THE INTERNET: A PUBLIC SPHERE FOSTERING COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND DISCURSIVE ACTIVISM FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
Over the last three decades, development efforts have been focused on participatory processes that seek to empower communities with the skill to take decisions and act for themselves in order to effect social change and attain their own development. However, the arena of communication has witnessed a dramatic change and advancement as a result of the increasing growth and usage of communication technologies especially the Internet. This change has been characterised by express ability of the internet to facilitate information sharing in which whoever has an access to it can produce and broadcast his/her own information for many and all to see. The interactivity which is enabled on the internet, has given rise to a situation where people are becoming tied to one another via the internet. Individuals who before have no opportunity to share their opinions, views and aspirations now have the space to do so and do so freely. This paper therefore looks at the potential of the Internet as a medium of communication with the ability to enable people's participation through the deliberative processes enabled on the Internet by facilitating mutual agreement towards growth and development. Through discussion topics from two groups on facebook, this paper attempts to demonstrate the inherent capacity of the Internet via Social Network Sites in fostering communicative action and deliberative activism. Employing content analysis within the frameworks of Communicative Action and the Speech Act Theory, the comments from discussion topics were analysed to ascertain the communicative intent of participants.

Keywords: Internet, Communicative Action, Speech Acts, Development, Discursive Activism, Social Network Sites.

Introduction

Communication technologies have become an integral part of man's existence and the society in general. The Internet, one of the greatest manifestations of modern communication technologies, has opened up a new lease of life, revolutionising human activities and giving rise to what is referred to as the "e" phenomenon where most of human activity (banking, education, business, and politics) can be carried out online. The Internet, best thought of as an interconnected, global network of computers (and other 'computational devices' such as personal digital assistants (PDAs), phones, and so on), has enabled a process of increased commonality, and sharing of ideas between people on a broader and unrestricted platform. The importance of communication to human development cannot be over-emphasised, as communication in recent times is a key and central factor in development.

Inclusive citizenship has therefore also been a major issue in development discourse. This is because true development, if it must take place, must take into consideration the needs and

aspirations of the people. As such, people's participation and likewise effective contribution to the processes of communication has become key and central to development, and the Internet, a social ecology, exudes a promising potential for people to participate and take control of their situations and cause change through information sharing and deliberation. Thus the space which the internet activates for users to share their views and share information in an unhindered manner can be conceived as an active public sphere. In the words of Dahlgren (2005:148):

> An active and functioning public sphere is understood as a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates, ideally in an unfettered manner.

The above space is therefore what online social network sites facilitates, as individuals congregate as independent beings but dependent on one another as they participate through interaction and information sharing with one another. In light of the above, participation in this sense is crystallised in-terms of the capacity of the platform to enable individuals express themselves freely by sharing information with one another, thereby enhancing civic engagement, deliberation, problem solving, and participation in shaping of culture.

Therefore, such self expression becomes an agency of public participation and facilitates a process through which information becomes a source for social transformation. As such, this paper explores the possibility of how Social Network Sites through the Internet stand as a potential means of communication characterised with the ability to facilitate participation and discursive activisms amongst people to effect change in society through the effective sharing of information and ideas, a potential which is still minimally exploited especially in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of development has over the decades gone through a dynamic treatment. Development as initially conceived by earlier practitioners was mainly concerned with economic growth as measured by the Gross National Product rates and encouragements of all factors and institutions that accelerated and maintained high growth rates such as capital intensive industrialisation, high technology, private ownership of factors of production and free trade (Melkote 1991). It was believed from the above that the advantages of economic advancements from the Metropolitan centres would eventually trickle down to the periphery. However, in recent history, development has been described as:

> A widely participatory process of social change in society intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom, and other valued equalities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment (Rogers 1976).

From the above, therefore, it implies that development is people centred; a process which must take into account the social, economic, political and cultural aspirations of the members of a given society. Hence, communication plays a very vital role in this people centred development. For people's aspirations and desires to be met they need to be heard and likewise communicated to, hence, the need for effective communication to take place. Thus, this has created the shift towards development communication; a process which depends on a heavy reliance on communication channels (interpersonal and mediated) in an effort to achieve meaningful but accelerated development. As a result, people's participation and likewise effective contribution to the processes of communication has become key and central to development, and the Internet,

a social media exudes a promising potential for people to participate and take control of their situations and cause change through information sharing and deliberation.

The conceptual framework of this paper draws its backing from communicative action. The theory of communicative action embodies processes of participatory communication. Participatory communication has been a major feature within the alternative paradigm of development which seeks to enable a common platform for individuals to exchange information and ideas on the basis of mutual understanding to improve their conditions and achieve meaning. Singhal (2004) describes participatory communication as:

> a dynamic, interactional and transformative process of dialogue between people, groups and institutions that enable people, both individually and collectively, to realize their full potential and be engaged in their own welfare.

Therefore, participatory communication involves a process of dialogue between individuals enabling them to share ideas in order to achieve a common meaning and reach a greater understanding of issues being discussed. Participatory communication, though most applied in face to face interactional processes, provides a theoretical basis for this work as the internet in itself facilitates interaction and dialogue between individuals and groups who deliberate, share information and ideas on issues that are of critical concerns to their existence.

It is, however, imperative that we continue this section by understanding communicative action. Communicative action is:

> ...a social action in which the participants coordinate themselves and achieve their goals on the basis of mutual efforts to achieve understanding, a process in which individuals interact and coordinate their action based on agreed upon interpretations of the situation (Habermas 1984).

As such, through communicative action, individuals engage in rational discussion, and in doing so they resist the encroachments of the state and the economy on their private lives; asserting their rights as a public to communicate and reach mutual understanding to take action based on consensus. The key point to note here is not only the free access for interaction and rational discussion facilitated through the internet, but the fact that individual users are aware of its capacity to foster relationships towards collective goals as well as provide opportunity for individuals to carry out various activities which would add meaning to their lives. Hence, according to Marshall (2004: 45);

> More than any other media technology, the Internet has represented the idea of change and newness within contemporary culture. A whole new vernacular has developed from its myriad forms that underline its pervasive influence and its normalization in our lives.

One of the resultant effects of the above described situation is that young people now live their lives completely immersed in technology and are ‘fluent in the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet’ (Prensky, 2005:8). Furthermore, scholars such as Chaffee & Metzger (2001) have observed that the Internet is capable of replacing the “one-to-many” model of traditional mass communication with the possibility of a “many-to-many” web of communication. Any individual with the appropriate technology can now produce his or her online media and include images, text, and sound about whatever he or she chooses.

The conclusion that can therefore be drawn is that the invention of the internet has meant anyone online, with minimum effort, can publish their knowledge and views for any and all to see. In this sense, it holds the promise of fostering public discourse in a wide variety of issues related to the common good (O' Brien 1999).

Consequently, Petric (2006:293), however, argues that 'the Internet is undoubtedly a forum for diverse social actions, where various degrees of communicative and strategic intents can be found'. Yet, to understand and measure uses of the Internet through these lenses, communicative action has to be distinguished at the level of speech acts, where Habermas most comprehensively discussed these concepts. This is because Habermas theory of communicative action provides a theoretical basis for a view of planning that emphasizes widespread public participation, sharing of information with the public, reaching consensus through public dialogue rather than exercise of power, avoiding privileging of experts and bureaucrats, and replacing the model of the technical expert with one of the reflective planner in the sense that common everyday people become planners and solution providers by reaching consensus through dialogue and discourse.
It is the position of this paper that discursive activism is activated when people foster discussions around issues they care about. There are, however, no campaigns around these discussions, simply individuals or online communities that act as fuel, and conversations that act as the vehicle for change. One can further expressly assert that the internet through Social Network Sites presents users with the social resource upon which they can draw in pursuit of their livelihood objectives and these may include networks, connectedness, membership of more formalised groups and relationships of trust, reciprocity and exchange (Putman 1993).

Brief Background On Facebook
Facebook was created by an ambitious Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg. The site, launched in February 2004, took its name (originally "TheFacebook.com") and inspiration from the books of student headshot photos and basic biographical data distributed to Harvard students to tell them about each other (Markoff 2007). Within a day of its creation, 1,200 students had signed up, within a month, half the undergraduate population had joined. It rapidly expanded to provide "networks" for students at other colleges. By September 2005, Facebook claimed that eighty-five percent of all students at the 882 colleges it supported had Facebook profiles, sixty percent of whom logged in daily (Arrington 2005).

A very interesting application on Facebook which enable interactivity is the group application. The group application also allows individuals to create groups and invite others who share the same commitments and interests to join. The group application allows for group members to share information ranging from photos, and recent news, to also sharing opinions and perspectives on issues through the discussion forums available on the group application. Unlike the personal profiles in which post made by an individual is sent to the wall of all his or her friends, the group discussion platform is a lot more private, you can only view discussions and peoples contribution by clicking into the topics on the group discussion forums, and notifications are sent to participants of the discussions.

Nonetheless, the intention of the site to facilitate connectivity between friends and users is underlined by the caption on the login page which reads *"facebook Helps you connect and share with the people in your life"*. What consequently makes facebook a suitable example for communicative action is its ability to enable users leave their comments on virtually everything

they see on their wall or profiles and get quick notifications about activities which relate to their profiles or those of their friends so they could also respond. This interactivity created by the site, which enables dialogue through exchange of texts as if in a face to face communication, makes facebook highly exemplary of enabling communicative action and discursive activism.

Methodology

This research made use of the qualitative research method. Thus, it would be right to say that qualitative research makes an inquiry into meaning and patterns of life and behaviours. However, as part of the data collection methods and techniques, the study used the Participant observation technique and virtual research. Two groups on facebook provided the resources for this paper namely; *'Youths for A Better Future* 'and *'Do More for Nigeria'* the latter being an already existing group, while the former is a group created specifically for this study.

Youths for A Better Future, the group created specifically for the purpose of this study, was created with a total number of 97 members. All together, three topics were posted with an introduction for members to respond to, which serves as an instrument for data collection as the Internet allows for information storage and retrieval at any point in time. The three topics created are: *Is the future bright?, Is unemployment a curse* and *Education in Crisis.* Each topic lasted for the period of six (6) weeks before the responses were collected and analysed for this study. It is imperative to note that participants were allowed to respond and act freely without being told by the researcher that their responses would be used for the purpose of this study.

The second group used for this study *"Do More for Nigeria ",* facilitates a vibrant discussion forum through its group discussion platform. Three topics likewise were chosen from this group under study each having a four-week interval between them. The topics include: *What Do They Have To Offer, The Presidential Aspirants* and / *Have a Question.* The topics used for the study were chosen based on their contemporaneity as at the time of collating the data for the research. However, for the purpose of this paper, two responses each from the topics; '*I Have a Question', &*' *The Presidential Aspirant* 'taken from the group *"Do More for Nigeria* ", as well as the topic '*Is the future bright*[1] taken from the group *"Youths for A Better Future "* will be discussed.

Analysing Conversations as Communicative Action and Discursive Activism

To effectively analyse conversations to reveal the communicative intent of participants, the three subsidiary forms of speech acts (locution, illocution and perlocution) as developed by(Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) were adopted as a framework for the analysis. In its simplest form, a speech act may be defined as an act performed in uttering certain expressions. According to Akmajian 2001:376 (cited in Akhimien 2006):

> To perform a speech act, there must be a speech situation involving a speaker, a hearer and an utterance, the speaker normally would move his jaws and tongue to produce some noise (sound) with which he would perform some acts such as making a statement, asking a question; issuing commands, greeting a hearer or warning him, apologising for wrong act, making promises, or complimenting the hearer.

Howver, the Speech acts theory can be traceable to Austin (1962), an Oxford philosopher of language. In a series of lectures at Harvard, Austin argues that utterances are of two kinds-constatives and performatives. Constatives, to Austin, describe a reality and therefore, may be assessed as either true or false. To state, declare, or explain are in this group, while on the other hand, Performatives, according to Austin, "can never be either true or false". They are used to perform an action, an action that can scarcely be performed with so much precision, in any other way (e.g. I apologise, I welcome you). Thus J. L. Austin and his student J. R. Searles (1971) later reached the conclusion that every utterance or speech act is performative and is composed of three subsidiary kinds of acts;

- Locutionary acts: is the successful production of any meaningful utterance following the conventions or grammar of a language and often seem to be the premise upon which the more interesting areas of illocution and perlocution rest.
- Illocutionary acts: An illocutionary act is the act performed with a locutionary act such as warning, stating, ordering, naming or promising, as such, it is an act performed in uttering a sentence with a performative verb.
- Perlocutionary act: effects produced on the hearer on saying something (Wallis & Shepherd 2002:62).

Thus this paper draws from these subsidiary qualities of speech acts expounded by J. L. Austin to argue and show the communicative intent of users on social network sites. Each topic created on the platform of the group discussion creates a sphere for users and members of the group to participate, sharing their opinions and perspectives to issues raised, thus through their comments they perform various speech act of advising, suggesting, describing, complaining, questioning e.t.c. which are all reflective of communicative action.

Locutionary acts as reflective of communicative action and likewise discursive activism would require comments being viewed as capable of making meaning and likewise reflective of mutual agreement and understanding in view of the feedback gotten from respondents to the topic. Thus, taking a look at the topic; *"Is the future bright",* from the discussion board of the group ' *Youths for A Better Future* \ we trace the elements of locution. Excerpts from the topic and responses are provided below:

Topic:

> *Over the years there has been a recycling of the same names mediating within the political arena as leaders. But still the popular saying youths are the leaders of tomorrow keeps re-echoing every now and then. The same leaders who care less about the youths of the country keep wanting more and more to remain in power to pursue their ill fated policies. Looking at the crop of leaders aspiring to gain political power the situation seems not bright. There are however two things to do, either wait for our tomorrow to come or stand up and make it happen through our talents and creativity.*

Reponses/analysis:

Rl, (Michael)

> *Youths make's up mostly the general populations of any country. Just like here in our country... 1 think most of the problems associated with our youths here is availability of quality information's... As the man who is not informed is deformed... till the youths of generation are ready to take up there place and stand up for what they know is right... most of the social vices that are associated with the average youth have help to drown them in silence and the only way we can do this is to say no to old politicians who gives us peanuts and drag us to fight their selfish war for them while most of their children are abroad schooling.. Let us arise and shine with our talents/creativity only with this can our voice be heard...*

Notice how the first three lines in Michael's comment express an understanding of the position and situation of youths in the country, as a result showing that he has been able to draw reasoning from the topic and the fears it expressed. Likewise in the last four lines, Michael tries to express his view as to what should be done by youths if their situation is to be changed. As such within the context of the topic and its introduction, Michael's comment reveals mutual agreement on the need for action to be taken in order for the youths to become more relevant in the society, therefore making meaning. Meaning in this sense is in response to the requirements of what the topic and in a larger context, what the group members involved in the discussion can benefit from. To further elaborate on locution, we take a look at the second response made to the discussion topic.

R2, (Madugu)

> *Well it myt be totally out of place to say that the future isn't bright becos that would be judging our fate as youths with the poor vision of our present leaders. However what we all need to understand is that in every society there are lapses, in ours it so happens to be that of failed governance, we do not have to sit down and wait for people who do not have plans to improve our society to do something for us, we need to stand up and take initiatives ourselves towards ensuring a good future, and this includes taking action and making our voices heard concerning what we see wrong in our society.*

Again notice how this response reflects the issues raised in the introduction of the topic. The first sentence in the first two lines of this response made by Madugu draws the attention of the reader to the cause of the problem. The second sentence found partly in the second and third lines go on to elaborate on the cause of the problem that youths encounter. Madugu then goes on to suggest in the last three tines what needs to be done to turn around the situation of the youths in the country. As such any reader or group member who comes in contact with the topic and then reads Madugu's response is sure of getting a better understanding of what the topic expresses, and also what should be done if he or she is looking up to a better future. One could therefore, draw from the two responses above, that there is a deep sense of consciousness which is emerging within the Nigerian youths, as deliberations online is capable of creating awareness

towards change of attitudes and behaviour which ultimately can be channelled towards development. This results from the "increase in inequality between the information rich and the information poor' (Rogers 1993: 44) as individuals are now able to access information capable of improving their lives through the internet.

However, looking at illocutionary acts, Searle (1969) adds that for a speech act to be successful it should be able to meet the conditions of felicity; it should be uttered appropriately, be uttered within the right context and all participants exhibit the right attitude to the speech act being uttered. In alt, suffice it to say that illocutionary acts are utterances that constitute acts such as making a statement, asking a question; issuing commands, greeting a hearer or warning him, apologising for a wrong, making promises, or complimenting the hearer. Thus, with this understanding we look at excerpts from two other topics from the group discussions. The topic' *The Presidential Aspirants*', taken from the group. '*Do Afore For Nigeria'* has an introduction which presents the profile of nine presidential aspirants who have indicated their interest to run for the office of presidency and also describes the difference between the present situation and what had occurred in previous elections where so many aspirants contested for the position. Excerpts of the responses again are presented below:

Responses/Analysis:

Rl, (Femi Longe)

> *And maybe it's a good thing there are not so many of them. To stand a realistic chance against the PDF, all we need are a few serious candidates so that people can concentrate their votes. When there are so many opposition candidates, they dilute the process and the opposition sword actually becomes blunted. I think this is a sign of progress and sign that perhaps the political class learnt real lessons from the last elections.*

Communication is complete when there is a feedback; the opportunity for individual users to be able to respond to issues raised on Social Network Sites makes it an exemplary platform for effective communication. Femi here in the first response is able to share his own feelings about the few numbers of candidates because of the availability of the parameters to respond available on Facebook. Notice the first statement in his response *'And maybe it's a good thing there are not so many of them',* hence Femi performs a speech act which expresses his attitude and feeling towards the number of candidates that have indicated their interest to run for president which he feels is good. Hence, the illocutionary point here is the psychological state of Femi. The second sentence goes on to elaborate on the first sentence and then he again makes another expressive illocutionary sentence: *I think this is a sign of progress and sign that perhaps the political class learnt real lessons from the last elections'.* As such what comes to mind at first contact with this comment is that Femi speaks sincerely about the issue raised in his effort to communicate with the topic raised and the rest of the participants in the group. As a result, he expresses a high level of communicative intent as he seeks to achieve mutual understanding within the group.

R2, (Teniola)

> *I'll agree and also disagree with you on that one sir. Maybe it's a good thing that -we have very few people but the question is, are they serious people. Most of these aspirants clearly have nothing to offer (e.g. the journalist-Dele Momodu who has never participated in any thing political and only want to contest because of popularity)*

In Teniola's attempt to respond to Femi's point he makes more than one illocutionary act. The first and second sentences reveals his psychological state of not being sure of whether it's a good thing that the candidates are few; therefore performing the illocutionary act of expressing his feelings towards the preceding comment. On the other hand, the last sentence: *Most of these aspirants clearly have nothing to offer (e.g. the journalist-Dele Momodu who has never participated in any thing political and only want to contest because of popularity)* shows his certainty towards the point he is trying to convey. Thus in communicating with Femi and the rest of the participants to reach a common understanding, Teniola performs an assertive illocutionary act by making what might be considered a statement of fact with the example he puts in parenthesis above. Hence what Teniola succeeds in doing is to provide more information for better understanding concerning the issues raised for better understanding of the participants.

Hence, the illocutionary acts performed above exemplifies a process of dialogic communication which can lead to people's awareness and likewise empowerment towards change. This is what Mefalopulos (2008:224) describes as; 'a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It is also about seeking change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change'.

Unlike the notion of locutionary act, which describes the linguistic function of an utterance, a perlocutionary effect is in some sense external to the performance. It may be thought of, in a sense, as the effect of the illocutionary act. Therefore, when examining perlocutionary acts, the effect on the hearer or reader is emphasized. The perlocutionary effect is not conventional but individual specific as such an illocutionary act can produce different perlocutionary effects from readers or listeners. With these basics we go on to look at perlocutionary acts as reflective of communicative action in discussion topics on Facebook as already established.

The topic, 7 *Have a Question',* taken from the group *'Do More For Nigeria',* borders on the credibility of the aspirants vying for the presidency. The topic has an introduction which quotes the Nigerian national pledge after which the following questions were presented;

Topic:

> *"How many of these politicians, presidential aspirants and so called leaders, even know how to recite the Nigerian pledge correctly? How many of our leaders (both past and present), can boast of doing exactly as promised. Bad roads, low economic development, struggling economic and developmental status, poor infrastructure, poor educational upbringing, oh my god!!! So help us God".* The excerpts of the responses and analysis follow below:

Responses/Analysis:

Rl, (Ofuafo)

> *Ifu take a look back 2 our recent past, you'll find that most of these so-called politicians poses only SSCE certificates only if not even lower than dot. .it's a shame that Nigerians would put their fate into d hands of such people. 1 say Nigeria is developing backwards and people ask me why. Its simple: 50 yrs ago all Nigerians -wanted was a better Nigeria free of racism and indifferences'a nation of oneness and prosperity, yet here -we are 50yrs later and our priorities are set on materials things...latest car. latest phones, fattest bank accounts and so on.....and-we –will stop at nothing to get these things even if it means treating our own blood, our brothers and sisters d same way d white man treated us 50 yrs ago... IT REALLY IS PATHETIC SO HELP USGOD....*

Social Network Sites have the capacity to facilitate interaction. Ofuofo's interaction with the topic enables him provide a meaningful response to the discussion. The perlocutionary effect of the illocutionary acts in the above topic prodded Ofuafo to take an action by commenting on the topic and also produce another act. Ofuofo's action is predicated on a mutual agreement to comment on the topic and share his own opinion on the issues raised. Ofuafo's first phrase *'if you look back at our recent past',* makes reference to a certain past and as a result suggests that he is about to make a statement of fact. Also notice the phrase in the fifth line *'yet here we are SOyrs later',* suggesting that the statements that follow are facts about the present He then goes on in the next lines to express the bad condition in which Nigeria has found itself. He contributes to add meaning and understanding to the topic raised for readers and participants in the group. The second response also expresses a similar tendency. R2, (D'monyAkson)

> *Your Question is very valid In fact a man was disqualified from being a commissioner in Kwara state just because he can't recite the National pledge appropriately. Pathetic you would say. The Nigeria of today needs a total revolution both in the way we do things and in our minds, Enough of all this old cargos trying to take us into the promise land. The height of it is IBB saying he wants to come back, after ruling for nine years and we are still suffering from the bad decisions he made. They should allow fresh minds to rule us perhaps then, promises will be kept.*

D'mony's interaction with the illocutionary force of the topic's introduction again prompts a response which makes him offer an illocutionary act of suggesting a solution to the problem faced in Nigeria as a result of bad leaders who continuously circulate within the corridors of power. As such the effect on the first response by Ofuafo is different from the effect produced by D'mony. Ofuafo complains and describes the situation of Nigeria, while, D'mony in his response, offers a solution to the problem. However, both illocutionary actions made by D'mony and Ofuafo were made with the understanding that the issues raised offer more insight and reach the greater goal of mutual understanding and agreement of readers and the entire participants in the group.

Mutual understanding and dialoguing is evident in online groups and communities on social network sites as can be seen through the lenses of the above excerpt. The response to the topic shows that the respondents have a good grasp of the issue raised by the topic and likewise show an understanding of what is needed to be done, it however clearly expresses the like mindedness of the respondents to the topic which is a characteristic of online groups.

Hence, essential to development, through gaining greater control of the environment, is the voice which is enabled on social network sites. Voice in this sense as it regards the larger realm of social discourse in which ones voice allows one to connect with a larger social body (Smith & Hyde 1991:54) and take part in an organised discourse so as to fuel change, as reflected by the various comments by participants on discussion topics.

Therefore, the actions taken by the participants in the various discussions, exchanging ideas and views through different speech acts show that social network sites empower people with the freedom to express their views (and engaging in discursive activism), and also learn other people's perspective to draw a reasonable conclusion on issues affecting them. This trend can be said to be fast growing in Nigeria, as the free space for interaction and communication is fast gaining grounds amongst the youths especially through social network sites such as facebook.

Conclusion

Indeed, effective communication geared towards development thrives on the sharing of ideas between individuals on a level playing ground where people can meet to express their feelings, views opinions and negotiate values on an equal platform as exemplified on social network sites. Aside offering solutions, users within the group were also committed to the group by being willing to shed more light on the issues discussed to enable greater understanding on the critical issues raised in the group, therefore expressing the communicative intent of members in the group and thus we see them engaging in what can be described as discursive activism, as they share ideas on what they care about.

Hence, people do not just speak for the mere fun of it, they speak because they want to make meaning, inform others and share useful ideas with others so as to evolve constructive decisions. People's participation and likewise effective communication is key and central to development, and the Internet, a social media, exudes a promising potential for people to participate and take control of their situations and cause change through information sharing and deliberation, a space which Nigeria needs to take advantage of.

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