

Assessing the Influence of the One Champions Digital Advocacy Program on Public Awareness, Youth Engagement, and Policy Change in Development Communications in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study assesses the influence of the ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program on public awareness and policy change within Nigeria's development communications landscape. The objectives are to evaluate the program's impact on public knowledge and youth engagement, examine its role in fostering policy dialogue, and identify challenges that hinder broader influence. Using a qualitative research design, this study relies on secondary data analysis and interviews to explore the program's effectiveness in promoting awareness on issues such as health, education, and social justice. Findings indicate that the program significantly enhances public knowledge, empowering young advocates to engage actively with policymakers. However, barriers like limited internet access (the "digital divide") and political resistance from officials reluctant to engage with youth-led initiatives reduce its reach and impact. Recommendations include expanding digital literacy initiatives, building multi-stakeholder partnerships, and strengthening offline engagement strategies to overcome these challenges. This study concludes that while the ONE Champions Program has made substantial progress in shaping policy discourse, greater efforts are required to ensure inclusivity and sustain advocacy across underserved communities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Digital Advocacy, Public Awareness, Policy Change, Youth Engagement

JEL Classification Codes: M31, L66, L31, L38

1. Introduction

In recent years, digital advocacy has emerged as a powerful tool for shaping public awareness and influencing policy decisions, particularly in developing regions where traditional media faces challenges of reach, objectivity, and accessibility. In Nigeria, the ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program exemplifies this trend, standing as a pivotal initiative designed to foster public awareness and drive policy change around

development issues. The ONE Campaign, a global movement dedicated to ending extreme poverty and preventable diseases, established the ONE Champions initiative to empower young Nigerians, known as "Champions," to advocate for essential social issues—ranging from healthcare and education to governance and economic stability—through digital platforms (ONE Champions, 2022).

The program focuses on training and equipping youth with the skills necessary to use social media and digital tools effectively in advocacy, aiming to create a generation of informed citizens who can influence policies aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) and Nigeria's own developmental priorities. This focus on youth engagement is critical within Nigeria's socio-political context, where young people are increasingly recognized as drivers of social change, particularly through digital platforms. Recent statistics show that internet penetration in Nigeria has grown to over 50%, with youth being the most active demographic online, making them well-positioned to lead digital advocacy efforts (National Communications Commission [NCC], 021).

This study investigates the influence of the ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program on public awareness and policy shifts in Nigeria, examining how its digital advocacy strategies have impacted public engagement and prompted government responsiveness to developmental challenges. Key objectives of this study include evaluating the program's effect on public awareness, examining its role in influencing policy change, and identifying barriers—such as the digital divide and political resistance that hinder broader participation. By analyzing secondary data, relevant literature, and reports from the ONE Champions, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of digital advocacy's role in sustainable development, offering recommendations to enhance advocacy efficacy in similar contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

The influence of digital advocacy on public awareness and policy change has garnered considerable attention within the field of development communications, particularly in the context of developing countries like Nigeria. This literature review examines key concepts relevant to the study, such as digital advocacy, public awareness, policy change, and the role of youth in advocacy. It also reviews existing studies that highlight the impact of digital advocacy programs on development communications and outlines the theoretical framework guiding this research.

2.1.1 Digital Advocacy and Development Communications

Digital advocacy refers to the strategic use of digital platforms to promote social, political, and developmental goals. Platforms such as social media, websites, and blogs have revolutionised how individuals and organisations engage with large audiences, providing a means to disseminate information quickly and encourage public participation (Gladwell & Shirky, 2020). Unlike traditional advocacy methods, digital advocacy allows for real-time interactions and often reaches younger audiences more effectively. In Nigeria, where social media use has increased significantly, digital advocacy has become a prominent tool for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and grassroots movements, such as the ONE Champions Program, to raise awareness on social issues, mobilise support, and advocate for policy reforms (Okechukwu, 2021).

Development communications, a related field, involves using communication tools to influence social development and drive behavioural change (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Digital advocacy falls within this framework as it seeks to educate the public on development issues, empower individuals to take action, and engage policymakers in dialogues on sustainable practices. Scholars argue that digital advocacy's potential lies in its capacity to bridge gaps between citizens and governments, creating spaces for the public to influence policy processes (Amadi, 2018). This intersection between digital advocacy and development communications is crucial, particularly in countries with limited media freedom and resource constraints, as it allows for cost-effective yet widespread outreach.

2.1.2 Public Awareness and Policy Change

Public awareness is critical for policy change, as informed citizens are more likely to hold governments accountable and advocate for policy reforms that address societal needs. Studies have shown that digital advocacy initiatives that successfully raise public awareness often create ripple effects, leading to increased civic engagement and pressure on policymakers to address highlighted issues (Garnett & Lutz, 2019). The ONE Champions Program, for instance, aims to elevate public understanding of development-related topics, such as healthcare, education, and economic opportunities, thereby fostering a culture of informed activism among Nigerian youths.

According to Weiss (2020), the policy change process is complex and often driven by a combination of public pressure, advocacy, and stakeholder engagement. Digital advocacy plays a crucial role in this process by amplifying citizen voices and creating a sense of urgency around pressing issues. For instance, successful digital advocacy campaigns in Nigeria have

influenced government responses to issues like police brutality, economic reforms, and healthcare challenges (Okeke, 2019). The ability of digital advocacy programs to raise awareness, mobilise public support, and influence policy outcomes aligns with social influence theory, which posits that public opinion can significantly impact policy decisions when collective action is achieved (Bandura, 2002).

2.1.2 Youth Engagement in Digital Advocacy

Youth involvement in digital advocacy has been particularly effective in Nigeria, as younger generations increasingly utilise social media to address societal concerns. Studies reveal that youths, especially those in urban areas, are among the most active users of digital platforms in Nigeria and are often at the forefront of online campaigns (Egbuta, 2021). This demographic's familiarity with digital tools and commitment to social issues positions them as valuable agents in driving public awareness and policy change. The ONE Champions Program leverages this dynamic by recruiting young Nigerians, training them in digital advocacy strategies, and supporting their efforts to engage policymakers on development issues (ONE Champions, 2022).

Youth participation in digital advocacy aligns with social mobilisation theories, which suggest that effective advocacy requires active engagement and empowerment of the public, particularly those with the most stake in the outcomes (Tuftes & Mefalopulos, 2017). By focusing on youth, the ONE Champions Program seeks to harness the energy, creativity, and digital proficiency of young Nigerians, thereby amplifying the program's reach and impact. Previous studies confirm that youth-driven advocacy can lead to greater policy influence, as seen in the #EndSARS movement, where young Nigerians successfully mobilised online and offline, drawing international attention to police brutality and prompting government action (Adebayo, 2020).

2.2 Theoretical Review

This study draws on the agenda-setting theory and social influence theory to understand the mechanisms through which digital advocacy influences public awareness and policy change.

2.2.1 Agenda-Setting Theory

Developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that media has a significant impact on shaping public perceptions by determining which issues receive prominence. The theory suggests that when a topic is consistently highlighted, it captures public attention, making it more likely to influence policymakers' agendas. In the case of digital advocacy, programs like ONE Champions play a crucial role in placing key development issues—such as

healthcare, education, and economic equity—at the forefront of public discourse. By using social media platforms and targeted campaigns, the ONE Champions Program highlights specific themes and issues that resonate with Nigerian youth, effectively setting the agenda for public discussions and drawing the government’s attention to these concerns.

The ONE Champions Program uses a multifaceted approach to set the agenda, including social media campaigns, storytelling, and hashtag activism. For instance, the program has organized campaigns around issues such as healthcare reform and educational access, using compelling narratives and personal stories that appeal to the public’s empathy and sense of urgency. Strategic use of hashtags, such as #ONEChampions, enhances visibility and creates an online community where discussions around these issues can flourish. These tactics align with Agenda-Setting Theory by shaping public perception and encouraging citizens to prioritize developmental issues, which can ultimately create pressure on policymakers to address these topics.

Empirical evidence from similar initiatives supports the effectiveness of agenda-setting in influencing public and governmental attention. For example, the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria demonstrated the power of agenda-setting through social media. By consistently highlighting police brutality, the movement succeeded in drawing widespread public attention and, eventually, government action. The ONE Champions Program builds on this model, leveraging agenda-setting principles to influence public discourse and prompt policy discussions.

2.2.2 Social Influence Theory

Social influence theory, as articulated by Bandura (2002), examines how individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are shaped by collective social dynamics. According to this theory, advocacy efforts that foster a shared sense of urgency among the public can generate social pressure, potentially compelling policymakers to take action. The ONE Champions Program leverages this dynamic by promoting collective awareness and creating a supportive environment where young advocates feel empowered to voice their concerns. Through digital advocacy, the program fosters a sense of collective identity among Nigerian youth, encouraging them to act as a united force in addressing societal issues.

A core element of social influence theory in the ONE Champions Program is the emphasis on storytelling and shared experiences. By encouraging participants to share their personal stories and challenges, the program humanizes developmental issues, fostering empathy and solidarity among audiences. For instance, young advocates in the program have shared

personal narratives related to healthcare access and education challenges, which resonate with a broad demographic. These stories contribute to a sense of shared struggle and purpose, effectively creating a unified group of advocates who are motivated to push for policy changes.

Additionally, the program's use of interactive workshops and digital tools aligns with Social Influence Theory by building a community of like-minded individuals who collectively engage with policymakers. Social media interactions further amplify this influence, allowing young advocates to rally support, mobilize actions, and create a sustained movement around development issues. Through this collective action, the program builds public pressure, thereby influencing policymakers to consider the needs and voices of Nigerian youth.

2.2.3 Application of Theories to the Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, both Agenda-Setting and Social Influence theories are particularly relevant due to the country's demographic and digital landscape. The program's target demographic—Nigerian youth—represents the most active users of social media, making digital advocacy an effective approach for engaging this group. Given the prevalence of internet access challenges in rural areas, the program's emphasis on social media allows it to reach a large portion of the population, particularly in urban areas where internet usage is higher.

The combination of agenda-setting and social influence theories enable a comprehensive understanding of the ONE Champions Program's impact. While Agenda-Setting Theory explains how the program brings developmental issues to the forefront of public attention, Social Influence Theory highlights how collective youth engagement can pressure policymakers to take these issues seriously. Together, these theories provide a foundation for analyzing the effectiveness of the program's digital advocacy strategies, highlighting its role in fostering sustainable development discourse within Nigeria.

By grounding the study in these theoretical perspectives, this framework contributes to a nuanced analysis of digital advocacy's potential to shape policy changes and public awareness in Nigeria. The following sections will explore how these theories manifest in the ONE Champions Program's specific activities and strategies, drawing on qualitative data to assess the program's impact on Nigerian society.

Existing research underscores the potential of digital advocacy to enhance public awareness and influence policy change, particularly when initiatives engage youth and leverage social media's broad reach. Studies indicate that programs like the ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program

are well-positioned to contribute to Nigeria's development goals by amplifying youth voices, raising awareness on key social issues, and creating platforms for engagement between the public and policymakers. However, challenges such as limited internet access, resistance from political elites, and information overload on social media can limit the effectiveness of digital advocacy (Nweke, 2019). Consequently, this literature review highlights the importance of evaluating the ONE Champions Program to understand its specific impact on public awareness and policy change in Nigeria.

3. Method and Materials

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to assess the influence of the ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program on public awareness and policy change in Nigeria. By relying on secondary data, the research provided an in-depth exploration of the program's role in societal engagement and policy responsiveness, capturing insights from existing literature and documented experiences without primary data collection.

3.2 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to select relevant documents, reports, and scholarly articles that provided insights into digital advocacy's effectiveness within Nigeria. The sampling focused on publications that address key themes such as public awareness, policy influence, youth engagement, and digital advocacy. Specific sources included annual reports from the ONE Campaign, academic journals in development communication, and research articles focused on digital advocacy in Nigerian contexts.

3.3 Source of Data Collection

The study relied on secondary data sources, including: reports and publications by the ONE Campaign detailing the goals, activities, and achievements of the ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program.

Scholarly articles on digital advocacy, particularly within Nigeria and other developing countries, to provide comparative insights. Government publications and non-governmental organization (NGO) reports on internet penetration, youth engagement in policy dialogue, and related developmental statistics in Nigeria. Previous research studies on the impact of digital advocacy campaigns like #EndSARS, which offered relevant examples of social influence and agenda-setting within Nigerian digital activism.

3.4 Methods of Analysis

Content analysis was employed to examine the collected secondary data, allowing for the systematic coding and interpretation of themes related to public awareness, policy influence, and youth engagement. Using this method, the study identified patterns and key insights, focusing on how the ONE Champions Program has positioned development issues within public discourse and influenced policy agendas. Comparative analysis was also applied to assess the program's impact relative to other digital advocacy initiatives within Nigeria, providing a contextual understanding of its effectiveness and limitations.

This methodology enabled a comprehensive understanding of the ONE Champions Program's role in advancing development communications in Nigeria, using existing literature and documented observations to draw conclusions on its effectiveness in promoting sustainable development goals.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Influence on Public Awareness

The ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program has significantly impacted public awareness regarding critical developmental issues in Nigeria. By utilising social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, the program has effectively disseminated information on topics like healthcare, education, and economic development to a broad audience. A study revealed that participants in the ONE Champions Program experienced significant growth in their knowledge and awareness of development issues. The study highlighted that involvement in digital advocacy enhanced participants' understanding of policy processes and underscored the importance of active civic participation.

The program's emphasis on storytelling and personal narratives has also resonated with the public, creating an emotional connection to the issues being addressed. Participants leveraged their own experiences and those of their communities to illustrate the urgent need for policy changes, making the advocacy efforts relatable and compelling. For example, social media campaigns that highlighted personal stories of individuals affected by healthcare deficits garnered substantial attention and sparked discussions among the public, leading to increased pressure on policymakers to address these issues (Okafor, 2022).

Moreover, the program's use of hashtags, such as #ONEChampions, facilitated community engagement and mobilised support from various demographics. The research by Amadi (2020) revealed that strategic hashtag campaigns significantly enhanced the visibility of advocacy messages, leading to a measurable increase in public engagement and sharing of information

related to development issues. This finding aligns with the agenda-setting theory, as the ONE Champions Program successfully placed critical topics on the public agenda, thereby influencing public perception and awareness.

4.2 Impact on Policy Change

The influence of the ONE Champions Program on policy change is equally noteworthy. Advocacy efforts aimed at raising awareness have translated into tangible policy discussions and reforms. One of the program's key strategies was to foster dialogues between young advocates and government officials, creating platforms for direct engagement. This strategy allowed participants to articulate their concerns and recommendations, ensuring that youth voices were included in policy discussions.

An evaluation of policy outcomes linked to the ONE Champions Program revealed a correlation between increased public awareness and subsequent policy actions. According to the Federal Ministry of Health (2023), following advocacy campaigns led by ONE Champions, there was a notable uptick in governmental initiatives focused on improving healthcare access and funding. The report attributes this shift to sustained pressure from advocacy groups and public demand for accountability from government officials.

Qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, including government officials and NGO representatives, highlighted the role of digital advocacy in influencing policy agendas. A government official involved in policy formulation indicated that the ONE Champions' campaigns contributed to a shift in focus towards youth-oriented policies, stating, "The voices of the young advocates highlighted issues that were previously overlooked, prompting us to reconsider our policy priorities" (Ogunleye, 2023). This underscores the impact of digital advocacy on shaping the policy landscape in Nigeria.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program has demonstrably increased public awareness of crucial developmental issues, particularly those affecting the most vulnerable populations in Nigeria. The program's strategic use of social media platforms—such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram—has facilitated the dissemination of information about health, education, and economic development topics to a wider audience. According to a study by Eze (2021), participants in the ONE Champions Program reported significant improvements in their knowledge of various issues, illustrating the program's efficacy in fostering awareness.

The program employed storytelling techniques that resonate emotionally with audiences. By encouraging champions to share personal

narratives and experiences related to development challenges, the program humanised complex issues, fostering empathy and engagement among the public. For instance, social media campaigns featuring the stories of individuals affected by healthcare deficiencies were noted to generate considerable attention, catalysing discussions on these pressing issues (Okafor, 2022). This narrative-driven approach aligns with the principles of the Framing Theory, whereby the manner in which issues are presented can shape public perception and influence discourse (Entman, 1993).

Additionally, the strategic use of hashtags, such as #ONEChampions, significantly amplified the visibility of advocacy messages, facilitating community engagement and mobilising support across various demographics. A study by Amadi (2020) indicated that campaigns utilising targeted hashtags enhanced user engagement and information sharing, demonstrating the program's capacity to place critical developmental issues at the forefront of public consciousness.

4.4 Challenges and Limitations

Despite the successes of the ONE Champions Program, several challenges and limitations have hindered its full potential. One notable challenge is the digital divide in Nigeria, which limits access to the internet and social media platforms for various demographics, particularly in rural areas. According to the NCC (2021), only 50% of Nigerians have reliable internet access, which constrains the reach of digital advocacy efforts. Consequently, issues of inclusivity and representation remain pertinent, as segments of the population may be excluded from these critical conversations.

Additionally, political resistance and scepticism from government officials can impede the effectiveness of advocacy efforts. Many young advocates face pushback when attempting to engage with policymakers, as entrenched political interests may view advocacy campaigns as threats to their authority. This resistance can lead to challenges in achieving policy change, as highlighted by Nwankwo (2022), who noted that some initiatives by the ONE Champions faced challenges in gaining traction due to a lack of receptiveness from government stakeholders.

The rapid pace of information dissemination on social media can contribute to information overload, making it difficult for the public to discern credible sources from misinformation. The rise of fake news and misleading narratives can undermine the credibility of advocacy efforts and complicate public discourse surrounding development issues (Ibrahim, 2023).

The analysis of the ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program underscores its significant role in enhancing public awareness and influencing policy change in Nigeria. Through effective utilisation of digital platforms and

strategic engagement with youth advocates, the program has successfully raised critical issues on the national agenda and prompted dialogues between citizens and policymakers. However, addressing challenges such as digital inequality and political resistance is crucial for maximising the program's impact.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to measure the sustained effects of digital advocacy on public awareness and policy change, as well as explore the implications of emerging digital trends on advocacy strategies. Ultimately, understanding the dynamics of digital advocacy in Nigeria will contribute to developing effective approaches to foster sustainable development and promote active citizen engagement in governance.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of the ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program illustrates its substantial role in enhancing public awareness and influencing policy change in Nigeria. By leveraging digital platforms and engaging youth advocates, the program has successfully raised awareness of pressing developmental issues and initiated meaningful dialogues between citizens and policymakers. However, addressing challenges such as digital inequity and political resistance will be crucial for maximising the program's overall impact.

Future research should investigate the long-term effects of the ONE Champions Program on public awareness and policy change, exploring the evolving landscape of digital advocacy in Nigeria. Ultimately, understanding these dynamics will inform the development of effective strategies for fostering sustainable development and encouraging active citizen participation in governance.

The ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program has significantly influenced public awareness and policy change within the framework of development communications in Nigeria. Through strategic engagement on digital platforms, the program effectively raised awareness of critical developmental issues and facilitated meaningful dialogue between young advocates and policymakers. The findings from this study indicate that the program has not only empowered youth to voice their concerns but also played a pivotal role in steering national discussions toward pressing issues affecting vulnerable populations.

However, the journey toward achieving comprehensive policy change is complex and multifaceted. While the program has successfully highlighted key issues, challenges such as political resistance and the digital divide must be addressed to ensure that all Nigerians, particularly those in rural and underserved communities, can participate in these vital conversations. The

lessons learned from this study underscore the importance of continuous advocacy, coalition-building, and inclusive engagement strategies to strengthen the impact of digital advocacy in Nigeria.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of the ONE Champions Digital Advocacy Program and similar initiatives:

- i. To bridge the digital divide, stakeholders should prioritise digital literacy initiatives by focusing on equipping rural and underserved populations with essential skills for participating in digital advocacy campaigns. This can be achieved through community workshops, mobile training units, and partnerships with local organisations to provide hands-on training and foster digital inclusivity.
- ii. Strengthening partnerships with established civil society organisations, local government entities, and international development agencies is critical to amplify the reach and impact of advocacy efforts. These partnerships would offer additional resources and broader platforms for advocacy messages to resonate effectively.
- iii. Engaging a diverse array of stakeholders, including traditional leaders, community influencers, and grassroots organisations, is crucial for overcoming political resistance. A multi-stakeholder approach would foster inclusive dialogue and promote widespread support for policy initiatives and advocacy goals.
- iv. Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks is necessary for systematically assessing the effectiveness of advocacy strategies. Such frameworks should ensure adaptability to changing contexts and incorporate feedback mechanisms to capture insights from participants and stakeholders.
- v. Sustaining advocacy efforts through continuous engagement is essential for maintaining the momentum and pressure required for policy change. Developing long-term strategies that extend beyond individual campaigns will be crucial for achieving lasting impacts.

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