

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION IN NIGERIA

Okonkwo, Emeka E.

Department of Archaeology and Tourism,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Eyisi, Afamefuna

Department of Archaeology and Tourism,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Ololo, Nneoma. G

School of General Studies,
Humanities Unit, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

Internet based applications and social media are inextricably linked to modern businesses; each contributing to and having impact on the other. Social media platforms specifically have been used to share information among internet users both within and outside the tourism industry. They allow people to engage in conversations with one another and are regarded as the future of communication. They present people with a countless array of internet platforms that increase and enhance the sharing of information. They make the transfer of text, photos, audio, video and electronic information in general easy. Social media platforms include Google, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, blogging, LinkedIn, Flickr, Whatsapp, Wechat, Badoo, Quantcast, etc. These communication modes have experienced a tremendous growth during the recent past years, and as they continue to grow, so is the importance of harnessing their contributions as marketing and management tools for businesses, especially the tourism industry, since the industry has long relied so much on the spread of information through the word-of-mouth, destination popularity and other forms of print media. The research, therefore, takes a look at the selected social media platforms available in Nigeria and how they are used for tourism promotion and development. To achieve these aims, the research employs an ethnographic method of data collection through the distribution of questionnaires via <http://www.surveymonkey.com> to elicit useful information on the subject matter from users of social media in Nigeria. The study argues that social media platforms are actively used for tourism development and promotion, though the usage is still poor when compared to other countries. Hence, there is need to create enabling environment for increased usage.

Keywords: Social media, Internet, Tourism development and promotion, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Blogger.

Introduction

Social media platforms have greatly impacted every aspect of life and society in general. As a by-product of the internet, they have transformed the world into what can now be referred to as "information society", with high-tech communication permeating almost every aspect of human life (Nwabueze and Chizoba, 2007). Social media platforms which came up as improvement in technology have helped in achieving accelerated development in politics, religion, economics,

business and most especially, recently, tourism. Their emergence have increased communication between people all over the world, as they help people to gain access to any information that they desire at anytime, anywhere, on any digital device as well as on any interactive user feedback. A Social network is a social structure made up of individuals or organizations called "NODES", which are connected by one or more specific types of interdependency such as friendship, kinship, common interest, financial exchange, dislike, sexual relationship or relationship beliefs (Adeboye, 2012). For Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), the term social media refers to "a group of Internet-based applications that constructs on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allows the design and exchange of "User-Generated Content". Among the numerous social media networks, Facebook, Skype, Twitter, Blogs, Badoo, WhatsApp, Instagram and Myspace seem to be the most popular among the youths. However, Facebook seems to be the most popular of them all, at least to the Nigerian audience. The popularity of Facebook is based on the fact that as at present, no less than three million Nigerians and over 27 million Africans are registered members. It is pertinent to note that the tourism industry is not left out in this patronage.

Furthermore, studies have equally shown that the use of social media platforms by tourism promoters and other tourism active groups have increased globally in recent times. These studies realised that the usage of social networking potentially increases tourism mobilisation and, in effect, tourism participation among citizenry (Ihejinika, Mbazie and Ndinojuo, 2015). To lend credence to this, Henrikson (2011) noted that between 2005 and 2010, the percentage of internet users between the ages of 18-29 year old grew from 16% to 86%, and adult users between the ages of 30-49 year old, 50-64 year old, and 65 and above, within the same years (2005-2010) rose from 12%-61%, 7%-47%, and 5%-26% respectively. Information has equally shown that tourism contributes 30% to Nigeria's GDP annually, which when compared with other income generating sectors in Nigeria like oil, agricultural and manufacturing sectors seems to be discouraging (Mbanefo, 2015). Hence, the need to invest more in the tourism sector for continued growth. One question that readily comes to mind is: how has social media being utilised in promoting tourism in Nigeria?

Research conducted on the internet revealed that millions of people have been recorded as using social networks daily (Miles, 2015). Thus, social networks are avenues where information is shared, and regrettably, this mode of communication's potentials have not been fully harnessed for the development and promotion of various destination sites in Nigeria. This research seeks to identify social networks mostly used by Nigerians with a view to examining their contributions to tourism development and promotion in Nigeria.

Methodology

A combination of two methods (qualitative and quantitative methods) was used to elicit vital information from knowledgeable users of social media. The qualitative method was used to gather information that are not numerical in nature from the respondents. In this regard, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews were used to obtain primary data from different tourism establishments in Nigeria that employ the use of social media, as well as social media users. To achieve this, four social media platforms were selected for the study. These are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Blogger. Their selection was based on their high number of users and accessibility.

The quantitative method involves statistical analysis which relies heavily on numerical evidence to draw conclusion or test hypotheses. For this study, over 12,500 questionnaires were distributed online through <http://www.surveymonkey.com> to Nigerians (via emails) that use internet. The data was later collated and analysed descriptively. The study provided insights into the major social media platforms used in the country, as well as their activeness and contributions to tourism development. Secondary data was also used, especially journals, unpublished projects, and conference materials.

Brief Literature Review

Here, attempts are made to review scholarly works on social media with a view to examining authors' views on the subject matter. It is instructive to point out that many research works have been carried out either on social media in general, or on one or more social media platforms. Folaranmi's (2013) survey on Facebook addiction level among undergraduates in selected Nigerian universities revealed that of the 994 students surveyed, 220 (22.1%) stated their reason for Facebook addiction as 'meeting people'; for school work 149 (15%); dating 134 (13.5%); uploading 113 (11.4%); chatting 194 (19.5%); uploading pictures 69 (6.9%); messaging 82 (8.2%); and celebrity follow-up 33 (3.3%). The study however, found low addiction (1.6%) particularly among university undergraduates in private universities, attributing the result to the low level of internet access generally in Nigeria. This review shows that social media can also thrive in the tourism sector. There is no doubt that the popularity of the social media has been greatly enhanced by its flexibility, interactivity and ability to perform multiple roles in almost every sphere of life. Unlike the mainstream or the traditional media with their rigid regulations and time-wasting characteristics, the social media platforms are virtually free, instantaneous, open to all, have little or no restriction on what to say, when to say it, how to say it and who to address it to. On the other hand, social media platforms have turned consumers of news into news producers. Accordingly, Nwabueze, Obasi and Obi (2013) postulated that the social media ushered the world into what can be called 'attention age,' an era which followed after the information age; and characterised by the ability of individuals to create and consume information instantly and freely, and as well, share it on the Internet via social media. A further proof of the wide acceptance and attraction of the social media can be seen from the number of people that operate social media accounts. Nigeria, for instance, has over 3 million people while 27.41 million Africans are on different social media platforms. Besides, there are more than 664.03 million people on Facebook across 233 countries as at 2014. Kazeniak (2010) notes that more than 67% of the global online population regularly visits a social network site, and social networking sites now collectively account for one in every eleven minutes people spend online.

Zarrella (2010) in his work titled "*The Social Media Marketing Book*" noted that traditional media such as televisions, newspapers, radio and magazine are one-way, static broadcasting technologies. He went further to argue that magazines and newspapers are distributing expensive contents to consumers; while advertisers pay for the privilege to insert their 'ads' (products) into the contents. Readers in turn have no possibility of sending the editors instant feedback, in case they disagree with the content(s). Social networking has made it easy for anyone to create and, most importantly, to distribute their own contents. A blog post, a "tweet" on Twitter handle, or a Youtube

video can be produced and viewed by millions virtually for free. Advertisers do not have to pay publishers or distributors huge sums of money to embed their ads; now they create their own interesting contents that viewers will flock into (Zarrella, 2010). Weber (2009) lends credence to the above when he observed that traditional media such as television, radio, and newspaper are providing one way communication; while social media platforms, on the other hand, allow everyone to publish and contribute in online conversations. He defines social network as “the online place where people with common interest can gather to share thoughts, comments, and opinions. He went further to state that social media platforms consist of social networks, such as Facebook, branded web destination like amazon.com, e-bay, etc. (Weber, 2009).

For Palmer and Koenig (2009), social network is an online application, platforms and media which aim to facilitate interactions, collaborations, and sharing of contents. Palmer and Koenig were of the opinion that social media was grouped into four categories namely:

- **Blogs:** Comprising individuals or firms, online journals that often combined with audio or video podcasts.
- **Content Communities:** Websites for organising and sharing particular types of contents.
- **Forums/Bulletin Boards:** Sites for exchanging ideas and information, usually around special interests
- **Context Aggregators:** Applications allowing users to fully customise the web contents they wish to access.

It should be noted that any of the above categories of social media can be used by tourism professionals in developing and promoting tourism industry in Nigeria. More so, social media platforms no doubt have so much influenced tourism industry, in that virtually all facets of the sector cannot do without them. As rightly noted by Khan (2012), the use of social media has changed the popular proverb in the hospitality sector from: “do one thing bad and ten people will know by the word-of-mouth”, to: “do one thing bad and ten people will know by the word of million mouths”. This goes to show the rapidness of communication which can either make or mar any business, government or agency. Khan (2012) further noted that the inherent benefits of social media are numerous and can be helpful in marketing and management, which are particularly important for hospitality and tourism since they are people professions. Supporting this assertion, Bobur, *et. al.* (2015) opined that the growth of Internet and diffusion of new technologies have transformed the tourism sector in unprecedented ways, and have provided unique opportunities and challenges for national and destination marketing societies, essentially keeping pace of a constantly changing and competitive environment.

According to Neeraj (2015), social media platforms have been highly utilised in the development and promotion of tourism industry in India. According to his findings, a tourism development cooperation in India known as Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Cooperation (MPSTDC) markets and promotes tourists sites in the Madhya Pradesh region and beyond. Neeraj further opined that the cooperation since 2004 has been offering comprehensive information on different sightseeing, tours, accommodation, attractions, events, destinations and travel related current and updated information. Through this cooperation, access to highly targeted

audience has been made possible, and it has served as an advertising outlet for the promotion of different products and services.

From the empirical reviews, social media platforms, no doubt, are viable tools for tourism development and promotion in this modern age, where computer and Internet have made virtually most things easy and have become part and parcel of the modern society. In Nigeria, the tourism sector is still at its embryonic stage, and it is argued that with the adequate use of social media in its promotion, the industry will experience tremendous growth as witnessed in other developed countries.

Data Presentation

Data collected from four selected social media are presented below. Thereafter, our discussions shall center on their contributions to tourism development and promotion in Nigeria.

1) Facebook

Facebook is an online social networking service headquartered in Menlo Park, California. Its website was launched on February 4, 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow Harvard University students, Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes. The founders had initially limited the website's membership to Harvard students, but later expanded it to colleges in the Boston area, the Ivy League, and Stanford University (www.en.wikipedia.org/facebook). It gradually added support for students at various other universities and later to high-school students. Since 2006, anyone who is at least 13 years old is allowed to become a registered user of the website, though the age requirement may be higher depending on applicable local laws. The name 'Facebook' came from a colloquialism for the directory given to it by American universities students (www.en.wikipedia.org/facebook).

Being part of the social network is simple. An individual would be required to register in order to have an account. After registering to use the site, users can create a user profile, add other users as "friend", exchange messages, post status updates and photos, share videos and receive notifications when others update their profiles. Additionally, users may join common-interest user groups, organised by workplace, school or college, or other characteristics, and categorise their friends into lists such as "People from Work" or "Close Friends" (www.en.wikipedia.org/facebook).

Facebook had over 1.18 billion monthly active users as of June 2015. Because of the large volume of data that users submit to the service, Facebook has come under scrutiny for their privacy policies. Facebook Inc. held its initial public offering in February 2012 and began selling stock to the public three months later, reaching an original peak market capitalization of \$104 billion. As of February 2015, it reached a market capitalization of \$212 Billion (www.en.wikipedia.org/facebook). Ethnographic sources revealed that Facebook is the most popular social networks used in Nigeria.

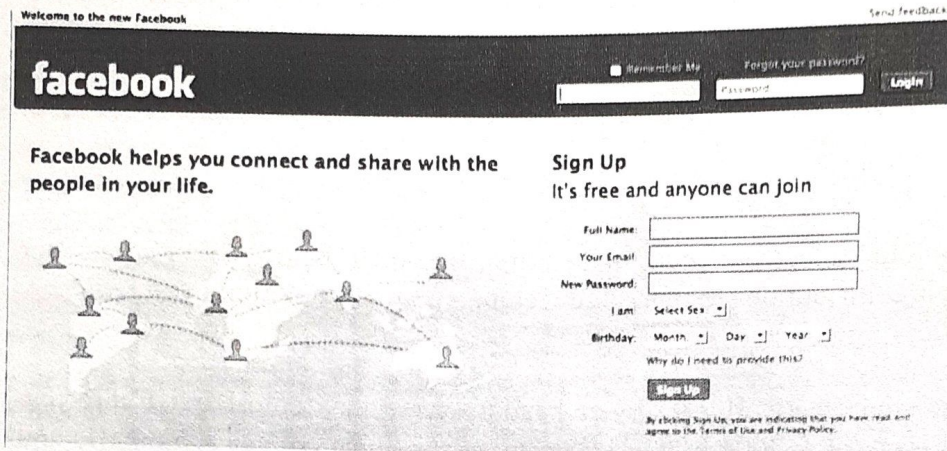


Plate 1: Facebook Home Page (Source: www.facebook.com)

2) Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking service that enables users to send and read short (140 characters) messages called "tweets". Registered users can read and post tweets, but unregistered users can only read them. Users access Twitter through the website interface, SMS, or mobile device application. Twitter Inc. is based in San Francisco and has more than 25 offices around the world (www.en.wikipedia.org/twitter). Twitter was created in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz Stone and Noah Glass and launched in July 2006. The service rapidly gained worldwide popularity, with more than 100 million users who in 2012 posted 340 million tweets per day. The service also handled 1.6 billion search queries per day. In 2013, Twitter was one of the ten most-visited websites, and has been described as the 'SMS of the Internet'. As of May 2015, Twitter has more than 500 million users, out of which more than 302 million are active users (www.en.wikipedia.org/twitter).

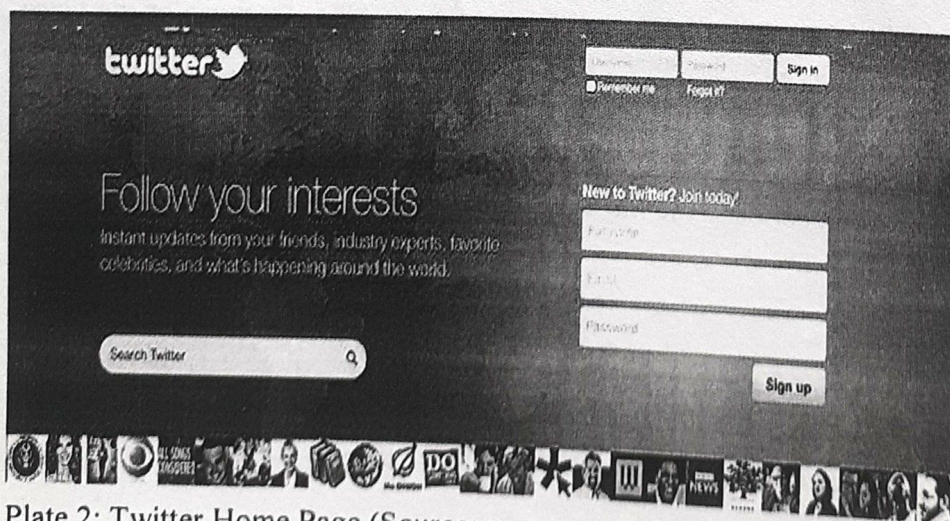


Plate 2: Twitter Home Page (Source: www.twitter.com)

There are many ways to use and/or search on Twitter. You can find Tweets from friends, local businesses and everyone (ranging from well-known entertainers to global political leaders, sports men and women and other high profile personalities). By searching for topics, keywords or hashtags, you can follow ongoing conversations about breaking news or personal interests (www.en.wikipedia.org/twitter). Follower is the name of the game on Twitter, you need to get as many followers as possible, so you need to start interacting with other people for them to notice and follow you. To be active in Twitter, you need to:

i. Follow Other People: Search for people that would like to follow you and what you provide and start following them. As with every other social network, they will receive a notification and most will check you out, if they like what they see, some will follow back. This is true for all the other social networks. Some accounts are used rarely; some are redundant, while some people may not just be interested in what you offer. Therefore, not all notifications will be accepted to check you in and follow you back. After a certain period of time (5-10 days), it is a good idea to un-follow the ones that did not follow you back so you keep your followers/follows ratio in a good balance.

ii. Follow People Back: Just like you follow other people and want to be followed back in return, other people will follow you with the same idea in mind. Although, these might not be the people you want to target, in the beginning, it's a good idea to follow everybody back so you have a nice looking profile with a decent amount of followers. If you don't follow them back fast they might un-follow you, so keep that in mind.

iii. Re-tweet Other People's Tweets. It is important that one should find tweets that are in line with his/her area(s) of interest(s) and re-tweet them. There are lots of interesting things on twitter that one can find and re-tweet. Once you re-tweet, the user that made that tweet will get a notification and might follow back. A new user might find people that are 'high up' with great accounts and re-tweet and interact with them often. They will eventually notice you and will help if you ask nicely or at least re-tweet some of your tweets for all their followers to see. To have a recipe for a great growing twitter handle, it is recommended that you schedule post, get other posts from other people on twitter, and get some post from different other feeds that are highly relevant to you based on your interests. This will make your account active on the social website (Jonny, 2014).

3) Instagram

Instagram is an online mobile photo/video sharing and social networking services that enables its users to take pictures and videos, and share them on a variety of social networking platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumbler and Flickr (Systrom and Kreger, 2010). Its distinctive feature is that it confines photos to a square shape, similar to Kodak Instamatic and Polaroid images, in contrast to the 4:3 aspect ratio typically used by mobile device cameras. Users can also apply digital filters to their images (Systrom and Kreger, 2010). Instagram was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, and launched in October 2010 as a free mobile application (www.en.wikipedia.org/instagram).

Instagram rapidly gained popularity, with over 100 million active users as of April 2012 and over 300 million in December 2014. The service was acquired by Facebook Inc. in April 2012 for approximately US\$1 billion in cash and stock. In 2013, Instagram grew by 23%, while Facebook, as

the parent company, only grew by 3% (www.en.wikipedia.org/instagram). It is a powerful social media site that can drive amazing traffic to websites. A lot of powerful brands are using it successfully and they are reporting that it works better for them than Facebook and Twitter combined (Jonny, 2014). The only downside of this platform is that, because of the way it was designed, one can only post images on it from ones smartphone; thus, one cannot post images online from a computer or by any other means.



Plate 3: Instagram Home Page (Source: www.instagram.com)

To become an active user of Instagram is very simple. The first thing to do is to create an account; thus, creating Instagram account can be done from a phone in order to get accustomed with the way it works. These include setting up the account like details of the user, a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and good profile images. It is important for one to make his account look good so that when people see it, they will be attracted to follow you without thinking twice. For an account to look good images of attractions and social/current issues (up to 15-20 pictures) are recommended and people will actually begin to take a look at it. It is advisable that after the initial posting, additional 5-10 new images should be uploaded on a daily basis. This trick is to attract many followers as possible. Thus, to get many followers, you need to:

- i. **Start following other people:** Use the search "function" and find people of like mind with their interests alien to yours. One also needs to be creative and target other users in order to entice them to follow you back. Once you start following people, they will receive a notification and in turn will follow you back if they like your account, and in some cases, some may follow back without going through your account (Jonny, 2014).
- ii. **Start liking other people's images:** People like to be appreciated and liked, and they will receive a notification when you do this. For these reasons many will be grateful and follow you in

return. If they do not follow you the first time, keep liking posts from the same people and they will start noticing you after a while and will want to reciprocate (Jonny, 2014).

iii. **Start commenting on other peoples' images:** This can help to create connections that could help you to further grow your account (Jonny, 2014). One final thing you can do on Instagram in order to boost your followers growth is to talk with other people on Instagram with big accounts and ask them to post one or two images from you to their followers (Jonny, 2014). Posting interesting images grows ones account and leads to steady increase in traffic.

4) Blogger

Blogger is a blog-publishing service that allows multi-user blogs with time-stamped entries. It was developed by Pyra Labs, which was bought by Google Inc. in 2003. Generally, the blogs are hosted by Google at a sub domain of blogspot.com. Blogs can also be hosted in the registered custom domain of the blogger (like www.example.com). So, blogspot.com domain publishing will be redirected to the custom domain. A user can have up to 100 blogs per account.



Plate 4: Blogger Home Page (Source: www.blogger.com)

Discussion: Contributions of Social Networks to Tourism Development and Promotion in Nigeria

Of the four social media discussed above, Facebook is the most widely used in Nigeria. This could be as a result of the amount of information that users are allowed to post and share. The frequency distribution table and the figures provided below give eloquent testimony on the level of usage of the studied social networks in Nigeria.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Number of Followers of the Studied Social Networks

S/No	Social Network	Number of Followers
1	Facebook	11 million followers
2	Twitter	1.8 million followers
3	Instagram	3 million followers
4	Blogger	1 million followers

Source: Fieldwork, 2016.

Facebook is the most actively used social network in Nigerian for tourism promotion because of the way it was designed: there is no limited number of likes or friends one can have, and also sharing and posting of information and photos are unlimited. Social networks are now generally accepted medium of communication among government agencies, parastatals, ministries, commissions, etc. For instance, the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) –the apex body in charge of tourism in the country uses Facebook to promote tourism and travel in Nigeria, as well as cultural carnivals and local festivals. NTDC helps in the development of Nigeria's tourism and travel industry as they relate to investments, aviation, maritime, hospitality, government policy, destination trends and directory of leading organisations. Presently, NTDC's Facebook followers are about 3,691. Apart from these cooperate bodies, individuals also use Facebook to promote tourism products. Example at hand is Johnpaul.ezeani@facebook.com. This individual (Mr. Ezeani – a tourism consultant to Enugu State Tourism Board) uses his Facebook homepage to advertise events such as carnivals, festivals, tourism seminars/conferences, tour packages, and international tourism forum. He also provides information on airlines and hotels as well as pictures of his visits to natural and cultural attractions. He equally does consultancy services to individuals intending to visit attractions in parts of Enugu State. Apart from Mr. Ezeani Johnpaul, there are lots of other individuals using Facebook, Twitter handle, Instagram and Blogger to develop and promote tourism in Nigeria.

Blogger is next to Facebook in promoting tourism products. Naija Treks is a travel blog that has been in existence since May 2003, and has been travelling the length and breadth of Nigeria, exploring and documenting its vast tourist attractions. Naija Treks Travel is a duly registered organisation, born out of a deep admiration and love for nature as well as a quest to explore, promote and develop the numerous tourism potentials of Nigeria. Naija Treks Travel uses social networks for several reasons, considering the vast wealth of undeveloped and unharnessed tourism potentials with which Nigeria is blessed. Naija Treks blogger aims to explore, expose and promote use the tool of knowledge to rekindle the pride and love for the African culture in the heart of all mankind.

Apart from the blogger, the organisation uses other social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to develop and promote tourism potentials in Nigeria. It should be noted that Naija Treks started using Facebook in June 2006 with 1,890 subscribers, Twitter in May 2009 with 540 followers and Instagram in March 2011 with 810 followers. Their Facebook site has bigger audience and is used for promoting tourism potentials in Nigeria. Destination sites or attractions in Nigeria are

posted on their social networks and receive good number of likes. Examples of attractions that have been promoted through Naija Trek blogger include Legacy Nigerian Railway Museum in Lagos State, Tinapa Business and Leisure Resort in Cross River State, and Heritage Resources in Niger Delta. The above mentioned attractions hosted by Naija Trek via social media platforms are embraced with 'likes'. Thus, Tinapa Business and Leisure Resort in Cross River State has over 267 likes on Facebook, followed by 62 likes on Twitter and 103 on Instagram. Heritage Resources in Niger Delta has 207 likes on Facebook, 81 likes on Twitter and 131 likes on Instagram.

Another organisation that uses blogger to promote tourism in Nigeria is Travelstart Nigeria, owned by an entrepreneur, Stephan Ekbergh and his blogger page was created in 1999. Travelstart is an online travel agency that uses her blogger to efficiently serve her numerous customers in online flight bookings, car rental, hotel bookings, etc. Their efficiency in communication via blogger has over the years placed them as the leading industry in online travel booking in Nigeria. Apart from their blogger page, Travelstart Nigeria also uses Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to promote tourism potentials in Nigeria. Travelstart blogger homepage introduced a hyperlink to other social networks with a view to widening their reach to potential customers and thus, to promote tourism in Nigeria. Their hyperlink takes viewers to 3 social networks viz: Facebook (with over 2,777 subscribers), Twitter (with 695 followers) and Instagram (with over 708 followers).

Twitter is also used for the promotion and development of tourism in Nigeria. An organisation with a brand name "Come to Nigeria" (see <http://www.cometonigeria.twitter.com>) dedicated their twitter handle to promoting Nigeria's natural, cultural and man-made attractions. The organisation's twitter handle is aimed at promoting and marketing Nigeria to leisure and business visitors, advocate quality improvements to tourism infrastructure and services, and to maximise the benefits of tourism for the improvement of the country. 'Come to Nigeria' twitter handle has 113 tweets, with 1596 followers, and follows 2032 other twitter users.

Just like the other social networks, Instagram is also employed in the promotion of tourism in Nigeria. For example, Jovagotravel.com has been very instrumental in promoting tourism in Nigeria. Recently, Jovago Travel launched an innovative campaign tagged '#mynigeria', an Instagram page that gives social media users the opportunity to upload and share pictures of Nigerian attractions using the hashtag '#mynigeria'. The initiative is geared towards promoting the nation's domestic tourism and hospitality industry. Jovago Travel is also the official hotel partners with Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC). Its operations help to accelerate tourism development in Nigeria. Till date, about 7,469 registered hotels in Nigeria are listed in Jovago Travel's homepage. Apart from Instagram, Jovago also uses Facebook (with 15 million likes) and twitter handle to promote tourism in Nigeria.

Ethnographic sources revealed that social networks are used for many reasons. They help in passing messages across to different users and can be used in advertising of tourism products. Advertising is defined as any paid form of non-personal presentation and the promotion of ideas, goods or services by any identified sponsor (Rowley, 1998). Tourism products in Nigeria are advertised through the four social media platforms studied. As seen in most government tourism organisations, and individual owned establishments, social media platforms are more suitable for public relation purposes. This explains why most of them focus on using social media in their

tourism programs and activities. This view may have informed Rowley (1998) to argue that good public relation promote and protect the image of a company or those of its products, including product literature, exhibitions and articles about the organisation. The effort is concentrated on conversation among people. Thus, the services of Facebook, Twitter handle, Blogger and Instagram focus on conversation and sharing of images and videos. These opportunities created by social media are explored by both government and individuals in promoting tourism events and activities.

The contributions of social media platforms in tourism promotion have been on the increase. Social networks play increasing roles in many aspects of tourism, especially in research, information sharing, decision-making, tourism promotion and communication with consumers/tourists (social sharing of holiday experiences). Tourism destinations benefit the most from the latest development in social networks because they can take advantage of these new tools for organising, developing and marketing tourism packages. Many tourists visit destinations as a result of the information made available to them via social networks. The social networks are made in such a way that they are interactive, timeless, etc. This makes it imperative for the marketers to market their products differently from the standard way of presenting other information (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Social Networks no doubt render a lot of services to tourism development in Nigeria. These services help tourism professionals in advertising tourist sites in Nigeria globally via social networks. Through the social media platforms, inbound and outbound tourists find it convenient to make enquiries about destinations by going through the destination page. Take for instance, if a tourist from Canada wants to visit Nigeria, with the help of social media platforms, the tourist can get adequate information such as attractions, accommodation and transportation in Nigeria. Other pieces of information that can be gotten via social media platforms include the facilities available at the proposed destination, cost of packaged tour to the destination, information about the host community, among others. These will help in increasing the number of tourists and expand tourism development in Nigeria. Again, social media platforms contribute to tourism development in the area of online booking. These platforms have made it easy for tourists to make payment online for reservation of hotels or travels ticket without stressing themselves to get to the destination before making any necessary arrangement. For instance, booking of flight ticket from Enugu to Abuja can be done via the airline's website where the flight schedules are made available. Payment can also be made online for the purchase of flight ticket.

When cultural tourism, sport tourism, business tourism, eco tourism, religious tourism, etc. are promoted through social media by making the information available, these outlets can contribute to tourism development. Events can attract tourists from different parts of the world more if the event is communicated via social media. It is a general belief among social media users that prompt posting of images of an upcoming event attracts lots of fun seekers attention. For instance, the Argungu Fishing Festival which is done once in a year is shared via social media few months to the event's due date and this has helped in popularising the festival. So, people from different parts of the world visit Nigeria for the festival. This increases the rate of tourist flow into Nigeria and also promotes the Nigerian culture. Travel agencies need to represent Nigerian tourism via good photos and graphics in order to provide a tangible image or experience to be consumed by social media users. The use of animations or short video clips of destination sites is advocated. This can enhance

the quality of information advertised (in facebook and blogger) and/or shared among twitter and Instagram users.

Social media platforms also allow people from around the world to interact with a destination through these networks. For instance, the travel blogs in Nigeria can make use of photos of attractions in Nigeria on their blogger homepage so that any tourist who clicks on the blog can see unique natural and cultural heritage that Nigeria is blessed with. The use of social media platforms in tourism development and promotion would enable the tourism industry reach larger number of consumers all over the world and at a relatively low cost. Tourism industries can provide factual and higher quality information via social media that will enable customers to get tourism products and services faster and from the comfort of their homes.

Conclusion

Four social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Blogger) were studied with a view to examining their roles in tourism development and promotion in Nigeria. These social media platforms are the most popular and frequently used networks in Nigeria for the promotion and development of tourism. From the study done, almost all of the tourism activities in Nigeria are being promoted via social networks by different government agencies and individuals or groups. This paper argues that social media platforms contribute to the development and promotion of tourism in Nigeria. The contributions of the studied social media platforms were identified in areas like travel agencies, natural and cultural attractions, hospitality industry, etc. However, in as much as social media platforms help in development and promotion of tourism in the country, users of these platforms are faced with lots of challenges like: lack of internet access in most areas especially in rural areas, high cost of accessing the internet either through cyber café, purchase of data bundle etc., high cost of smart phones used for social networking, etc. It is believed that when these challenges are properly handled, the efficiency that will result will help to advance the country more in terms of technology. Other social networks that are used outside Nigeria which requires high speed internet facilities may be introduced in Nigeria when these challenges are surmounted.

The paper concludes that the use of social media for tourism development and promotion purpose is effective in Nigeria, though it has not been utilized to its full capacity. Government agencies and groups/individuals' examples used in this paper mainly focused their efforts on promotion and service delivery. Thus, they were identified as useful tool for fast spreading of information about tourism activities. The data for this paper shows that tourism industry have found social media to be useful for promoting attractions and other tourism related activities like news on what is happening in Nigeria and other parts of the world. These are done through various social media platforms, which provide opportunities for people to engage in different interactions. Using the right social media platform, will no doubt help in publicising tourism attractions or sites and the features within Nigeria.

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