Social Media: An Adult Education Approach for Improving
the Environmental Awareness of Timber Merchants in
Udenu, Enugu State

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Abstract: Environmental awareness is very important for resolving the challenges facing the environment. This study assessed the extent to which social media as an adult education approach could improve the environmental awareness of timber merchants. Descriptive survey design was used for the study. The respondents of the study consist of 357 registered timber merchants in the study area. The data collected for the study was analyzed using percentage rating and mean score. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was validated by three experts. Reliability co-efficient of 0.85 was obtained for the instrument. The findings, among others, were that, 85% of the timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State made use of social media sites especially Facebook and Whatsapp; hence, social media provides opportunity for timber merchants to share ideas on environmental issues through online group discussions. The study concluded that social media could be used to promote environmental awareness on the dangers of negative environmental practices such as deforestation and improper dumping of wastes. These enable members of the society to conveniently participate and respond to information posted in relation to environmental issues.

Keywords: Social media, adult education, environmental awareness, timber merchants, information

1.0 Introduction

Industrialization and rapid growth in the economic sector has threatened the sustainability of the environment. Humans have continued to harness resources in their environment for their survival without making adequate provisions which will enable the environment to regenerate and serve the need of the future generation¹. The author went further to state that this heavy exploitation of the environment could be reduced significantly if individuals such as timber merchants who regularly
make use of environmental resources for day to day economic activities become adequately aware of the dangers of environmental degradation and their roles in sustaining the environment.

Timber merchants refer to those who engage in timber processing for the purpose of making profits. Timber refers to wood processed for use in construction of furniture and buildings or to trees which are meant for such purposes and other related purposes. Hence, for the purpose of this study, timber refers to any form of wood which is to be used for production of pulp, paper, synthetic tiles, and construction of furniture or buildings among others. The activities of timber merchants in the process of timber production lead to some environmental problems such as deforestation, indiscriminate disposal of wood wastes, air pollution among others which challenge sustainable development. Hence, improving the environmental awareness of timber merchants on effective ways for managing the environmental resources such as forest trees is essential for sustainable development.

Environmental awareness is very important for resolving the challenges facing the environment. Environmental awareness is a process which involves the creation of adequate knowledge and understanding among members of the society about their environment, environmental challenges and protection. Environmental awareness would help an individual to recognize the dangers associated with negative environmental practices such as bush burning, improper waste management, and deforestation among others. Therefore, environmental awareness has to do with equipping members of a society with the right knowledge and attitude about the resources in their environment, the challenges militating against the sustenance of the environment and their roles in sustaining their environment. This awareness could be created through various adult education approaches accessible to the people such as social media.

Adult education is an essential tool for improving the knowledge and awareness of the people to help them effectively manage their environment. Adult education is an organized learning process which seeks to equip adults with new knowledge and skill or to update their previous knowledge. Adult education is able to significantly improve the attitude and behaviour of members of the society and help them to think critically and to take responsibility for their environmental activities. Therefore, adult education is the learning process designed to equip youth and adult members of the society with adequate knowledge, skill and attitude which will help them to effectively manage their environment for sustainable development. Adult education improves the environmental awareness of its beneficiaries through means such as social media.

Social media could boast of wide coverage; this makes it a good platform for information dissemination. Social media is an online environment which enables its users to create and share information and ideas virtually from anywhere in the world. Social media tools such as Face-book, Twitter, Instagram and Whatsapp, LinkedIn among others have proved to be very effective and appropriate tools for interaction and communication among users and communities as they boast of very large database with billions of users. More so, environmental education providers could raise the environmental awareness of large population on social media by sharing real time videos or photos on variety of environmental issues such as illegal dumping, flowing of chemical spills in water ways; fires in forests. Therefore, Social media is an online platform which is highly interactive and enables the various users (individual or community) to create, send or receive information which will help them learn of their roles in effectively managing their environment for sustainable development.

Social media as an adult education strategy would improve the environmental awareness of timber merchants so as to help them practice good environmental practices. These environmental management practices which could help timber merchants promote sustainable development include the use of environmentally friendly chemicals for preserving timber, good timber waste management (such as recycling, reuse and safe disposal) cutting trees only from sustainably managed and certified forest and actively participating in reforestation. These environmental management practices could reach timber merchants wherever they might be through social media.

However, social media as an adult education approach for improving the environmental awareness of members of the society is faced with some challenges such as the inability of some the people to use social media sites. Also, some of the information passed through social media could be
misleading as there not adequate control measures to curb the posting of fake or unverified information by individuals. One other challenge facing the use of social media for improving environmental awareness of the people is that it does not afford the beneficiaries of face to face contact with the resource persons. Despite these challenges, it is obvious that social media also possess some credible potential which could make it a very effective approach for improvement of environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State.

Udenu is one of the 17 Local Government Areas in Enugu State, Nigeria. The people in the local government area are predominantly engaged in petty trading and businesses such as timber business among others with very little number of the people working as civil servants. There are 4 timber processing sites in Udenu Local Government Area which is responsible for distributing wood to various communities within and outside the area. These sites are found at Orba, Obollo-afor, Obollo-eke and Amalla. It was also observed that the timber processing sites in Udenu especially that of Obollo-eke serve as distribution site for communities in other local governments such as Igbo-eze, Isiuzo and some communities in Benue State. This has led to constant deforestation of forests in the local government area as the demand for timber continues to increase. These timber merchants seem to be more interested in the immediate profit which could result from felling trees and converting them to planks and beams for sell than in sustaining the forest environment through reforestation.

The government has instituted various task force agencies such as the “produce task force” for guiding the forest resources. However, despite the existence of these taskforce agencies, timber merchants still pay their way through the forest for the purpose of felling trees for their business without replanting the trees. This proves that to curb the rate of deforestation in the area, there is a need to change the attitude of the timber merchants towards environmental resources such as trees. This could be done by improving their knowledge and awareness of the dangers associated with uncontrolled deforestation through adult education approaches for environmental awareness. However, due to the very busy schedule of these timber merchants, it could become difficult for them to participate in face to face adult education approaches for environmental awareness. Therefore, the problem of the study is to assess the extent to which social media tools such as facebook and whatsapp as an adult education approach could improve the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State.

2.0 Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to assess the extent to which social media as an adult education approach could improve the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. identify the social media site used mostly by timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State;
2. ascertain the extent to which social media could improve the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State;
3. determine challenges facing the social media as an adult education approach for improving the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design as the researchers sought to collect data from timber merchants in Udenu so as to assess the extent social media as an adult education approach could improve their environmental awareness. Descriptive survey studies attempt to collect data on, and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population.

The study was carried out in Udenu Local Government Area of Enugu State. Udenu Local Government Area is one of the 17 local government areas in Enugu state with its administrative headquarter in the town of Obollo-Afor. The population of the study consists of three hundred and fifty seven (357) registered timber merchants from the 4 timber processing sites in Udenu local government area of Enugu State. The population is a manageable size. Therefore, the entire population was used for the study. The researchers made structured questionnaire titled “Social Media for Improving
Environmental Awareness” (SMIEA) was face validated by three experts. Cronbach alpha reliability technique was used to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items and the reliability coefficient of 0.85 was obtained. 357 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and collected by the researchers during their union meeting in the four sites. The respondents were enlightened on their contributions to the study. Hence, from the 357 copies of questionnaire distributed, 338 were rightly completed accounting for 95% return rate and was therefore, used for data analysis. Percentage rating and weighted mean was used for data analysis.

Results

Table 1: Percentage ratings of the social media site mostly used by timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State.

| S/N | Item Statement                              | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----|---------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1   | I spend more time on Facebook               | 99        | 29             |
| 2   | I spend more time on Whatsapp              | 77        | 23             |
| 3   | I spend more time on 2go                    | 10        | 3              |
| 4   | I spend more time on twitter                | 12        | 4              |
| 5   | I spend more time on YouTube                | 35        | 10             |
| 6   | I spend more time on Instagram              | 54        | 16             |
| 7   | I do not have access any social media site  | 51        | 15             |
| Total|                                            | 338       | 100            |

Table 1 shows the percentage ratings of the social media site mostly used by timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State. The table revealed that 29% of the timber merchants spend more time on Facebook while another 23% spend more time on Whatsapp. Other social media sites which the respondents spend time on include Instagram (16%); YouTube (10%); Twitter (4%) and 2go (3%). The table also revealed that only 15% of the respondents do not have access to any social media site. Thus, findings from table 1 reveal that 85% of the timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State made use of social media sites especially Facebook and Whatsapp. This is in line with the earlier findings which stated that social media sites have rapidly become a vital communication tool for people as it boasts of broader spread and easy availability. This implies that social media enjoy high level of accessibility among the timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State; hence, making social media a credible medium for passing on information to the timber merchants. Hence, any information placed on social media has the potential of reaching to a large number of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State.

Table 2: Mean ratings on the extent to which social media could improve the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State.

| S/N | Item Statement                                                                 | Mean | Decision  |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------|
| 1   | Provides opportunity for timber merchants to share ideas on environmental     | 2.72 | High Extent|
|     | issues through online group discussions.                                     |      |           |
| 2   | Helps the timber merchants to take note of the environmental management       | 2.51 | High Extent|
|     | practices in other communities such as good timber waste management.          |      |           |
| 3   | Exposes the anti-environmental behaviour of individuals and organizations     | 2.66 | High Extent|
|     | to the public                                                                  |      |           |
| 4   | Discourages deforestation by posting videos of its resultant dangers          | 2.63 | High Extent|
| 5   | Encourages reforestation by posting beautiful pictures of forest trees        | 2.59 | High Extent|
| 6   | Improves environmental knowledge of timber merchants through well             |      |           |
|     | researched post on environmental issues                                      |      |           |
Table 2 shows the mean ratings on the extent to which social media could improve the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State. It revealed that the mean ratings of the respondents on items 1 to 10 are within the mean range of 2.51 to 3.32; the overall mean rating of 2.76 also indicates that social media to a high extent could improve the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State as it has the potential to help the timber merchants take note of the environmental management practices in other communities; discourages deforestation by posting videos of its resultant dangers; encourages reforestation by posting beautiful pictures of forest trees; makes environmental education easy and convenient for timber merchants and provide opportunity for timber merchants to share ideas on environmental issues through online group discussions among others.

The ability of social media to encourage the sharing of ideas and concerns on environmental issues by environmental groups could motivate social media users to change their attitude towards sustainable environmental development. Also, the use of social media for environmental education helps to bring people of like minds together virtually to share ideas and information on environmental issues. This proves that through social media, it could become easy and convenient for timber merchants in various locations to communicate, share ideas and acquire information which will help them to participate actively in protecting the environment. Also, through posts, photos and videos shared on social media sites such as Facebook, the anti-environment behaviour of people would be exposed to the timber merchants in a way that could motivate them to take actions against such behaviour. Therefore, social media to a high extent could improve the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State.

Table 3: Mean ratings on the challenges facing the social media as an adult education approach for improving the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State

| S/N | Item Statement                                                                 | Mean  | Decision     |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------------|
| 1   | Increased risk of fake information as individual could post anything at all      | 2.65  | High Extent  |
| 2   | Inadequate power supply to keep devices for social media switched on            | 2.88  | High Extent  |
| 3   | Social media usage consumes lots of time.                                     | 2.93  | High Extent  |
| 4   | Social media usage demands constant availability of data                      | 3.58  | High Extent  |
| 5   | Poor internet connection could slow down information on social media.          | 2.76  | High Extent  |
| 6   | Poor attitude towards social media                                            | 2.34  | High Extent  |
| 7   | Reduction of personal contact                                                  | 2.52  | High Extent  |
|     | **Grand Mean**                                                                 | **2.81** | **High Extent** |

Table 3 shows the mean ratings of the respondents on the challenges facing the social media as an adult education approach for improving the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State. It revealed that mean ratings of the respondents on items 1; 2; 3; 4; 5 and 7 are
between the range of 2.52 to 3.58 while that of item 6 is 2.34. Therefore, the respondents revealed that the challenges facing the social media as an adult education approach for improving the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State include; increased risk of fake information as individual could post anything at all; inadequate power supply to keep devices for social media switched on; social media usage consumes lots of time; social media usage demands constant availability of data; poor internet connection could slow down information on social media and reduction of personal contact.

This finding agrees with a previous study which revealed that the use of social media for educational or awareness purposes are often done without the face to face interaction between the resource person and the beneficiaries; also, inadequate power supply in remote Udenu areas makes it difficult for the devices used for social media to be kept switched on whenever needed\textsuperscript{16}. These factors could challenge the effective utilization of social media for improving the environmental awareness of timber merchants because the lack of frequent face to face interaction may reduce their interest in the awareness information posted. Inadequacy of power supply may also keep the timber merchants offline at the time when vital information is being posted or discussed on social media groups.

4.0 Conclusion

Environmental awareness is very important for resolving the challenges facing the environment. Social media could be used to promote environmental awareness since it enables members of the society to conveniently participate and respond to information posted in relation to environmental issues. More so, social media enjoy high level of accessibility among the timber merchants; hence, making social media a credible medium for passing on information to the timber merchants. However, inadequate power supply to keep devices for social media switched on and reduction of personal contact could challenge the effective utilization of social media for improving the environmental awareness of timber merchants. However, the study has proved that social media as an adult education approach, to a high extent could improve the environmental awareness of timber merchants in Udenu, Enugu State.

5.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations:

- Timber merchant union leaders should create social media groups through which they would share ideas and discuss environmental issues regularly. This will keep the individual timber merchants updated on emerging environmental issues.
- The various administrators of timber merchant social media groups should designate content control team. This team will be responsible for checking all posts to ensure that all posts in the group are genuine and beneficial.
- Governmental agencies in charge of environment protection should use social media platforms such as Facebook as a means of creating awareness on the roles of citizens in environmental protection. This will make it easier for the information to reach large number of people.

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