Kumi, E. (2019). Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals: An Analysis of the Potential Role of Philanthropy in Ghana. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 54(7) 1084–1104.
29. Kvasničková Stanislavská, L.; Pilař, L.; Margarisová, K.; Kvasnička, R. (2020). Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Media: Comparison between Developing and Developed Countries.. *Sustainable* 12, 5255. [Google Scholar].
30. Leavy, P. (2017). *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*. The Guilford Press, New York. London.

31. Mahama, A. (2018). *Appraisal of Continues Professional Development of Basic School Teachers in the Nanumba North District* [Thesis]. University for Development Studies.
32. Marinotti, J. P. (2017). *Symposium on Language, the Sustainable Development Goals, and Vulnerable Populations*, New York: Study Group on Language and the United Nations .
33. Marcolin, B., Saunders, C., Aubert, B. (2022). Persuasive Technologies and Social Interactions in Professional Environments: Embedded Qualitative Case Study. *JMIR Form Res*, 6(2):e32613 doi: 10.2196/32613.
34. McLeod, J. M., Zubric, J., Keum, H., Deshpande, S., Cho, J., Stein, S., & Heather, M. (2001). Reflecting and connecting: Testing a communication mediation model of civic participation. *Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, DC*.
35. Michels, A., & De Graaf, L. (2010). Examining Citizen Participation: Local Participatory Policy Making and Democracy. *Local Government Studies*,36(4),477–491.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2010.494101>.
36. Moore, K. R., & Elliott, T. J. (2016). From participatory design to a listening infrastructure: A case of urban planning and participation. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 30(1), 59–84.
37. Preece, J., Maloney-Krichmar, D., & Abras, C. (2003). History of online communities. *Encyclopedia of Community*, 3(1023–1027), 86.
38. Schuler, D., & Namioka, A. (1993). *Participatory design: Principles and practices*. London: CRC Press.
39. Seltzer, E., & Mahmoudi, D. (2013). Citizen Participation, Open Innovation, and Crowdsourcing: Challenges and Opportunities for Planning. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 28(1), 3–18.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412212469112L>
40. Shah, D. V., Cho, J., Eveland, W. P., & Kwak, N. (2005). Information and Expression in a Digital Age: Modeling Internet Effects on Civic Participation. *Communication Research*, 32(5), 531–565.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650205279209>
41. Shayan, N. F., Mohabbati-Kalejahi, N., Alavi, S., Zahad, M. A (2022). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). *Sustainability*, 14(3), 1222; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031222>..
42. Shen, L.-B. (2008). Computer Technology and College Students' Reading Habits. *Chia-Nan Annual Bulletin* Vol. 32, 559–572, 14.
43. Simonsen, J., & Robertson, T. (2012). *Routledge international handbook of participatory design*. London: Routledge.

44. Stein, S. M., & Harper, T. L. (2003). Power, trust, and planning. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 23(2), 125–139.
45. Stein, S., & Harper, T. (2000). The paradox of planning in a multicultural liberal society: A pragmatic reconciliation. *Urban Planning in a Multicultural Society*, 67–82.
46. Tirmizi, S. N. A. (2005). *The contribution of levels of social capital to community development*. Iowa State University.
47. Tsao, R., Preece, J., & Lazar, J. (1999). One Foot in Cyberspace & the Other on the Ground A Case Study of Analysis and Design Issues in a Hybrid Virtual and Physical Community. *WebNet Journal: Internet Technologies, Applications & Issues*, 1(3), 49–57.
48. Vonderwell, S., & Zachariah, S. (2005). Factors that influence participation in online learning. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 38(2), 213–230.
49. Wilkinson, C. R., & De Angeli, A. (2014). Applying user centred and participatory design approaches to commercial product development. *Design Studies*, 35(6), 614–631.
50. Wojcieszak, M. E., & Mutz, D. C. (2009). Online groups and political discourse: Do online discussion spaces facilitate exposure to political disagreement? *Journal of Communication*, 59(1), 40–56.
51. Yunus, M., Nordin, N., Salehi, H., Amin Embi, M., & Salehi, Z. (2013). The Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Teaching ESL Writing Skills. *English Language Teaching*, 6(7), p1. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n7p1>.