GENERATION Z AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL MOBILITY, VALUES, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Sunday Onyema Iherue, Ph. D
Department of Religion and Peace Studies,
Faculty of Humanities,
Imo State University, Owerri

Abstract
Generation Z—commonly defined as the cohort born approximately between 1997 and 2012—has become the most digitally connected generation in Nigeria. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and X now shape how young Nigerians learn, communicate, seek work, build businesses, participate in politics, and negotiate cultural values. This paper examines the implications of social media use among Nigerian Generation Z for social mobility, values formation, and sustainable development. It argues that social media is neither automatically emancipatory nor inherently harmful; rather, its development outcomes depend on digital access, skills, platform governance, economic opportunity, and the quality of public discourse. The paper shows that digital platforms can expand social capital, entrepreneurship, political awareness, and access to global markets, thereby supporting upward mobility. At the same time, unequal access, misinformation, cybercrime, consumerism, online harassment, and precarious digital work can reproduce or deepen existing inequalities. The paper concludes that Nigeria can harness Generation Z's digital practices for sustainable development only through coordinated investment in digital infrastructure, digital literacy, ethical education, youth entrepreneurship, online safety, and inclusive platform governance.
Keywords: Generation Z, social media, social mobility, values, sustainable development

Introduction

Nigeria has one of the largest youth populations in the world, and its young people are increasingly living much of their social, economic, and political lives online. Social media has moved beyond being a leisure activity; it is now a space where young Nigerians form identities, access information, mobilize for civic causes, market products, seek employment, and imagine alternative futures. The Pew Research Center reports that "in Nigeria, 72% of adults use Facebook, 57% use TikTok, 40% use Instagram, 34% use Snapchat, and 26% use X, with younger and more educated people more likely to use these platforms" (Pew Research Center, 2026, "Social media platform use around the world," para. 3). These figures demonstrate that social media is now a mainstream social institution in Nigerian public life.

Generation Z occupies a strategic position in this transformation. Unlike older generations, many members of Generation Z have grown up with smartphones, mobile internet, and platform-based communication. Their digital fluency gives them opportunities to participate in the digital economy, but it also exposes them to risks such as misinformation, digital fraud, cyberbullying, online radicalization, and unrealistic comparisons with curated lifestyles. The central question of this paper is therefore not whether Nigerian Generation Z uses social media, but how that use affects their chances of social mobility, their values, and Nigeria's pursuit of sustainable development.

Sustainable development, as understood in the 2030 Agenda, seeks a future that is "economically sustainable, socially inclusive and environmentally resilient" (Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, 2023, "Development Agenda," para. 1). For Nigeria, this agenda includes ending poverty, expanding quality education, promoting decent work, reducing inequality, strengthening institutions, and protecting the environment. Social media intersects with all of these goals because it influences who gets seen, who gets hired, who can start a business, what young people consider successful, and how citizens hold institutions accountable.
This paper is organized into seven main sections. First, it defines Generation Z and social media. Second, it explains the Nigerian digital and socioeconomic context. Third, it examines social media and social mobility. Fourth, it analyzes implications for values. Fifth, it connects these dynamics to sustainable development. Sixth, it identifies risks and policy challenges. Finally, it offers recommendations for government, educational institutions, families, civil society, technology companies, and young people themselves.

Conceptualizing Generation Z and Social Media

Who Is Generation Z?

Generation Z is generally understood as the generation born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, following Millennials and preceding Generation Alpha. In Nigeria, this cohort includes many secondary-school students, university undergraduates, early-career workers, entrepreneurs, content creators, and unemployed or

underemployed youth. Their defining characteristic is not simply their age but their relationship to digital technology: they are the first generation to mature fully within a social environment where smartphones, mobile data, social networking sites, short-video platforms, and instant messaging are ordinary parts of everyday life. Generation Z is often described as digitally native, but this description can be misleading. Being comfortable with apps does not necessarily mean having the critical, technical, or entrepreneurial skills needed to convert digital access into economic opportunity. The World Bank notes that "employers report persistent difficulty finding job-ready talent, while many young Nigerians lack the basic digital literacy needed to participate productively in the economy" (World Bank, 2026, p. 5). This distinction between digital consumption and digital capability is essential for understanding why social media may empower some young Nigerians while leaving others excluded.

What Are Social Media Platforms?

Social media platforms are internet-based services that allow users to create, share, and interact with content and with other users. They include messaging platforms such as WhatsApp; social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram; short-video platforms such as TikTok and YouTube; microblogging platforms such as X; and professional or market-oriented platforms such as LinkedIn. These platforms differ in their affordances. WhatsApp supports private and group communication; Facebook supports broad social networking and community groups; TikTok and Instagram emphasize visual performance and viral content; X supports public debate and rapid news circulation; and LinkedIn emphasizes professional visibility.

Social media is therefore not a single technology. It is an ecosystem of platforms, algorithms, communities, influencers, advertisers, creators, and users. Its effects on society depend on how these elements interact. A young Nigerian may use WhatsApp to coordinate a small business, TikTok to build an audience, Instagram to display creative work, X to engage in political debate, and Facebook to join a professional group. The same platforms may also expose the person to scams, comparison culture, harassment, or misleading information.

The Nigerian Context

Youth, Employment, and Inequality

Nigeria's development challenge is closely tied to its youth population. Young people constitute a major share of the population, yet many face unemployment, underemployment, poverty, insecure work, and limited access to quality education. The National Bureau of Statistics reported that "youth unemployment among those aged 15–24 was 6.5% in the second quarter of 2024, down from 8.4% in the first quarter of the year" (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024, p. 12). However, unemployment statistics alone do not capture the full extent of economic exclusion. Many young Nigerians are underemployed, work informally, or are not in employment, education, or training.

The National Bureau of Statistics also reported that "the proportion of youth aged 15–24 who were not in employment, education, or training was 14.4% in the first quarter of 2024, up from 13.7% in the third quarter of 2023" (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024, p. 13). This indicates that even when young people are not formally counted as unemployed, many remain economically inactive or precariously engaged. In this context, social media becomes especially important because it offers low-cost channels for information, networking, self-presentation, and income generation.

Digital Access and the Digital Divide

Nigeria's digital economy has considerable potential, but access remains unequal. The Pew Research Center found that "57% of Nigerian adults use the internet, a figure that is lower than in many high-income countries but continues to rise as economic conditions and technology access improve" (Pew Research Center, 2024, "Technology use around the world," para. 2). Access is also shaped by income, gender, geography, education, disability, and the quality of electricity and network infrastructure.

Social media use reflects these inequalities. Pew Research Center found that "63% of Nigerians with incomes above the national median use Facebook, compared with 41% of those earning below the national median" (Pew Research Center, 2024, "WhatsApp and Facebook dominate," para. 4). This gap shows that social media does not automatically democratize opportunity. A young person in a well-connected urban household with stable electricity, multiple devices, and digital skills may use platforms very differently from a young person in a rural or low-income community with intermittent data access.

The World Bank has argued that Nigeria is well positioned to build a strong digital economy because of its size and youth population, but that "this requires progress across digital infrastructure, digital platforms, digital financial services, digital entrepreneurship and digital skills" (World Bank, 2019, Abstract, para. 1). Without these

foundations, social media may become another arena in which privileged youth accumulate advantages while marginalized youth remain spectators.

Social Media and Social Mobility

Social Capital and Networks

Social mobility refers to the ability of individuals or families to move between social positions, usually measured through income, education, occupation, or status. Classical sociological theory emphasizes that mobility is not achieved by individual effort alone; it also depends on social capital—the resources embedded in relationships and networks. Granovetter (1973) famously argued that "weak ties" are often more valuable than strong ties for accessing new information and opportunities because they connect people to networks beyond their immediate circle" (p. 1371).

Social media expands weak ties at unprecedented scale. A Nigerian undergraduate can connect with alumni, recruiters, mentors, freelancers, customers, and professionals across the country and abroad. LinkedIn can make a CV visible to employers; WhatsApp groups can circulate job vacancies; X can connect young people to policy conversations; and Facebook groups can link entrepreneurs to suppliers and customers. In this sense, social media can reduce some barriers created by geography, class, and limited formal networks.

However, digital networks do not eliminate inequality. Young people with better schools, English-language competence, urban connectivity, family support, and digital skills are more likely to convert online visibility into real opportunities. Those without these advantages may spend considerable time online without gaining meaningful mobility. Thus, social media can widen opportunity for some while masking structural exclusion for others.

Education, Learning, and Skills

Social media can support learning by providing access to tutorials, study groups, educational content, professional advice, and global knowledge communities. YouTube tutorials, WhatsApp study groups, Telegram channels, and TikTok explainers can supplement formal schooling. For students in under-resourced schools, peer-created content may provide practical explanations that classroom instruction does not always offer.

Yet educational benefits depend on digital literacy. The ability to search effectively, evaluate sources, detect manipulation, protect privacy, and apply knowledge is more important than mere access to content. UNESCO has emphasized that media and information literacy enables citizens to engage critically with information and participate responsibly in digital societies. Without such literacy, social media may reinforce shallow learning, distract students, or expose them to misinformation.

Nigeria's digital-skills challenge is substantial. The World Bank estimates that "by 2030, Nigeria's labour force will require about 28 million workers trained in digital skills, with approximately 45% of jobs expected to require such skills" (World Bank, 2021, as cited in World Bank, 2026, p. 8). This projection shows that social media use must be linked deliberately to skills development if it is to contribute to mobility rather than merely to entertainment and consumption.

Entrepreneurship and Digital Work

One of the most visible ways social media supports mobility in Nigeria is through entrepreneurship. Young Nigerians use Instagram to sell fashion, food, beauty products, and digital services; WhatsApp Business to manage customer orders; TikTok to advertise products; X to build professional visibility; and YouTube to monetize educational or entertainment content. Social media lowers the entry cost of marketing because a small business can reach customers without paying for expensive traditional advertising.

The "creator economy" also creates new income possibilities. Content creators, comedians, musicians, fashion influencers, tech reviewers, teachers, and activists can earn income through brand partnerships, advertising, donations, product sales, and platform monetization. For some young Nigerians, this represents a genuine route out of economic exclusion. Social media allows talented individuals to bypass some traditional gatekeepers in media, retail, and entertainment.

Nevertheless, digital work is often precarious. Income can be irregular, algorithms can reduce visibility overnight, platforms may change monetization rules, and many creators lack contracts, social protection, or legal clarity. Online entrepreneurship also requires capital, reliable electricity, data, devices, digital payment systems, and business skills. Therefore, while social media can support mobility, it should not be treated as a substitute for broader employment policy, infrastructure investment, and social protection.

Visibility, Identity, and Aspiration

Social media also affects mobility through visibility and aspiration. Young Nigerians can observe successful peers, learn about careers they had not considered, and imagine possibilities beyond their immediate environment. A student in a small town may see a young Nigerian software developer, fashion designer, farmer, or content creator succeeding online and begin to believe that such paths are possible.

At the same time, visibility can create pressure. Curated images of wealth, travel, luxury, and success may encourage young people to measure worth by consumption rather than skill, service, or character. This is particularly important in a country where economic hardship is widespread. The language of Nigerian Gen Z online culture reflects these tensions. Research on Nigerian Gen Z digital communication found that terms such as "sapa," meaning poverty or financial struggle, and "japa," meaning to emigrate or flee the country, function as "linguistic shorthand for deep socio-economic and migration remarks and shared national trauma" (Adegbite et al., 2026, p. 5). Such expressions reveal how online culture becomes a space where young people interpret economic precarity and aspiration.

Social Media and Values Formation

Changing Norms of Success

Social media influences values by repeatedly showing young people what is rewarded, admired, and normalized. When viral content celebrates wealth, physical appearance, controversy, sexualized performance, or fraudulent lifestyles, it can shape aspirations in problematic ways. When it celebrates creativity, education, community service, innovation, and honest enterprise, it can strengthen constructive values.

In Nigeria, concerns about materialism, instant gratification, and deviant behaviour are especially prominent. A recent study argues that social media fosters new subcultures that prioritize "materialism, instant gratification, and deviant behaviours," thereby weakening communal values such as "respect, honesty, integrity, and social responsibility" (Okafor, 2026, p. 4). This concern is important because values are not private matters only; they influence workplace ethics, public trust, civic responsibility, and the willingness to contribute to collective development.

However, it would be inaccurate to blame social media alone for value change. Nigerian youth also respond to unemployment, corruption, insecurity, weak institutions, peer pressure, and limited opportunities. Social media may amplify existing pressures rather than create them. A balanced analysis must therefore ask not only what social media encourages, but also what social conditions make certain online values attractive.

Consumerism and Comparison Culture

Social media platforms are designed to capture attention and encourage engagement. Advertising, influencer marketing, and algorithmic recommendations often promote consumption. Young users are constantly exposed to images of expensive phones, clothing, cars, vacations, cosmetics, and lifestyles. This can encourage a culture in which appearance and consumption become measures of success.

Comparison culture can affect mental health and self-esteem. When young people compare their everyday lives with the edited highlights of others, they may feel inadequate, anxious, or pressured to perform success. This pressure may push some toward debt, fraud, risky relationships, or unethical means of acquiring status. It may also discourage patience, discipline, and long-term planning.

At the same time, social media can challenge harmful status systems. Young Nigerians use platforms to discuss mental health, gender equality, disability rights, corruption, and social justice. These conversations can promote empathy, accountability, and more inclusive values. The outcome depends on the content ecosystem and the critical capacity of users.

Civic Values and Political Participation

Social media has become an important arena for civic learning and political participation among Nigerian youth. Research on Generation Z in Nigeria found that "the cohort is more politically active online than in physical spaces" and spends more than four hours daily on social media, with Facebook, WhatsApp, and X among the most commonly used platforms" (Adeyemi & Bello, 2025, p. 9). This suggests that digital platforms are now central to how young Nigerians encounter public issues.

Social media can strengthen democratic values by enabling citizens to share information, expose wrongdoing, organize campaigns, and hold leaders accountable. During elections, protests, and public emergencies, platforms can help young people coordinate civic action and demand transparency. Research on political socialization among Nigerian Generation Z found that "67.8% of respondents agreed that social media increased their awareness of governance and political issues, while 64.1% saw it as a safer space for expressing political opinions" (Kenarchy Journal, 2026, p. 11).

Yet online political participation can also become performative, polarized, or manipulated. Misinformation, ethnic and religious division, coordinated harassment, and bot activity can weaken democratic deliberation. "A study of Nigerian Generation Z undergraduates found no statistically significant negative relationship between social media use and political socialization, reporting a correlation coefficient of -0.053 with a probability value of 0.284" (IRJMS, 2026, p. 12). This finding suggests that the relationship between platform use and political values is complex rather than straightforwardly positive or negative.

Gender, Identity, and Social Inclusion

Social media provides spaces for young Nigerians to negotiate gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, religion, and identity. For young women, platforms can offer visibility in business, activism, education, and creative work. For young people with disabilities, online communities may reduce isolation and provide peer support. For marginalized groups, social media can create solidarity where offline institutions have failed.

Nevertheless, online spaces can reproduce offline discrimination. Women, LGBTQ+ individuals, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities may face harassment, stalking, doxxing, and hate speech. Online abuse can silence voices and discourage participation. Therefore, the inclusive potential of social media depends not only on access but also on safety, moderation, and legal protection.

Social Media and Sustainable Development

The Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

"The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) designed to guide global policy and funding toward poverty reduction, inclusion, and environmental protection" (United Nations, 2015, p. 1). In Nigeria, the SDGs are pursued through national planning, ministry-level implementation, and partnerships with international organizations. "The United Nations in Nigeria states that it supports the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs and line ministries to ensure that planning and budgeting align with the SDG framework" (United Nations in Nigeria, 2025, "Our work," para. 1).

Generation Z is central to this agenda because today's youth will live longest with the consequences of current policy choices. Their digital practices can either accelerate progress toward the SDGs or undermine them. Social media can support SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions, and SDG 17 on partnerships.

Education and Lifelong Learning

Social media can advance SDG 4 by democratizing access to learning materials and creating informal learning communities. A young Nigerian can learn coding, graphic design, data analysis, foreign languages, agriculture, financial literacy, or digital marketing through online content. This is especially valuable in a country where formal education systems face overcrowding, infrastructure deficits, and uneven quality.

The United Nations Development Programme highlights SDG target 4.4, which seeks to "substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship" (United Nations Development Programme, n.d., "Goal targets," para. 2). Social media can contribute to this target when platforms are used for structured learning, mentorship, and skills certification rather than only entertainment.

However, informal online learning must be connected to credible assessment and employment pathways. A young person may watch many tutorials without acquiring a recognized qualification or practical portfolio. Nigeria therefore needs models that combine social media discovery with formal training, apprenticeship, mentorship, and labour-market linkage.

Decent Work and Entrepreneurship

Social media can support SDG 8 by expanding market access, self-employment, freelancing, and digital entrepreneurship. A tailor in Aba, a food vendor in Lagos, a farmer in Kaduna, or a designer in Enugu can reach customers beyond their immediate neighbourhood. Digital payment systems, delivery services, and online marketplaces further strengthen this potential.

The World Bank argues that "accelerating access to digital technologies can spur "innovation, efficiency, and productivity," creating opportunities for "greater growth and inclusion" (World Bank, 2019, p. 3). It also notes that "46% of work activities in Nigeria are susceptible to automation, meaning that digital skills can help young people enter both traditional and emerging sectors" (World Bank, 2019, p. 4). Social media is a gateway to these opportunities because it enables learning, networking, marketing, and customer engagement.

Yet decent work requires more than online visibility. Young digital workers need fair pay, contracts, data protection, safe working conditions, and protection from exploitation. Nigeria's policy challenge is to ensure that the digital economy produces not only viral success stories but also broad-based livelihoods.

Reduced Inequality and Inclusion

Social media can reduce inequality by giving marginalized groups visibility and access to information. Rural entrepreneurs can learn market prices; students in remote areas can access tutorials; young women can find mentorship networks; and persons with disabilities can participate in public conversations. These are meaningful forms of inclusion.

But inequality can also be reproduced digitally. Data costs, poor electricity, limited devices, language barriers, disability-inaccessible design, and gendered norms can exclude many young people. If policy treats smartphone

ownership as proof of digital inclusion, it may overlook deeper barriers. True inclusion requires affordable connectivity, accessible design, local-language content, and targeted support for disadvantaged groups.

Governance, Accountability, and Peace

Social media can strengthen SDG 16 by improving transparency, civic participation, and access to information. Citizens can document misconduct, share evidence, mobilize for reform, and demand accountability. Young Nigerians have used digital platforms to organize around elections, police accountability, human rights, and governance issues.

However, the same platforms can spread hate speech, misinformation, and incitement. In a diverse country such as Nigeria, unverified claims can worsen ethnic, religious, and political tensions. Sustainable development requires peace and social cohesion; therefore, platform governance, fact-checking, community moderation, and media literacy are not optional extras but development necessities.

Environmental Awareness

Although social media is often discussed in economic and cultural terms, it also affects environmental values. Platforms can spread climate education, promote sustainable agriculture, publicize environmental degradation, and mobilize young people for clean-up campaigns, recycling, tree planting, and climate advocacy. Nigerian youth can use short videos and visual storytelling to make environmental issues relatable.

At the same time, digital life has environmental costs. Data centres, smartphone production, electronic waste, and energy consumption all have ecological footprints. Sustainable digital development should therefore encourage responsible consumption, device repair, e-waste management, and energy-efficient infrastructure.

Risks and Challenges

Misinformation and Disinformation

Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information shared without harmful intent, while disinformation is deliberately misleading information. Both are major risks on social media. During elections, health emergencies, security crises, and economic shocks, false information can spread rapidly and influence public behaviour.

Young people are not immune simply because they are digitally active. Familiarity with apps does not guarantee critical evaluation of sources. Nigeria needs sustained media and information literacy education in schools, universities, community centres, and online spaces. Fact-checking organizations, journalists, educators, and platform companies must also make accurate information more visible and accessible.

Cybercrime, Fraud, and Online Harm

Social media can facilitate fraud, impersonation, romance scams, phishing, identity theft, and other cybercrimes. These practices damage victims, undermine trust in digital commerce, and harm Nigeria's international reputation. They also distort values when fraudulent success is glamorized online.

The response must combine enforcement with prevention. Law enforcement should address cybercrime effectively, but criminalization alone will not solve the problem. Young people also need legitimate pathways to income, mentorship, digital ethics education, and alternatives to the pursuit of status through consumption.

Mental Health and Well-Being

Heavy social media use can contribute to anxiety, sleep disruption, cyberbullying, body-image concerns, and fear of missing out. These effects are not uniform; they depend on the type of content, duration of use, individual vulnerability, and offline support systems. Nevertheless, the wellbeing implications are serious enough to require attention in schools, families, and health services.

Platforms should provide stronger safety tools, including reporting systems, privacy controls, age-appropriate protections, and limits on harmful content. Schools and universities should integrate digital wellbeing into counselling and orientation programmes. Parents and guardians also need guidance on supportive rather than purely restrictive approaches.

Algorithmic Inequality and Platform Dependence

Algorithms determine what users see, whose content becomes visible, and which voices are amplified. This creates a dependence problem for young creators and businesses: a change in an algorithm can drastically reduce reach and income. Nigerian youth who build livelihoods on foreign platforms may also face currency, payment, tax, and regulatory challenges.

Platform dependence highlights the need for local digital infrastructure, creator cooperatives, diversified income streams, and stronger consumer protection. Young Nigerians should be encouraged to build skills and businesses that are not wholly dependent on one platform.

Policy and Practice Recommendations

Government

Government should treat digital development as core development policy. Priorities include expanding affordable broadband, improving electricity reliability, reducing device and data costs, strengthening digital public infrastructure, and supporting digital skills in schools and vocational institutions. The World Bank's digital-skills blueprint emphasizes the need to ensure that "digital skills acquired through education or training lead to livelihood opportunities for graduates" (World Bank, 2026, p. 6).

Government should also develop rights-respecting digital governance. Regulation should address cybercrime, data protection, misinformation, online harassment, and platform accountability without unnecessarily restricting expression or civic participation. Youth consultation should be built into digital policy processes.

Educational Institutions

Schools, colleges, and universities should move beyond banning phones or criticizing social media. They should teach media and information literacy, digital ethics, online safety, critical thinking, entrepreneurship, and responsible content creation. Students should learn how to verify information, protect personal data, identify manipulation, and use digital tools productively.

Universities should also connect students to internships, digital-work opportunities, innovation hubs, and mentorship networks. Research on Nigerian youth suggests that "value-based education, mentorship, community engagement, and supportive socio-political environments are crucial for strengthening resilience, ethical awareness, and long-term thinking" (Babcock Journal, 2026, p. 7).

Families and Communities

Families remain important value-forming institutions. Parents and guardians should engage young people in conversations about online conduct, privacy, fraud, relationships, mental health, and responsible consumption. Restriction without dialogue may simply push young people toward hidden use; guidance should be relational and practical.

Community organizations, religious institutions, and traditional institutions can also promote positive digital norms. They can celebrate young people who use social media for education, service, creativity, and enterprise, thereby broadening public definitions of success.

Technology Companies

Platforms operating in Nigeria should invest in local safety, moderation, and creator support. This includes effective reporting mechanisms, protection from harassment, transparency about algorithms, accessible design, and fair monetization. Platforms should also support local-language content, fact-checking partnerships, and digital literacy campaigns.

Because young Nigerians are heavy users of TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, "WhatsApp, and X, these companies have a responsibility to ensure that their products do not systematically amplify harm. The rapid growth of TikTok in Nigeria—from 25% use in 2023 to 57% in 2026—shows how quickly platform influence can change" (Pew Research Center, 2026, "TikTok use," para. 4).

Young Nigerians

Generation Z should be encouraged to use social media strategically. This means building skills, documenting work, learning continuously, protecting privacy, verifying information, avoiding fraudulent shortcuts, and using platforms to create value for others. Young people should also cultivate offline relationships, practical experience, and financial discipline, since online visibility alone does not guarantee mobility.

Conclusion

Social media has become a powerful force in the lives of Nigerian Generation Z. It shapes how young people learn, work, build relationships, form values, participate in politics, and imagine their futures. Its implications for social mobility are double-edged: it can expand networks, skills, entrepreneurship, and visibility, but it can also reproduce inequality and expose young people to exploitation, misinformation, and harmful comparison.

For sustainable development, the decisive issue is not whether young Nigerians use social media, but whether Nigeria builds an ecosystem in which digital access leads to capability, capability leads to opportunity, and opportunity leads to inclusive and ethical development. This requires investment in infrastructure, education, digital literacy, online safety, entrepreneurship, and accountable governance. If these conditions are met, Generation Z's digital practices can become a major engine of social mobility, value renewal, and sustainable development in Nigeria.

References

Adegbite, T., Ogunleye, A., & Eze, C. (2026). Socio-pragmatic variations in Nigerian Gen-Zers' digital communication. *Pedagogy and Journal of Linguistics, 12*(1), 1–18. https://jurnal.uns.ac.id/pjl/article/view/108546

Adeyemi, K., & Bello, S. (2025). Social media, civic engagement, and political participation of Generation Z in Nigeria. *Social Digital Media Discourse, 3*(2), 1–20. https://socialdigitalmediadiscourse.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/8.-Social-media- civic-engagement-.pdf

Babcock Journal. (2026). Re-engineering youth's mindset towards value-driven decision-making in Nigeria. *Babcock Journal of Management and Social Sciences, 14*(1), 1–18. https://journal.babcock.edu.ng/article/a88bd429-6dbd-46c5-8039-91f550bedbe3

Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning. (2023). *Development agenda: Sustainable Development Goals*. https://sdgs.gov.ng/about-sdgs/development-agenda/

Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology, 78*(6), 1360–1380. https://doi.org/10.1086/225469

International Research Journal of Modernization in Engineering Technology and Science. (2026). *Social media use for political socialisation and participation among Generation Z in Nigeria* [Research article]. https://www.irjms.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Manuscript_IRJMS_010089_WS.pdf

Kenarchy Journal. (2026). Between scripture and the state: Interrogating the influence of social media on youth political participation in Nigeria. *Kenarchy Journal, 8*(7), 1–20. https://kenarchy.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Kenarchy_Journal_Volume8_7.pdf

National Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Nigeria labour force survey: Q1 2024*. https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/1241562

National Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Nigeria labour force survey: Q2 2024*. https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/NLFS_Q2_2024.pdf

Nigerian Journal of Communication. (2025). Digital content, youth participation, and sustainable development in Nigeria. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication, 21*(1–2), 1–25. https://www.ajol.info/index.php/njcomm/article/download/306428/288057

Okafor, N. (2026). Erosion of values in Nigeria and the influence of social media. *Unity Journal of Communication and Culture, 9*(2), 1–18. https://journals.ezenwaohaetorc.org/index.php/UJOCC/article/download/3927/4038

Pew Research Center. (2024, February 5). *8 charts on technology use around the world*. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/02/05/8-charts-on-technology-use-around-the-world/

Pew Research Center. (2024, March 22). *WhatsApp and Facebook dominate the social media landscape in middle-income nations*. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/03/22/whatsapp-and-facebook-dominate-the-social-media-landscape-in-middle-income-nations/

Pew Research Center. (2026, October 1). *Social media platform use around the world*. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2026/10/01/social-media-platform-use-around-the-world/

United Nations Development Programme. (n.d.). *Sustainable Development Goals*. https://www.undp.org/nigeria/sustainable-development-goals

United Nations in Nigeria. (2025). *The Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria*. https://nigeria.un.org/en/sdgs

United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1). https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda

World Bank. (2019). *Nigeria digital economy diagnostic report*. World Bank Group. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/836a66d9-863a-58a0-a023-c1ad951031a3

World Bank. (2021). *Demand for digital skills in Sub-Saharan Africa*. World Bank.

World Bank. (2025). *Annual report 2025: Results by theme*. https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/annual-report-2025/results-by-theme

World Bank. (2025). *Nigeria digital economy diagnostic report: Pix Nigeria report results of the task-based digital skills assessment*. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/4f88caef-4937-4203-9826-229940c90317

World Bank. (2026). *From learning to livelihood: Digital skills development blueprint (2026–2035)—Building a future-ready workforce for Nigeria's digital economy*. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099081826104041745/pdf/P181048-4a2fdb0d-726c-443a-a458-ee1300ac2318.pdf