

LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PREVENTION AND MITIGATION OF DRUG ABUSE AND ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKING AND DRUG ABUSE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Drug trafficking and abuse present profound challenges to Nigeria's public health, education, family cohesion, national security, and economic stability. Recognized as a significant player in the global drug trade, Nigeria continues to grapple with the far-reaching consequences of this menace. Despite the deployment of conventional countermeasures, the pervasive and evolving nature of drug-related crimes demand innovative approaches. This paper critically examines the growing intersection of drug trafficking, abuse, and social media, a platform whose unprecedented accessibility, extensive reach, and real-time communication capabilities offer both challenges and opportunities. The paper explores the strategic utilization of social media as a complementary mechanism to existing enforcement and prevention frameworks. It argues for the deployment of social media in raising public awareness through targeted anti-drug campaigns, facilitating intelligence gathering to identify and monitor drug peddlers, and encouraging public reporting of illicit activities. Furthermore, the paper underscores the potential of social media to foster community engagement and enhance the efficacy of law enforcement agencies in their mandate to curtail drug-related crimes. The paper concludes by advocating for the integration of social media strategies into Nigeria's broader anti-drug policy framework, emphasizing its role as a transformative tool for prevention, enforcement, and societal mobilization. By leveraging the dynamic capabilities of social media, Nigeria can strengthen its efforts to combat drug trafficking and abuse, thereby promoting a safer, healthier, and more secure society.

Keywords: Drug Abuse, Drug law enforcement, Drug Trafficking and Social Media in Nigeria.

1.0 Introduction

Freedom of expression and the press¹, and freedom of association² are two internationally recognized rights regimes. They are also enshrined and enforceable under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999. Hence, the emergence of the internet and social media and the government's acceptance and accommodation of the virtual world was an indicator of the government's respect for its citizens' rights to freedom of expression and the press and freedom of association. However, with the advent of social media arrived its attendant challenges, occasioning the need for retrospection on the effects of social media on certain issues of concern, particularly drug abuse and drug trafficking. The

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¹ Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), Cap C.23 LFN 2004. S.39.

² *Ibid*, S.40.

interconnectivity between social media, drug abuse and drug trafficking is rapidly becoming an issue requiring extensive intervention. Globally, drug abuse is on the increase. The thriving drug trafficking market is mostly focused on young people, with factors such as the advancement in technology, expansion in drug trafficking networking and access, and influences of social media. The colossal impact of drug use is debilitating to the community and the society. The drug abuse index is rising and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) warns of an impending crisis if the situation is not curbed.³ The drug production and trafficking market contributes to other illegal markets that contribute to the debilitation of the environment, and increased human rights violations and violence.⁴

The inception of social media in the late 20th Century introduced interactions at a global level, young people can now easily access publications of celebrities displaying their lifestyles including drug use. Social media use also predisposes young people to psychological depression.⁵ The onslaught of COVID-19 threw about 100 million people into extreme poverty, unemployment and inequalities which exacerbated mental health conditions, increasing fears of a rise in drug abuse.⁶ Trafficking networks are being managed through social media. The emergence of the dark web introduced a booming drug market now worth more than US\$ 315 million in annual sales.⁷

Nigeria's teeming youth population is one of the largest in the world,⁸ most of whom have access to social media. Nigeria has been tagged as one of the main transit routes for drug distribution, globally,⁹ with the Nigerian market topping the list of cocaine smuggling markets in the African region.¹⁰ The prevalence of drug use in Nigeria was estimated at 14.4 per cent (about 14.3 Million people) aged between 15 and 64 years old.¹¹ The most commonly used drug in Nigeria is cannabis (with 10.6 million people reporting use), followed by opioids (4.6 million), mainly through non-medical use of prescription opioids and cough syrups (2.4 million).¹² Multiple interventional measures would be required to enforce, prevent and manage the rising drug abuse, and trafficking in drugs situation and the regulation of access to content on social media may be beneficial in curbing the developing menace.

2.0 Definition of Concepts

³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'World Drug Report' (*United Nations June 2023*) 1-67.

⁴ *Ibid*, 27.

⁵ F Karim and others, 'Social Media Use and Its Connection to Mental Health: A Systematic Review' (2020) 12(6) *Cureus*, 15; L Azem and others 'Social Media Use and Depression in Adolescents: A Scoping Review' (2023)13(6) *Behav Sci*, 475.

⁶ United Nations, 'COVID Pandemic Fueling Major Increase in Drug Use Worldwide: UN Report' (*UN, 24 June 2021*) <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/06/1094672>> accessed 25 April 2024.

⁷ United Nations 'UNODC World Drug Report 2021: Pandemic Effects Ramp Up Drug Risks, As Youth Underestimate Cannabis Dangers' (*UN, 24 June 2021*) Available at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/frontpage/2021/June/unodc-world-drug-report-2021_-pandemic-effects-ramp-up-drug-risks--as-youth-underestimate-cannabis-dangers.html> accessed 25 April 2024.

⁸ United Nations, 'Young People's Potential, the Key to Africa's Sustainable Development' (*UN, 17 April 2024*) Available at <<https://www.un.org/ohrrls/news/young-people%E2%80%99s-potential-key-africa%E2%80%99s-sustainable-development>> accessed 25 April 2024.

⁹ P Adeleye, 'Slaves to Drugs: How Nigeria Has Become Key Transit Hub for Global Cocaine Trafficking' (*The African Report, 16 June 2023*) Available at < <https://www.theafricareport.com/312261/how-nigeria-has-become-key-transit-hub-for-global-cocaine-trafficking/>> accessed 25 April 2024.

¹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'Global Report on Cocaine 2023: Local Dynamics, Global Challenges,' (*UN, March 2023*) 12-182.

¹¹ National Bureau of Statistics, 'Drug Use In Nigeria: 2018' (*National Bureau of Statistics, January 2019*) 6-86.

¹² Inter-Ministerial Committee 'National Drug Control Masterplan' (2019) UNODC, 1-4.

Drug has been defined as ‘any chemical substance that affects the functioning of living things and the organisms (such as bacteria, fungi, and viruses) that infect them.’¹³ It is also defined as ‘an illegal substance that some people smoke, inject, etc. for the physical and mental effects it has.’¹⁴ Drug use refers to the ‘use of drugs for psychotropic rather than medical purposes,’¹⁵ the frequent consumption and reliance on drugs with attendant consequences at work, school, home or relationships that are referred to as drug abuse, drug misuse or substance abuse,¹⁶ which in turn leads to drug addiction which is ‘an adjunct or subordinate behaviour activated by deeper, more significant psychological and biological stimuli. It is not just the pharmacological reaction to the drugs but a mode of compensation for a decrease in capacity to exist and function in the circumstance.’¹⁷

Drug trafficking is a global quintessential illicit market involving domestic and transnational organizations and armed groups involved in the cultivation, manufacturing, distribution, and sale of substances which are prohibited by law.¹⁸ Trafficking involves the smuggling of illegal items or legal items in breach of the law.¹⁹ Social media is subject to various definitions, *A Schultz* defines social media as ‘the collection of tools and online spaces available to help individuals and businesses to accelerate their information and communication needs.’, while *S Lucky* described social media as a ‘means of connections among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks.’²⁰

3.0 Brief History of Drug Abuse and Trafficking

Drug use can be traced to the prehistoric period when people used substances and plants such as nicotine, tobacco, coca, and poppy plants that existed naturally for medicinal, recreational, and later financial purposes. As civilizations evolved, so did their understanding and use of those plants and substances.²¹ By the beginning of the 20th century, trade in drugs was categorized as a global problem requiring intervention. The first international conference on narcotic drugs took place in Shanghai, China in 1909. This did not eradicate the trade, instead, this aspect of organized crime developed into illicit independent

¹³JA Thomas and others ‘drug’ (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 12 April 2024) Available at <<https://www.britannica.com/science/drug-chemical-agent>> accessed 25 April 2024.

¹⁴ Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, *Drug* (Ed: M Deuter and others, 9th Edn, Oxford University Press 2015) 473.

¹⁵ WG Steiner, ‘Drug Use’ (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 16 April 2024) Available at <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/drug-use>> accessed 26 April 2024.

¹⁶ L Robinson and others, ‘Drug Abuse and Addiction’ (*Helpguide.org* 5, February 2024) Available at <<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/drug-abuse-and-addiction.htm>> accessed 26 April 2024.

¹⁷ JL Falk, ‘Solvay Award address: Drug abuse as an adjunctive behavior’ (1998) 52(2) *Drug Alcohol Depend* 91-8 Available at <doi: 10.1016/s0376-8716(98)00084-2. PMID: 9800138.> accessed 26 April 2024.

¹⁸ L Raineri and F Strazzari, ‘The Data That We Do (Not) Have: Studying Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in Africa.’ (2023) 26 *Trends Organ Crim*, 358–378 Available at <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117-023-09482-5>> accessed 26 April 2024; United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, ‘Drug Trafficking’ (UNODC 2024) Available at <<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/index.html>> accessed 26 April 2024.

¹⁹ C Dechery and L Ralston, *Trafficking and Fragility in West Africa* (World Bank 2015) 4.

²⁰ J Kaur, ‘Social Media: Precedenting The Human Life’ (2015) 3(3) *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 142-151 Available at <<https://www.researchpublish.com/upload/book/SOCIAL%20MEDIA%20PRECEDENTING-2096.pdf>> accessed 26 April 2024.

²¹ T Saah, ‘The Evolutionary Origins and Significance of Drug Addiction’ (2005) 2 (8) *Harm Reduct J* Available at <<https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7517-2-8>> accessed 26 April 2024; Susan Julius, ‘The History of Substance Abuse’ *Townsend Recovery Center* Available at <<https://www.townsendla.com/blog/history-of-substance-use>> accessed 26 April 2024.

consortiums and organizations - drug cartels or criminal networks focused on controlling the production and distribution of drugs.²²

Drug trafficking and abuse may have been a rising cause for concern in Nigeria before 1935 because of Nigeria's enactment of the Dangerous Drugs Act.²³ However, by the 1950s, the West African region may have become a small-scale heroin and cocaine trans-shipment point, with the cartels taking advantage of the institutional weaknesses, integration of countries of the region into the global market to further their cross-country smuggling networks and trafficking, using the Gulf of Guinea, the Atlantic coastline, and the Sahel-Sahara region as hubs.²⁴ Over time, people living in the diaspora became instrumental in the establishment and development of a well-organized network in the region, the Lebanese, and then Nigerians took over the coordination of the network.²⁵ By the 1980s the industry bloomed on a massive scale, the economic downturn in the region led to the incorporation of high-level corruption and the globalization of their trade. Most of the traffickers apprehended at the JF Kennedy Airport, New York were Nigerians. Conflicts and wars were the window required for the trade to thrive, weaponization and recruitment of armed combatants were also funded by the organized networks. They operated undetected, suppressed competition, or escaped conviction by taking advantage of fragile political institutions.²⁶ They utilize coercion, corruption, and patronage to foster their political capital or penetrate the local elite.²⁷

4.0 Status of Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking in Nigeria

It is difficult to list all the drugs being abused or trafficked in Nigeria as new combinations are created from time to time. However, any substance that is capable of being ingested and if when ingested results in alterations of feelings can be abused. Some abused substances are legal, for instance, alcohol, while some substances are illegal, such as marijuana and cocaine, some other substances are not contemplated by law as substances capable of being ingested, for example, home cleaning agents, glue etc. While some are aware of the abuse of legal substances like alcohol or illegal drugs like marijuana and cocaine.

Nigeria graduated from being a transit hub for drug trafficking to become a major producer, consumer, and distributor of illicit drugs. Drug traffickers in the country cultivate cannabis for local consumption and exportation. They traffic cannabis, cocaine, opioids such as heroin and pharmaceutical opioids, and

²² RJ Samuels, 'Drug Cartel' (Encyclopedia Britannica, 10 January 2024) Available at <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/drug-cartel>> accessed 26 April 2024; T Saah, 'The Evolutionary Origins and Significance of Drug Addiction' (2005) 2 (8) *Harm Reduct J* Available at <<https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7517-2-8>> accessed 26 April 2024; Susan Julius, 'The History of Substance Abuse' (*Townsend Recovery Center 31 October 2023*).

²³ Dangerous Drugs Act, 1935.

²⁴ C Dechery and L Ralston, *Trafficking and Fragility in West Africa* (World Bank 2015) 4-5, 4-33.

²⁵ W Lacher, 'Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region.' (Paper delivered at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC) [2012]; C Dechery and L Ralston, *Trafficking and Fragility in West Africa* (World Bank 2015) 4-5, 4-33.

²⁶ M Shaw and Reitano, 'The Evolution of Organised Crime in Africa: Towards a New Response' (2013) *Institute for Security Studies*, 1-28.

²⁷ J Cockayne, 'Chasing Shadows: Strategic Responses to Organised Crime in Conflict-Affected Situations' (2013) *RUSI Journal* 158 (2): 10-24.

psychotropic substances such as methamphetamine, tramadol, codeine, and diazepam.²⁸ There is a locally produced methamphetamine also called *Mkpuru mmiri*, generally known as crystal meth, the drug is a narcotic hallucinogen which is rampant in South-East, Nigeria. It is produced in labs set up by Mexicans in Nigeria.²⁹ The first methamphetamine laboratory was established in 2011, between then and 2019, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency had demolished 18 illegal methamphetamine laboratories. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency also demolished a ‘super lab’ with the capacity to produce 3,000 kg of methamphetamine in each cycle. The ‘super lab’ used a pre-precursor chemical benzaldehyde, an organic compound used as a food additive, from which the chemical phenylacetone (P2P) was synthesized to manufacture methamphetamine. 753kg of methamphetamine was seized by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) at the secret laboratory site and NDLEA arrested four Mexican nationals along with five Nigerians at the site, revealing a link between the ‘super lab’ and cartels operating in Mexico. The NDLEA reported a total seizure of approximately 270 kg of methamphetamine in 2018 and 146 kg in 2019. Many of the intoxicating substances are found in schools, motor parks, and local traders that sell provisions in kiosks, available on demand.

Other drugs include, amphetamine, diazepam, fencamfamine, and Phencyclidine, also referred to as PCP, which can cause obsessive-aggressive behaviours in users. It also increases users’ physical strength making the user dangerous to others. Sedatives, hypnotics, or anti-anxiety drugs can quash the nervous system, leading to death by respiratory arrest where an overdose is taken, or the drugs are mixed with another nervous system depressant drug.³⁰

The NDLEA reports to have seized drugs totaling 317,765kg in 2018, increasing to 612,903kg in 2019. In 2018, about 125 kg of cocaine were seized in Nigeria, which dropped to around 113 kg in 2019. The National Drug Use Survey 2019 showed that 4.7 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 64 reported non-medical use of prescription opioids in the previous year, with tramadol being by far the most misused opioid, and tramadol being the second most ingested drug after cannabis in 2018.³¹ About 326 kg of ephedrine was seized by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency in 2018, a figure that increased to around 454kg in 2019. Between 2016 to 2019, about 7 tons of ephedrine (raw and finished products) were imported.³² The rate of drug use in Nigeria depicts the need for a state of emergency in the fight against drugs and drug abuse, using multi-dimensional strategies, one of which is social media.

5.0 The Social, Cultural and Economic Impact of Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking in Nigeria

²⁸ UNODC, *Drug Trafficking*, (UNODC) Available at <<https://www.unodc.org/conig/en/links/strengthening-the-forensic-chemical-analysis-capacity-of-the-national-drug-law-enforcement-agency-ndlea.html>> accessed 26 April 2024.

²⁹ L Nwabughio, ‘*Mkpuru Mmiri*: Mexicans set up labs in Nigeria to produce meth in 2016 — Reps urge NDLEA to declare war on cartel’ *Vanguard* (Abuja 25 November 2021) Available at <<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/11/mkpuru-mmiri-mexicans-set-up-labs-in-nigeria-to-produce-meth-in-2016-reps/#:~:text=House%20of%20Representatives%2C%20Thursday%2C%20explained,of%20Mkpuru%20Mmiri%20in%202016.>>> accessed 26 June 2024.

³⁰ UNODC, *Drug Use in Nigeria: 2018* (UN, January 2019) 3-13; AI Jatau and others ‘The Burden of Drug Abuse in Nigeria: A Scoping Review of Epidemiological Studies and Drug Laws’ (2021) *Public Health Rev*, 42 Available at <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7904248/pdf/phrs-42-1603960.pdf>> 27 April 2024.

³¹ Inter-Ministerial Committee ‘National Drug Control Masterplan’ (2019) UNODC, 1-4.

³² (n 31).

The Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking situation in Nigeria has an extensive alarming impact on the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the Country as drug abuse has been identified to have biological, psychological, and social influences and effects on people addicted or dependent on drugs. Despite the strict laws criminalizing drug possession, drug use and drug trafficking, the problem continues to grow at exponential rates.³³ Experts suggest that illicit drug trade in the country is driven by predisposing factors such as Nigeria's geographical location, economic inequalities, political instability, and global demand for drugs. Nigerian drug trafficking is thriving because of the interdependence and transnational collaborations with criminal organizations, globally, such as the Latin American drug cartels and West African criminal networks. They have developed expertise, and networks and utilise sophisticated smuggling techniques.³⁴ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists association with delinquent or substance-using friends as one of the risk factors for high-risk substance abuse amongst adolescents.³⁵

Some causative factors identified include environmental variables such as dysfunction or disruption in family, poorer communities especially overcrowded areas, poor parental monitoring, stresses, and frequent exposure to social drug use may predispose a substance user to addiction. Frequent exposure of young people to popular substance-using celebrities whom they adopt as role models or are constantly exposed to in the media, or substance-using peers or older family members may influence them into drug use and eventually addiction.³⁶ The constant demand would determine supply. Similarly, the promotion of the perception that smoking, drinking or drug use is standard practice among peers appears to be a narrative at the community level and on social media. The widespread availability and access to drugs in certain vicinities in the communities also surge susceptibility to drug abuse and addiction.³⁷

Drug abuse has a direct socio-economic impact on individuals, families and society. Firstly, it causes a loss of productivity. The financial costs of addiction or dependence on drugs as many drug users cannot maintain jobs, have problems securing employment and lose their sources of income while prioritizing their appetite for more drugs as their bodies adjust to the dosages. Employers are forced to deal with

³³ P Adeleye, *Slaves to Drugs: How Nigeria Has Become Key Transit Hub for Global Cocaine Trafficking* (The African Report, 16 June 2023) Available at < <https://www.theafricareport.com/312261/how-nigeria-has-become-key-transit-hub-for-global-cocaine-trafficking/>> accessed 25 April 2024; UNODC, *Global Report on Cocaine 2023: Local Dynamics, Global Challenges* (UN, March 2023) 12-182; UNODC, *Drug Use in Nigeria: 2018* (UN, January 2019) 3-13; National Bureau of Statistics, *Drug Use In Nigeria: 2018* (National Bureau of Statistics, January 2019) 6-86.

³⁴ Editorial, 'Nigeria: Youths appetite for drug abuse growing –Otokpa' *Vanguard* (23 June 2023) Available at <<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/06/nigeria-youths-appetite-for-drug-abuse-growing-dr-otorkpa/#:~:text=Crime%20and%20social%20consequences%3A%20Drug,other%20forms%20of%20illicit%20activities.>> accessed 28 April 2024.

³⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Adolescent and School Health: High Risk Substance Use Among Youth* CDC Available at <<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/substance-use/index.htm>> accessed 27 April 2024; M Whitesell and others, 'Social, and Individual Factors Contributing to Risk for Adolescent Substance Use' (2023) *J Addict* Available at <https://downloads.hindawi.com/journals/jad/2013/579310.pdf?_gl=1*cazoxr*_ga*ODQ3ODYzMzQ5LjE3MTQzOTQ2NTc.*_ga_NF5QFMJT5V*MTcxNDM5NDY1Ny4xLjAuMTcxNDM5NDY1Ny42MzC4wLjA.&_ga=2.77969492.1518157406.1714394657-847863349.1714394657> accessed 28 April 2024.

³⁶ T Saah, 'The Evolutionary Origins and Significance of Drug Addiction' (2005) 2 (8) *Harm Reduct J*, 1-7 Available at <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1174878/pdf/1477-7517-2-8.pdf>> accessed 27 April 2024.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

habitual truancy and theft of products, supplies and equipment which are sold to buy drugs.³⁸ The low productivity alongside other issues like healthcare expenses, law enforcement expenses, economic implications of drug-related crimes etc., also impact the nation's economy which can be tackled by mitigating the demand for drugs and resources can be redirected towards more productive endeavours.³⁹

The education sector is a major area negatively affected by drug abuse and drug trafficking. Drug abuse adversely impacts the educational attainment of young people. They are more susceptible to academic difficulties, dropping out of school, having limited employment prospects, and cognitive and mental effects. It is therefore pertinent to address drug use and abuse among young Nigerians to enable them to reach their full potential and contribute effectively to society.⁴⁰

Drug abuse is usually associated with non-drug-related crimes, as people often resort to illegal means to support their addiction, contributing to increased crime rates, including drug-related violence. Nigeria can reduce the societal and economic burden associated with drug-related crimes.⁴¹

Drug abuse has severe physical and mental health implications for perpetrators, especially when it begins at a young age. Drug abuse may lead to addiction, damage to vital organs, impaired cognitive function, and increased risk of mental health disorders.⁴² Therefore, tackling drug use among young people is essential to protect their well-being and ensure a healthy future generation. Drug abuse also unsettles social structures and disrupts communities. Young people who are affected by drug addiction or dependence often have difficulties in forming healthy relationships, maintaining stable families, and engaging in positive community activities. The family and community are saddled with increased burdens to support adolescents and young adults who are unable to become self-supporting, alongside the demands for medical and other treatment services.⁴³

³⁸ Tribune Online, 'The Social and Economic Effects of Drug Abuse in Our Society: An Analysis' *Nigerian Tribune* (5 November 2022) Available at < <https://tribuneonlineng.com/the-social-and-economic-effects-of-drug-abuse-in-our-society-an-analysis/> > accessed 28 April 2024.

³⁹ Editorial, 'Nigeria: Youths appetite for drug abuse growing – Dr Otorokpa' *Vanguard* (23 June 2023) Available at <<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/06/nigeria-youths-appetite-for-drug-abuse-growing-dr-otorkpa/#:~:text=Crime%20and%20social%20consequences%3A%20Drug,other%20forms%20of%20illicit%20activities.>> accessed 28 April 2024.

⁴⁰ AO Adeniyi 'Effect of Drug Abuse on the Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Nigeria' (2022) 10(3) *European Journal of Biology and Medical Science Research*, 72-79 Available at <<https://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Effect-of-Drug-Abuse.pdf>> accessed 27 April 2024; Editorial, 'Nigeria: Youths appetite for drug abuse growing – Otorokpa' *Vanguard* (23 June 2023) Available at <<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/06/nigeria-youths-appetite-for-drug-abuse-growing-dr-otorkpa/#:~:text=Crime%20and%20social%20consequences%3A%20Drug,other%20forms%20of%20illicit%20activities.>> accessed 28 April 2024.

⁴¹ (n. 40).

⁴² AO Adeniyi 'Effect of Drug Abuse on the Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Nigeria' (2022) 10(3) *European Journal of Biology and Medical Science Research*, 72-79 Available at <<https://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Effect-of-Drug-Abuse.pdf>> accessed 27 April 2024; *Vanguard*, 'Nigeria: Youths appetite for drug abuse growing – Otorokpa' *Vanguard* (23 June 2023) Available at <<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/06/nigeria-youths-appetite-for-drug-abuse-growing-dr-otorkpa/#:~:text=Crime%20and%20social%20consequences%3A%20Drug,other%20forms%20of%20illicit%20activities.>> accessed 28 April 2024.

⁴³ R Sartor, 'The Social Impact of Drug Abuse on Community Life' (1991)10(2) *Med Law*, 205-8 Available at <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/1886469/>> accessed 28 April 2024.

There is, therefore, a need to protect young people and mitigate their susceptibility to drug use as a way of ensuring social development, strengthening community bonds, and fostering a more stable society. Social media may be an effective tool for mitigating drug abuse and drug trafficking as it cuts across various strata in society.

6.0 The Power of Collective Identity Through Social Media

Social platforms such as Meta, Instagram, and X have become relevant sources of public information. They possess the potential to determine social media users' understanding of tobacco, alcohol, and drug use and to improve the efficacy of substance abuse interventions. For instance, Facebook and Twitter were pivotal mobilization mechanisms to the #EndSARS movement against police brutality and the advocacy for the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad unit in Nigeria, employing various nonviolent strategies to advance their objectives, such as peaceful protests and demonstrations. The coordination of that magnitude is arguably, a first of its kind owing to social media, worthy of note was how they were galvanized without a distinguishable leader.⁴⁴ The demonstrations were mostly organized on social media platforms. It was after this and other related deviances that the Federal government placed a ban on Twitter in 2021,⁴⁵ and lifted the ban about 7 months later after certain terms were agreed upon between the platform and the government. The ban on Twitter and the criminalization of access to Twitter through installed bypass Virtual Private Network (VPN) allowed users to bypass the censorship and still use the platform⁴⁶

The #EndSARS movement against police brutality may have emulated an earlier movement that sprang up in the Northern African region called the Arab Spring or Arab Awakening. The movement pervaded Tunisia and spread across Egypt, Lybia and Yemen with various forms of violent and nonviolent protests and demonstrations, including strikes, rallies, civil resistance and armed rebellion. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook were strategically used by activists in the biggest uprising the region had witnessed in a while. It commenced in Tunisia on December 18, 2010. Online activists served as catalysts and no definite leader was identifiable in the Tunisian revolution, and this spread across other countries. However, the government retorted with violent clampdowns by security agencies and government-funded militias and counter-demonstrators. The protesters would not back down, some also resorted to violence, which eventually led to the deposition of the leaders in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria. There were reports of Tunisian authorities attempting to hack or delete Facebook accounts of people suspected to be instigators and censor the internet, in Egypt, the government implemented total internet and mobile device blackout, yet activists organized, communicated, and circulated information through online platforms.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ OB Oyinloye and AI Omotayo, 'Social Media and Nonviolent Protest Movements: A Contemporary Review of The ENDSARS Movement' (2023) Vol 7(3) *Wukari International Studies Journal*, 312 -323 Available at <<https://wissjournals.com.ng/index.php/wiss/article/view/194>> accessed 28 April 2024.

⁴⁵ Editorial, 'Nigeria's Twitter Ban: Government Orders Prosecution of Violators' *BBC* (5 June 2021) Available at <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57368535>> accessed 27 April 2024.

⁴⁶ Editorial, 'Twitter Agrees to Nigeria's Demands To End Seven-Month Ban' *BBC* (13 January 2022) Available at <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-59958417>> accessed 28 April 2024.

⁴⁷ OB Oyinloye and AI Omotayo, 'Social Media and Nonviolent Protest Movements: A Contemporary Review of The ENDSARS Movement' (2023) Vol 7 (3) *Wukari International Studies Journal*, 312 -323.

Over time, it has shown that social media may be a dynamic tool for social good and social movements; through which collective actors express their interests, articulate grievances, and propose solutions to identified problems through engagement in a variety of collective actions initiated by social media,⁴⁸ an example is the #Blacklivesmatter which centres on issues concerning profiling and targeting the black race, which was instigated by the killing of an unarmed African American teenager by law enforcement agents. The movement pioneers racial justice activism and generates sustained national awareness of the systemic incarceration and killing of African Americans as an issue, unlike previously where each case was viewed in isolation, pressuring authorities to bring perpetrators to book and immortalizing the victims.⁴⁹

The #MeToo movement created awareness and pioneered the need to change people's attitudes towards sexual violence against women by highlighting and bringing public issues related to sexual violence against women, sexism and sexual based crimes.⁵⁰ The # MeToo movement started in 2006 but gained global recognition through social media in 2017 with the victims and survivors of sexual harassment sharing their experiences on social media. The movement exposed that sexual harassment was more about dominance and power than sexual attraction. The movement raised consciousness and solidarity amongst survivors and supporters.⁵¹ The movement led to the trial of Harvey Weinstein on numerous counts of sexual abuse. The trial court found the movie mogul guilty, a decision that was overturned by the apex court in New York on 25th April 2024, on grounds that he was not given a fair trial as witnesses called to testify were not included in the charge and a re-trial was ordered. This did not affect a 16-year sentence given against him in California.⁵²

This paper has established that social media holds immense power today. The influence it wields may influence behaviour whether positively or negatively. It may also be a veritable tool for social movements against drug abuse and drug trafficking if systematically used.

7.0 Legal Framework on Cyber-Related Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking Offences

Nigeria ratified the 3 treaties relating to drug abuse and trafficking; *The United Nations General Assembly, Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961 (as amended by the 1972 Protocol Amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961)*, *The United Nations General Assembly 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, A/RES/3443*, *United Nations General Assembly, 9 December 1975 and the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988*, nevertheless, there is no specific law regulating or prohibiting cyber-related drug

⁴⁸ W Walcot, 'Positive Effects of Social Media on Social Movement' 2020 (5) 1 *International Digital Organization for Scientific Research* 43-50 Available at <<https://www.idosr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/IDOSR-JCE-51-43-50-2020.-P3.pdf>> accessed 27 April 2024.

⁴⁹ HH Wu and others, 'Say Their Names: Resurgence In The Collective Attention Toward Black Victims Of Fatal Police Violence Following The Death Of George Floyd' (2023) 18(1) *PLoS One* Available at <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9833594/>> accessed 27 April 2024.

⁵⁰ S Shukla and others, '#Me Too Movement: Influence of Social Media Engagement on Intention to Control Sexual Harassment Against Women' (2020) 12 *Journal of Content, Community & Communication: Amity School of Communication* 57-65.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Editorial, 'Harvey Weinstein's New York Conviction Is Overturned' *New York Times* 25 April 2024 Available at <<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2024/04/25/nyregion/harvey-weinstein-appeal>> accessed 27 April 2024.

offences in Nigeria. In other words, cyber-related drug offences are not contemplated by Nigerian law. However, there have been attempts to regulate social media through sponsored bills such as the 2015 Bill for an Act to Prohibit Frivolous Petitions and Other Matters Connected Therewith, which attracted public backlash and subsequent withdrawal of the Bill as it was said to be an infringement on the fundamental rights of citizens. Another Bill, the Protection from Internet Falsehoods, Manipulations, and Other Related Matters Bill was introduced in 2019. This also attracted negative responses that led to the Bill being withdrawn eventually by the Senate.

In 2021, the Code of Practice for Interactive Computer Service Platforms/Internet Intermediaries was issued and focuses on the operations of Interactive Computer Service Platforms/Internet Intermediaries and their agents in Nigeria and serves as a guide on steps to safeguard the security and interest of Nigerians and non-Nigerians regarding activities conducted on the digital space. It outlines the responsibilities of social media platform providers and seeks to ensure that they operate within limits as stipulated by the law. They are prohibited from publishing or promoting content that may be harmful to a child or cause physical or psychological harm to any person amongst other responsibilities. The Code states that materials prohibited by specific laws of the country shall not be made accessible by the social media platform providers and it goes ahead to outline the laws, of which the Drug prohibited laws were not included. However, the omnibus clause, ‘... consideration should be given to the laws of Nigeria, including but not limited to the following’ may allow for the inclusion of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency Act, 1989 Cap N30, Laws of the Federation 2004 (NDLEA Act, 1989).

The Code provides for the removal of false information that may cause violence, public disorder, or exploitation of a child. The regulatory framework offered by the Code, though not comprehensive gives a sense of security, while avoiding a breach of users' freedom of expression. The miscellaneous provisions of the code allow for amendment, therefore there is room for improvement as it relates to drug-related offences perpetrated through social media platforms.

There are three other principal laws and policies that govern Nigerian cyberspace and relations. They are; the Nigeria Data Protection Act, 2023, the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention etc) Act, 2015, and the National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy, 2021. Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention etc) Act, 2015 provides a legal framework for the prohibition, prevention, detection, prosecution and punishment of cybercrimes, the protection of national information and promotion of cybersecurity, and the protection of computer and cyber-related rights in Nigeria. It prohibits racist and xenophobic offences, child pornography, cyberstalking, fraud, cyberbullying, etc, but does not include drug abuse, drug trafficking or drug peddling.

The National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy, 2021 though unenforceable and non-justiciable provides an overview of what the Nigerian government envisions in respect of cyberspace which is a safe and secure digital community, and to foster a secure cyber environment for citizens. The policy

acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic occasioned increased remote work, transactions and online communications with related possibilities of threats and crimes.⁵³

The policy states that Nigerian cyberspace is confronted with threats that cause huge financial losses. The cyber threats identified include; cybercrime in the context of deep fakes, fudging and crypto, cloud hijacking, hacking etc.; Cyber terrorism perpetrated by national and transnational terrorist groups, and organized illicit groups using social media for propaganda and recruitment, child sexual exploitation etc.⁵⁴ However, there is no specific mention of drug-related cybercrimes as a threat. The policy outlines some pertinent considerations, firstly, that the security and well-being of the Nigerian people are just as important in the virtual world as it is in the physical domain and lastly, that regional and international collaborations are central and crucial to cybersecurity.⁵⁵ The policy identifies key areas which are priority sectors for the domicile of crucial ICT assets called the Critical National Information Infrastructure (CNII). It is difficult to ascertain which sector drug trafficking and drug trafficking falls within.⁵⁶ Commendably, the policy recommends a review and amendment of the Cyber Crimes Act, of 2015, outlining areas of the law that require amendment and buttresses the need for harmonization, yet drug-related issues were omitted.⁵⁷ The aspect that provides for multilateral and bilateral mechanisms to collaborate and establish frameworks towards preventing and enforcing cybercrime, is laudable.⁵⁸

The Nigeria Data Protection Act, 2023 specifically relates to the protection of personal data and the establishment of the Nigeria Data Protection Commission for the Regulation of the Processing of Personal Information and other related issues. The Nigeria Data Protection Act, 2023 makes provisions to safeguard the fundamental rights and freedoms, and the interests of data persons, as guaranteed under Chapter 4 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.⁵⁹ It regulates and safeguards the processing of personal data, while strengthening the legal foundations of the national digital economy and guaranteeing the participation of Nigeria in the regional and global economies through the beneficial and trusted use of personal data.⁶⁰

Conversely, the NDLEA Act, 1989 which is currently undergoing amendment,⁶¹ specifically prohibits and prosecutes possession, abuse, trafficking and peddling of cocaine, Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and heroin,⁶² amongst other related offences.⁶³ Section 20 specifically prohibits abuse, possession, and trafficking in all forms of materials used for the production of narcotic drugs or

⁵³ National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy 2021, 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 4-6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 10-11.

⁵⁶ *Ibid* 21.

⁵⁷ (n. 53) 35.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 39.

⁵⁹ CFRN, 1999 (as amended)

⁶⁰ Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023, s1.

⁶¹ Bertram Nwannekanma and Tina Abeku, 'Amendment of NDLEA Act to Boost Drug War, Says Marwa' (Lagos and Abuja 8 March 2024) Available at < <https://guardian.ng/news/amendment-of-ndlea-act-to-boost-drug-war-says-marwa/> > accessed 27 April 2024.

⁶² National Drug Law Enforcement Agency Act 1989, s11.

⁶³ *Ibid*, s12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19.

psychotic substances such as opium, poppy, coca bush or cannabis plant.⁶⁴ The punishments range from 5 to 25 years of imprisonment, fines and forfeiture of property.⁶⁵

The Indian Hemp Act, 1966 Cap I6, Laws of Federation 2004 (as amended) (Indian Hemp Act, 1966 (as amended)), prohibits the planting, cultivation, importation, exportation, possession, and use of Indian hemp while the Dangerous Drugs Act, 1984 Cap D1, Laws of the Federation 2004 (as amended) (Dangerous Drugs Act, 1984 (as amended)) prohibits the importation, exportation, manufacture, sale and use of opium and other dangerous drugs. Section 2 of the Indian Hemp Act, 1966 (as amended) stipulates the punishment for planting and cultivating the cannabis plant as a minimum of 21 years imprisonment, selling, importation⁶⁶ and exportation⁶⁷, also. Smoking or unlawful possession of Indian hemp attracts a minimum of 4 years imprisonment.⁶⁸ Possession of the utensils used for selling Indian hemp is liable to a minimum of 5 years imprisonment.⁶⁹ Allowing the use of one's property for the sale, smoking, and preparation of Indian hemp makes the perpetrator liable for a minimum of 10 years imprisonment,⁷⁰ and such a person may be compelled to forfeit such property.⁷¹ The Indian Hemp Act, 1966 (as amended) provides that persons under the age of 17 years found guilty of any of the offences under the Act may undergo reformatory treatment.⁷²

The Dangerous Drugs Act, 1984 (as amended) defines a dangerous drug as raw opium, coca leaves, and Indian hemp and new drugs prescribed in the Act.⁷³ The Dangerous Drugs Act, 1984 (as amended) prohibits the importation, exportation, possession, ingestion, sale, accommodation, and purchase of prepared opium.⁷⁴ The Dangerous Drugs Act, 1984 (as amended) prohibits the trading or manufacturing for trade of new drugs using coca leaves or opium as ingredients.⁷⁵ It stipulates the punishment as 10 years imprisonment or the option of a fine or both.⁷⁶

The European Union, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in collaboration with the Nigerian Federal Government came up with a policy called, the National Drug Control Master Plan, 2019. The policy is scheduled to run from 2021 to 2025. It outlines strategies for supply reduction through disruption of drug trafficking networks, making drug trade unprofitable, and reduction in the cultivation and production of drugs which require license such as cannabis, narcotics, psychotropics and precursors.⁷⁷ The policy aims at targeting key populations through strategies that would ensure reduced use of drugs, reduced dependence on drugs through treatment, reduced drug-related harm and

⁶⁴ *Ibid* s20, 21 and 22.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, s19, 22(3).

⁶⁶ Indian Hemp Act, 1966 (as amended), s3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, s4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, s5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, s6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, s7.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, s12.

⁷² *Ibid*, s11.

⁷³ Dangerous Drugs Act, 1984 (as amended), s10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, s5 and 6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, s9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, s19(2).

⁷⁷ Inter-Ministerial Committee 'National Drug Control Masterplan' (UNODC 2019),11-16.

provision of enabling environments for services.⁷⁸ However, the policy in outlining its objectives and strategies does not contemplate using social media or cyber-based solutions.

Conclusively, considering the non-existence of a legal framework for cyber-related drug offences in Nigeria, it is pertinent that stakeholders in the fight against drug trafficking and drug abuse should enact laws and adopt strategies therein that would ensure that the menace is curbed in the virtual space. The legal framework on drug-related offences should also be reviewed and harmonized, offering a more detailed framework on the subject matter.

8.0 Institutional Framework on Cyber-Related Drug Abuse and Drug Trafficking Offences

Nigeria, through various agencies, has established various institutional frameworks to secure Nigerian cyberspace. However, most of the cybersecurity outfits are established to prevent and respond to cyberattacks and not respond to transactional cybercrimes like drug-related cybercrimes. Various ministries, departments and agencies have cybersecurity structures in place to detect, prevent and respond to cyberattacks and cybercrimes within the contexts envisaged by their enabling laws and policies. There are also prescribed frameworks and guidelines for social media use at various levels, for instance, the Framework and Guidelines for the Use of Social Media Platforms in Public Institutions, 2019 by the National Information Technology Development Agency, the Nigerian Communications Commission's Technical Framework for the Use of Social Media Network in Nigeria, 2019. The National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) which was created in April 2001 to implement the Nigerian Information Technology Policy and coordinate general information technology (IT) development in Nigeria.

The National Information Technology Development Act empowers the agency to establish a structure for the planning, research, development, standardization, application, coordination, monitoring, evaluation and regulation of Information Technology practices, activities, and systems in Nigeria. The agency set up a security department saddled with the responsibility of taking proactive steps in securing and standardizing the setting up of cybersecurity structures in Ministries, Departments and Agencies, private sector and individual behaviour, guiding them on what to avoid, partake of, and how to report and act when incidences occur.⁷⁹ The National Information Technology Development Agency in collaboration with the National Broadcasting Commission created the Code of Practice for Interactive Computer Service Platforms/Internet Intermediaries for the regulation of social media platforms providers and content.

The NDLEA is empowered by the NDLEA Act, 1989 (as amended) to combat drug trafficking and drug abuse. It is empowered to enforce all drug-related laws, investigate, and prosecute drug-related offences, seize illegal drugs and properties used for drug-related offences, disrupt drug trafficking organizations, rehabilitate and treatment of drug addicts, monitor and control drug precursor chemicals, regulate pharmaceutical drugs and control substances, collaborate with international agencies to combat

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 16-25.

⁷⁹ National Information Technology Development Agency, 'Cybersecurity' (NITDA 2024) Available at <<https://nitda.gov.ng/departments/cyber-security/#>> accessed 29 April 2024.

global drug trafficking and providing intelligence and advisory services to government agencies and stakeholders.⁸⁰

Some other relevant agencies that are key to the detection, and prevention of drug abuse and drug trafficking and the enforcement of relevant laws are the National Agency for Food Drug Administration and Control, the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigeria Customs Service, the Nigeria Immigration Service, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps amongst others who have a role to play as watchdogs whether in the virtual world or the physical domain. A collaboration between the institutions empowered to supervise social media and cybersecurity, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, relevant security agencies and other agencies would be a formidable venture in the detection, prevention, reduction, and enforcement of relevant laws relating to drug abuse and drug trafficking in Nigeria.

9.0 Harnessing Social Media as a Tool for Prevention, Mitigation and Enforcement of Laws Against Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse in Nigeria

Social media has contributed immensely to making the world one online community, enabling information dissemination at a broader scope within the shortest possible period, its power and influence cannot be overemphasized. It presents the platform for the reaction and mobilization of movements that can bring about social or political change.⁸¹ Social media has proved to be an invaluable tool for activism, which can be effectively used to mobilize and galvanize support for social movements. It has become an essential medium of expression, organization and transformation in social demonstrations and everyday life. Social media is a meeting point, a melting pot for world interactions and communication to which most of the world's population has access, reshaping relationships, and engaging in activities where ideas and information flow and some boundaries become fluid.

Social media platforms may become powerful tools for research in identifying prevailing attitudes and myths and conveying accurate information to the public about drugs, drug abuse and trafficking in drugs. The analyses derived by researchers from social media interactions may give insights into patterns of use, risk factors, and behaviours associated with substance use. Government and relevant stakeholders should invest in research and data collection to better understand the extent, nature and other factors encouraging drug abuse and drug trafficking in Nigeria, towards informing and guiding relevant authorities on evidence-based policies, interventions, and resource allocation.

Sponsoring a social media platform and incorporating into major platforms innovative science-based, health-related messages, may enhance knowledge and foster prevention, management and treatment of

⁸⁰ National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, s3.

⁸¹ HH Wu, and others, 'Say Their Names: Resurgence In The Collective Attention Toward Black Victims Of Fatal Police Violence Following The Death Of George Floyd' (2023) 18(1) *PLoS One* Available at <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9833594/>> accessed 27 April 2024; S Shukla and others, '#Me Too Movement: Influence of Social Media Engagement on Intention to Control Sexual Harassment Against Women' (2020) 12 *Journal of Content, Community & Communication: Amity School of Communication* 57-65.

substance abuse cases and addiction.⁸² By filling important gaps in our current understanding of drug use and drug trafficking, thereby contributing to the efficacy of substance abuse interventions, globally.

Effectively tackling drug abuse and drug trafficking in Nigeria through social media would require a comprehensive and complex approach. The International Narcotics Control Board of the United Nations includes in its 2023 annual report, considering the prevailing situation, that it *sees opportunities to use the Internet and social media for drug use prevention campaigns and to improve access to drug treatment services, and encourages governments to use the full range of International Narcotics Control Board tools and programmes to assist in their efforts to counter exploitation of the Internet for drug trafficking.*⁸³ *The international community has recognized the importance and role of social media in tackling drug trafficking and drug abuse globally. However, it needs the cooperation of key stakeholders on the platforms.* The International Narcotics Control Board encourages governments to work with the private sector and International Narcotics Control Board projects to prevent and detect the trafficking of drugs and other dangerous substances online.⁸⁴

The Nigerian government may identify and partner with key stakeholders including influencer organizations, and social media influencers to use social media platforms to pioneer anti-drug abuse and anti-drug trafficking campaigns, disseminate information and sensitize social media users towards preventing and mitigating substance abuse among consumers, especially young people. The government may catalyze internal discourses through innovative strategies while mobilizing and stimulating positive decision-making. Secure whistle-blowing channels would be established and utilized with a reward system set in place. The government in partnership with relevant stakeholders should ensure improved access to drug treatment services.

Considering the global reach of social media platforms, governments and other stakeholders at the international level should ensure collaborative efforts are galvanized in identifying fresh threats and developing effective responses. Taskforce(s) should be set up to monitor and establish feedback mechanisms for online manufacturing, marketing, movement and monetization industries as they are predisposed to be exploited for trafficking. The government has the responsibility of offering alternative options to farming illicit drug materials, as in the case of Afghanistan where there was a decline in the cultivation and production of opium poppy.⁸⁵

⁸² National Institutes of Health, 'Using social media to better understand, prevent, and treat substance use' (NIH, 17 October 2014) Available at <<https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/using-social-media-better-understand-prevent-treat-substanceuse#:~:text=By%20providing%20a%20platform%20for,of%20substance%20use%20and%20addiction.>> accessed on 25 June 2024.

⁸³ International Narcotics Control Board, 'Press Release' (INCB 5 March 2024) Available at <<https://www.incb.org/incb/en/news/press-releases/2024/the-role-of-the-internet-in-drug-trafficking-and-drug-use-is-highlighted-in-the-international-narcotics-control-board-annual-report.html>> accessed 29 April 2024.

⁸⁴ International Narcotics Control Board, 'Press Release' (INCB 5 March 2024) Available at <<https://www.incb.org/incb/en/news/press-releases/2024/the-role-of-the-internet-in-drug-trafficking-and-drug-use-is-highlighted-in-the-international-narcotics-control-board-annual-report.html>> accessed 29 April 2024.

⁸⁵ United Nations Office On Drugs and Crime, 'Afghanistan Opium Survey 2023 Cultivation And Production After The Ban: Effects And Implications' (2023) UNODC, 1-54.

A multi-sectoral approach should be introduced by the government and stakeholders by pioneering online programs targeted at and emanating from local communities, religious organizations, civil society groups, and other stakeholders forming different drug abuse and drug trafficking prevention campaigns. Encourage community participation in awareness campaigns, peer support networks, and community-led initiatives to address drug abuse. The programme should also aim at strengthening collaborations and cooperations with international organizations, transnational and regional organizations and countries, and other key partners involved in drug control efforts. All stakeholders will be actively involved in sharing information, intelligence, and best practices towards combating drug trafficking networks and promoting regional initiatives to tackle drug-related challenges collectively.

Transnational networks that are not restricted by time/space constraints, should be created between stakeholders. Considering that social media plays a significant role in facilitating the mobilization and influencing of direct actions and determining lifestyles offline, it is pertinent to galvanize its influence, using it for more positive communications as it relates to drug abuse prevention and mitigation.

Other recommendations are to collaborate with schools in setting up online education and awareness programs which will facilitate and implement widespread drug awareness for schools, faith-based organizations and communities by raising awareness about the dangers of drug abuse and drug trafficking. The purpose of the program would be to promote accurate information about drugs and empower individuals to make informed decisions. The program will involve identifying champions who would influence social media against drug abuse and drug trafficking. Free or subvention-based regulated access to social media is funded by the government and the private sector.

Law enforcement should use social media to enhance their efforts in combating drug trafficking and illicit drug markets in Nigeria, by working towards winning the trust of social media users by engaging high-profile influencers, campaigning or improving on campaigns to garner the trust and followership of social media users. Collaborating with stakeholders, agencies and international organisations towards intelligence gathering, and enforcement of drug laws which may act as a deterrent and disruption of the drug supply chain.

Prevention programs targeted at high-risk groups, such as vulnerable youth, school dropouts, and marginalized communities, should be launched on social media using innovative strategies to attract the target group while offering a variety of online tutorials and life skills training, mentorship programs.

Treatment and rehabilitation channels should be made available on social media, which when accessed will guide users on the availability of real-time services which the government with support from its partners, would have set up for free. Nigeria is obligated to meet the global standard of access to quality drug treatment and rehabilitation services. The government should establish treatment centres and facilities, with online annexes and counselling centres, that offer evidence-based interventions, including counselling, detoxification, and rehabilitation programs. The government or organizers of the program would ensure the availability of trained healthcare professionals who can provide comprehensive care and support to individuals seeking help for drug addiction and dependence.

10.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, social media was created to improve social relations and bridge the gaps caused by the divide of time and place. It is a positive venture that has also, over the years taken a negative connotation owing to the vices that have been perpetrated through it. Harnessing social media, and using it for positive purposes such as prevention, mitigation and enforcement of drug abuse and drug enforcement laws accords users the opportunity to enjoy the positive outcomes of social media, especially the teeming social media population in Nigeria, mostly comprising of youths who are usually the main focus in drug abuse and drug trafficking intervention programs. Nigeria should review and consolidate its laws relating to social media, cyber-related laws and drug-related legal framework towards expanding the scope to cater for the prevention, mitigation, management and enforcement of drug abuse and drug trafficking. It is pertinent to state that the complex nature of drug abuse and drug trafficking and the fact that these issues have eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society, hence tackling them would require long-term commitment, channelling of adequate resources, and multi-dimensional approaches involving relevant government agencies, international and regional networks, the private sector, civil society organizations, healthcare providers, educators, families, communities and individuals. These strategies will spur considerable progress in preventing, mitigating and enforcing drug abuse and drug trafficking in Nigeria. However, although social media may be an important device in curbing the problems of drug abuse and drug trafficking in Nigeria, it is important to note that its interventions can only work if the government in partnership with stakeholders address the underlying social and economic factors that contribute to drug abuse, including poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and inadequate social support systems.