

Exploring the Impact of Social Networks and Community Engagement on the National Building in South Sudan

Atem Madut Yaak Kur, Dr. Kadian Wanyonyi Wanyama PhD* & Ring Longar Gum Majok

School of Business and Management, University of Juba, South Sudan

* Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.905000158>

Received: 11 February 2025; Accepted: 15 February 2025; Published: 04 June 2025

ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of social networks and community engagement on national building in South Sudan, a nation characterized by significant youth demographics and socio-economic challenges. The research is justified by the urgent need to understand how empowering the youth through digital engagement can support the nation's development objectives, particularly in the context of prolonged conflict and instability. Guided by Social Learning Theory, Civic Engagement Theory, and Network Theory, the study employs a mixed-methods methodology encompassing descriptive and explanatory designs. Data was collected through surveys and interviews with 140 respondents, primarily youth and government officials, from the National Ministry of Youths and Sports. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.76$) between social networks, community engagement, and national building, indicating that increased online and offline civic participation bolsters national identity and development initiatives. Key results show that 70% of participants reported social networks enhance their engagement in community activities, contributing to a collective sense of belonging and shared responsibility. The qualitative data underscores that while social networks can catalyze positive initiatives, issues related to misinformation and digital divide pose challenges to effective engagement. The conclusions emphasize that fostering digital literacy and encouraging civic participation through social media can be instrumental for national progress. Recommendations for policymakers include developing programs to enhance digital skills among youth, promoting partnerships between civic organizations and social media platforms, and establishing monitoring systems for community engagement practices. The study advocates for the Ministry of Youths and Sports to leverage social networks for effective communication and mobilization, thereby reinforcing their role in national building. Future research is encouraged to examine the long-term sustainability of online engagement and its effects on community resilience and national identity over time.

Keywords: Social Networks, Community Engagement, National Building, National Ministry of Youths and Sports, South Sudan.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Youth empowerment plays a crucial role in fostering national building, creating pathways for young individuals to contribute meaningfully to their communities and countries. The concept of youth empowerment involves equipping young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices necessary to engage effectively in their societies. This idea has gained increasing attention in global policy discussions, particularly within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By focusing on empowering youth, nations can harness their potential to drive economic growth, enhance social cohesion, and promote political engagement. The United Nations has emphasized that achieving these goals requires a strong commitment to youth empowerment, which acts as a catalyst for broader societal progress (United Nations, 2021).

The advent of digital communication technologies has revolutionized the ways communities form and interact, culminating in the vast landscape of social networks. These platforms not only facilitate personal connections

but also foster a sense of community engagement that can significantly influence nation-building. The concept of nation-building encompasses the coherent development of a nation's identity, unity, and infrastructure in alignment with the aspirations of its populace. As communities increasingly turn to online spaces for interaction, there is a burgeoning need to understand how these dynamics impact collective consciousness and national progress (Hampton & Wellman, 2022; Walther et al., 2022; González-Bailón, 2023).

Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have emerged as powerful tools for mobilizing citizens and embedding a sense of community identity among diverse populations (Khan & Callahan, 2021; Pérez & Canela, 2022; Zhou & Leung, 2023). According to a study from the Pew Research Center (2021), approximately 70% of American adults and a similar proportion of citizens globally engage with social media regularly. This particular form of community interaction manifests in the collective sharing of information, discussions around civic responsibilities, and mobilization efforts for social causes. When individuals connect over shared interests and communal goals, they strengthen social ties, which are crucial for cohesive national identity and social stability.

Community engagement on social networks can also play a significant role in bridging divides within multifaceted societies. Research indicates that a strong sense of belonging fosters civic participation; according to a report by CivicScience (2023), individuals deeply engaged in local community efforts display a 55% higher likelihood of voting in national elections than those who are not. Furthermore, engagement on social media allows marginalized voices to gain visibility, often leading to shifts in policy or the mobilization of grassroots movements. This democratization of information and visibility reinforces the potential for a unified national narrative that honors diversity and inclusivity.

Moreover, social media acts as a catalyst for innovation and group problem-solving, directly contributing to effective national building initiatives. Collaborative platforms allow citizens to brainstorm solutions to pressing issues, from health crises to economic challenges. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social networks were instrumental in fostering community response initiatives. Data published by the World Economic Forum (2022) showed that over 30% of communities involved in local aid networks utilized social media to coordinate responses, significantly improving response times and resource distribution.

While the positive aspects of social networking are apparent, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential for misinformation and social polarization. The very same platforms that enhance community engagement can perpetuate divisions if not managed responsibly. Recent research by the Digital Civil Society Lab (2023) demonstrated that exposure to misinformation can diminish civic participation by up to 40%. This signals the importance of fostering digital literacy and critical engagement among citizens to prevent the undermining of social cohesion and national unity.

Engaging communities through social networks can also enhance governmental accountability and transparency. The use of these platforms can facilitate direct communication between citizens and their representatives, enabling real-time feedback on public initiatives. Effective e-government strategies have been shown to increase public trust and active participation in the political process, as evidenced by a report by the United Nations E-Government Survey (2022), which found that countries leveraging social media for governmental communication reported an average 25% increase in citizens' satisfaction with public services.

In conclusion, the impact of social networks and community engagement on national building is profound and multi-dimensional. As these digital platforms continue to evolve, they present both opportunities and challenges for fostering community ties, enhancing civic participation, and promoting national cohesion. Investing in digital literacy and transparent communication strategies is crucial for harnessing the full potential of social networks in contributing to a cohesive and engaged society. By understanding and leveraging these dynamics, nations can progress towards building inclusive identities and resilient communities that thrive in the 21st century.

Social networks and community engagement further underpin the empowerment of youth by fostering a sense of belonging and community responsibility. Social networks encompass the relationships individuals maintain, which can significantly influence their civic engagement levels. According to a study by the International Labour

Organization (2019), youth who actively participate in community activities report higher levels of social cohesion and mutual support. Metrics to assess this engagement include the frequency of community participation, the size and quality of social networks, and the impact of community projects on local developments. Capturing perceptions of community impact through surveys provides insights into how youth contributions can enhance communal well-being.

National building, ultimately, is the outcome of integrating these individual and communal efforts into a cohesive societal framework. It involves strategies to establish unity, promote economic development, and ensure social justice, thereby creating stable and functional societies. The World Bank (2021) notes that effective national building relies heavily on youth involvement, asserting that countries with high levels of youth engagement in governance often experience greater political stability and economic resilience. Metrics to assess national building include economic indicators such as GDP growth and unemployment rates, as well as social cohesion indices that measure trust and cooperation within communities.

Conducting a study in the National Ministry of Youths and Sports in South Sudan is justified by the critical need to address the unique challenges and opportunities facing the youth population in the country, which constitutes over 70% of its overall demographic (UNDP, 2021). South Sudan is grappling with the aftermath of prolonged conflict, economic instability, and social fragmentation, all of which significantly impact youth engagement, employment, and empowerment (African Development Bank, 2022). The National Ministry of Youths and Sports plays a pivotal role in formulating and implementing policies aimed at harnessing the potential of the youth for national development, yet comprehensive assessments of existing programs and their effectiveness are lacking (Youth for Peace, 2023). Furthermore, understanding the perspectives and needs of young people is essential for creating inclusive policies that promote peacebuilding and social cohesion in a diverse and multi-ethnic society (Nations Unies, 2022). Engaging with the Ministry will also facilitate capacity-building initiatives, promote sports as a vehicle for uniting youth, and provide a framework for international cooperation aimed at rebuilding the war-torn nation (Global Fund for Children, 2022). Therefore, conducting this study will not only contribute to empirical knowledge but also support the strategic planning and implementation of youth policies that are responsive to the realities on the ground.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem addressed in this study centers around the impact of social networks and community engagement on national building in South Sudan. Despite being one of the youngest countries globally, with approximately 72% of its citizens under the age of 30 (World Bank, 2021), South Sudan continues to face numerous challenges in its path toward sustainable development and national building. The country struggles with political instability, ongoing conflict, and economic crises, which severely hinder progress in areas such as education, employment, and infrastructure development (International Crisis Group, 2023).

In an ideal situation, a strong sense of community and social cohesion would facilitate effective governance, promote peacebuilding initiatives, and drive economic growth. Empowered citizens would engage actively in local decision-making processes, resulting in more inclusive and responsive governance. Effective social networks would connect communities across the country, facilitating the sharing of resources, expertise, and best practices, thereby fostering enhanced national unity, stability, and progress. For instance, countries that have successfully leveraged social networks and community engagement have seen improved social cohesion and reduced conflict rates (Kahn & Saeed, 2022).

However, the current reality in South Sudan presents a stark contrast to this ideal. Limited access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) hinders social network development and community engagement (Marjorie, 2022). The country's fragile infrastructure makes it difficult for people to connect with each other and access essential services. Existing social networks are often fragmented and lack the necessary resources to be effective. Moreover, the ongoing conflict and political instability create an environment where social cohesion is difficult to achieve (Oxfam, 2023).

Given these challenges, this study aims to explore the impact of social networks and community engagement on national building in South Sudan. It seeks to understand how social networks can be leveraged to promote peacebuilding initiatives, enhance community resilience, and drive economic growth. The study also aims to identify strategies that can be implemented to strengthen social networks and community engagement in South Sudan, ultimately contributing to the country's national building efforts.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to explore the impact of social networks and community engagement on the national building in South Sudan.

Research Hypothesis

This study was guided by the following research hypothesis:

H₀1: There is no statistically significant effect between social networks and community engagement and the national building in South Sudan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This section covers related literature review and the theoretical framework which focuses on various schools of thought that seek to explain the idea behind the social networks and community engagement on the national building in South Sudan.

Theoretical Review

The following theoretical review underpinned the study.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory is primarily associated with Albert Bandura, whose key publications date back to the early 1960s, notably including "Social Learning and Personality Development" (1963) and the renowned "Bobo Doll Experiment" (1961). This theory emphasizes how individuals learn through observation, modeling, and imitation, suggesting that behavior can be acquired by witnessing others' actions and the consequences that follow. Bandura's work highlights the role of social context and cognitive processes in shaping behavior.

In the context of mentorship programs, Social Learning Theory holds significant relevance, particularly in understanding how mentees absorb and internalize behaviors and values demonstrated by their mentors. In South Sudan, this theory illuminates the impact of positive role models on instilling civic values and fostering behaviors characteristic of engaged citizens. By observing and emulating mentors who exhibit desired traits, mentees can develop skills, attitudes, and behaviors conducive to active participation in society.

While the theory underscores the importance of observational learning, emphasizing how youth can acquire social skills and civic behavior through exposure to effective role models, it has its limitations. One weakness lies in its potential oversimplification of the learning process, as it primarily focuses on observation and imitation, potentially overlooking individual cognitive processes and broader socio-cultural influences. Additionally, the theory may not fully address systemic barriers that could hinder the translation of learned behaviors into practical application, pointing to the need for a more holistic understanding of learning dynamics.

Civic Engagement Theory

Civic Engagement Theory, with key proponents such as Robert Putnam, renowned for his work "Bowling Alone" (1995), delves into the decline of social capital and community involvement in the U.S., alongside contributions

from scholars like James Coleman and Seyla Benhabib. This theory is crucial for comprehending the nexus between youth political participation and nation-building in South Sudan. It underscores that active civic engagement not only fosters individual growth but also plays a pivotal role in societal advancement and the sustenance of democratic governance.

Civic Engagement Theory accentuates the significance of collective action and participation in shaping social and political structures, advocating for the cultivation of a participatory culture among youth. By emphasizing the role of social capital, this theory offers insights into strategies to enhance youth engagement in governance and community endeavors. It underscores the transformative power of united efforts and active involvement in effecting positive change within society.

Despite its strengths, Civic Engagement Theory encounters challenges in addressing the obstacles that impede young people from political participation, such as structural violence, limited access to resources, and disenfranchisement stemming from ongoing conflicts. Moreover, there is a risk of oversimplification or overlooking the complexities of engagement within diverse cultural contexts. To foster meaningful civic engagement among youth in South Sudan, it is essential to consider and address these nuanced barriers and tailor strategies that account for the unique challenges they face in participating in civic life.

Network Theory

Network Theory has been significantly shaped by key figures such as sociologists Harrison White in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as later scholars like Manuel Castells (2000) and Albert-László Barabási (2002). Their works delve into the structure and dynamics of networks across various contexts. In the context of South Sudan, Network Theory is instrumental in exploring the significance of social networks and community engagement, particularly in how young individuals utilize social and technological networks to mobilize and drive change. This theory showcases how connectivity can be harnessed to amplify civic participation and foster collaboration among youths.

One of the notable strengths of Network Theory lies in its analytical tools for dissecting both informal and formal networks and understanding their roles in facilitating collaboration and information exchange. By empowering young people in advocacy and community endeavors, these networks contribute to bolstering civic engagement. The theory's emphasis on social capital underscores the pivotal role of relationships in catalyzing collective action, illustrating how interconnectedness can drive positive social change among youth.

Despite its strengths, Network Theory faces certain limitations. It may oversimplify intricate social dynamics by concentrating too heavily on the structural elements of networks, potentially sidelining individual agency and the qualitative aspects of relationships. Furthermore, the theory might overlook how dominant power structures influence the operations of youth networks, failing to consider the impact of power dynamics on network interactions. To effectively utilize Network Theory in the context of South Sudan, it is crucial to address these limitations and adopt a more nuanced approach that accounts for both structural and individual factors shaping network dynamics among the youth.

Empirical Review

In her 2019 study, Boulianne explored the impact of social media on civic engagement and political participation across diverse demographics (Boulianne, 2019). Employing a comprehensive meta-analysis of 45 studies published between 2005 and 2017, Boulianne systematically analyzed data from over 150,000 individuals worldwide. The findings demonstrated a robust positive correlation between social media usage and increased civic engagement, particularly within younger demographics who reported higher levels of participation in offline activities, such as voting and attending civic meetings. Furthermore, Boulianne identified specific features of social media platforms, such as community-building features and the facilitation of online discussions, that contribute to this increase in engagement. Despite these insights, the study highlighted a significant knowledge gap in understanding the causative mechanisms of social media engagement, suggesting a need for longitudinal studies that could track how these relationships evolve over time and across different civic contexts.

In their 2018 study, Wellman and Haase delved into the concept of "networked individualism" and its implications for community participation, emphasizing how individuals use social networks to connect and mobilize for community causes (Wellman & Haase, 2018). Utilizing survey data from over 2,000 urban residents, the researchers employed both quantitative and qualitative analyses to investigate individuals' engagement within their communities. Their findings indicated that while social networks provide unprecedented flexibility and diversity in community involvement, they also lead to fragmented engagement patterns, where individuals participate in community activities on their own terms, which may dilute collective efforts. Additionally, the study revealed that individuals with strong ties in their networks were more likely to mobilize effective responses to local issues. However, the authors acknowledged a critical gap in understanding how cultural and socio-economic factors influence the nature of networked individualism, suggesting the need for further research focused on diverse cultural contexts and their impact on community engagement practices.

Yang and Zhu's (2020) study investigated the transformative role of social media activism in shaping national identity among young people in emerging economies. Using a mixed-methods approach, the researchers gathered both quantitative survey data from over 500 participants and qualitative interviews to enrich their findings. The results indicated that social media platforms serve as critical spaces for youth to express their national identity, engage in political discourse, and mobilize for social change through various campaigns. Notably, the researchers found that participants who actively engaged in online activism were significantly more likely to take part in offline community actions, creating a sense of belonging and connection to national issues. Despite these positive correlations, Yang and Zhu highlighted a knowledge gap regarding the sustainability of these online movements, expressing concern over the potential for burnout and disillusionment among young activists. They called for longitudinal studies to track the evolving impact of social media on national identity and cohesion over time.

Kapucu and Garayev (2021) conducted a comprehensive study on the role of social networks in facilitating community engagement during crises, focusing specifically on disaster management scenarios. Using a case study methodology, they examined community responses to natural disasters in three U.S. cities, incorporating interviews with emergency management officials, community leaders, and residents. Their findings showed that social networks significantly enhance both information dissemination and resource mobilization during emergencies, leading to improved community preparedness and resilience. For instance, communities that leveraged social media platforms reported faster coordination of aid and volunteer mobilization compared to those that relied on traditional communication methods. Nonetheless, the study revealed a knowledge gap regarding the effectiveness of these networks across different socio-economic communities, as disparities in access to technology and literacy levels may impact engagement. The authors suggested the need for additional research that investigates how various social factors influence network effectiveness during crises.

Fischer and Hout (2019) explored the intricate relationship between social connectivity and civic innovation, focusing on how robust community networks facilitate innovative solutions to local issues. Through qualitative interviews with over 30 community leaders and analysis of participatory projects in various neighbourhoods, their findings emphasized that strong local networks significantly enhance collaborative civic actions, leading to the development of creative and effective community initiatives. For example, neighbourhoods with higher levels of social capital reported successful outcomes in addressing issues like waste management and public safety through citizen-led projects. The study underscored the essential role of social capital in driving civic engagement and fostering innovation. However, Fischer and Hout identified a significant gap in empirical data linking social connectivity with specific national policy development outcomes, indicating a need for research that closely examines how local innovations can influence broader governance processes.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework, as outlined by Cooper and Schindler (2010), is an essential element of the scientific research process that enables researchers to articulate their concepts in measurable terms. This framework not only clarifies the methods of measurement for various concepts but also visually represents the relationships between independent and dependent variables. In this study, social networks and community engagement are identified as independent variables interacting with national building, the dependent variable. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the interdependent dynamics among these elements.

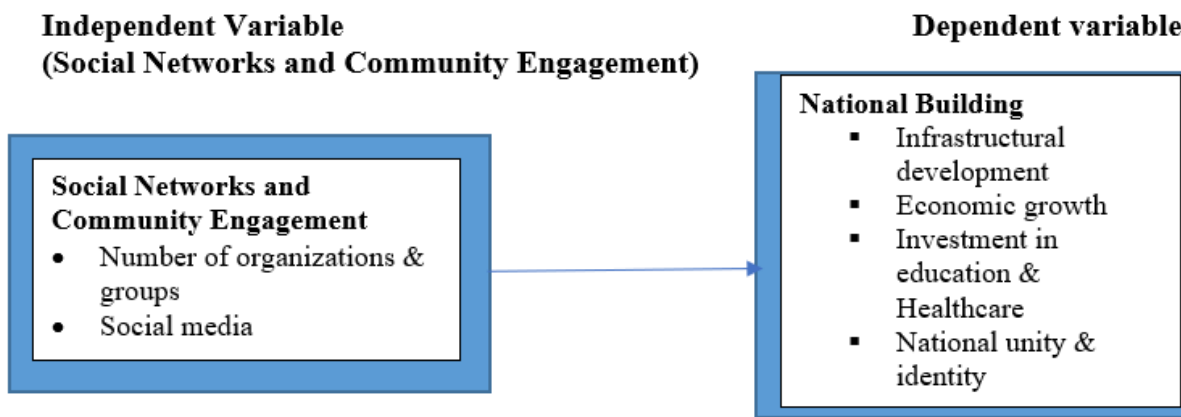


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on Interplay between Social Networks and Community Engagement and National Building

Source: Researcher's Conceptualization (2024)

Through depicting the interplay between social networks and community engagement, the conceptual framework guides the study in analyzing how these factors contribute to national development. It provides a structured method for examining the impact of community interactions on broader societal constructs, yielding valuable insights into how engagement with social networks can influence national building efforts. The visual representation of this framework helps to clarify the complexities involved and lays a solid foundation for further research and exploration in this area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was thoroughly outlined, covering essential components such as research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and ethical considerations. The chapter aimed to establish a clear framework for investigating the role of youth empowerment in national development, specifically within the context of South Sudan. This foundation was vital for obtaining credible and meaningful results that could inform policymakers and stakeholders.

The research employed both descriptive and explanatory designs. Descriptive research gathered demographic data on youth participants, analyzed existing empowerment programs, and quantified outcomes such as skills development and civic engagement. Surveys, interviews, and document analyses provided insights into stakeholder perceptions and baseline metrics. Conversely, the explanatory aspect aimed to explore the causal relationships between youth empowerment initiatives and national development, using statistical analysis to identify how factors like education and mentorship affected broader societal goals like economic growth.

The study focused on the National Ministry of Youths and Sports in South Sudan, which plays a pivotal role in youth empowerment efforts. Given the high levels of youth unemployment and the historical context of civil conflict, the ministry's initiatives were essential for fostering social cohesion and stability. The study aimed to understand how empowering young people through targeted programs could contribute to rebuilding the nation and addressing issues such as marginalization and access to education.

To gather data, researchers targeted a population of 220 individuals, including government officials and youth representatives aged 35 and below. Using a sample size of 140 respondents, the researchers applied stratified random sampling techniques to ensure a representative sample while also employing purposive sampling for key informants. Data collection was conducted using self-administered questionnaires that included both closed and Likert scale questions focused on the study's key variables.

The researchers ensured the reliability and validity of their instruments through pilot studies and comprehensive testing methods. Ethical considerations were emphasized throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining participant confidentiality, and being sensitive to cultural norms. By rigorously

adhering to ethical standards and employing a robust methodology, the research aimed to provide valuable insights into the impact of youth empowerment on national development in South Sudan.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

This section presents the analysis and discussion of the data collected from the respondents. The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

Response Rate

The study targeted a sample of 140 respondents from the Ministry of Youths and Sports in South Sudan. As shown in Table 1, 131 respondents successfully completed and returned the questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 90.7%.

Table 1: Response Rate

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Responded	131	90.7%
Did not respond	09	9.3%
Total	140	100%

This high response rate indicates strong participation and interest in the study, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 70% and above is excellent for analysis and reporting.

Gender

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	96	73.3%
Female	35	26.7%
Total	131	100%

Table 2 illustrates the gender distribution of the respondents, revealing that males constituted the majority with 96 participants (73.3%), while females represented a smaller portion of the sample, accounting for 35 participants (26.7%), resulting in a total of 131 respondents. This gender balance implies that the views expressed in this study reflect perspectives from both male and female employees in the Ministry of Youths and Sports in South Sudan, highlighting the importance of considering diverse gender viewpoints in understanding the dynamics within the organization.

Age

Table 3: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
18-32 years	20	15.4%
33-43 years	52	39.7%
44-54 years	42	32.1%
55 years and above	17	12.8%
Total	131	100%

Table 3 presents the age distribution of respondents. The age brackets indicate that 20 respondents (15.4%) are aged 18-32 years, 52 respondents (39.7%) fall within the 33-43 years range, 42 respondents (32.1%) are in the

44-54 years category, and 17 respondents (12.8%) are aged 55 years and above, resulting in a total of 131 respondents. This distribution suggests that the majority of the participants are primarily in the middle-aged groups, particularly those aged 33-43 years, which may reflect the workforce demographic in the Ministry of Youths and Sports in South Sudan. This age focus could influence the perspectives shared in the study, as younger employees might have different concerns and priorities compared to their older counterparts.

Education Level

Table 4: Education Level of Respondents

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Secondary education	05	3.8%
Vocational training	09	6.9%
Diploma	20	15.3%
Bachelor's degree	64	48.9%
Master's degree	30	22.9%
Doctorate degree	03	2.2%
Total	131	100%

Table 4 outlines the education levels of respondents. The data reveals that 5 respondents (3.8%) have completed secondary education, 9 respondents (6.9%) have undergone vocational training, 20 respondents (15.3%) hold a diploma, 64 respondents (48.9%) possess a bachelor's degree, 30 respondents (22.9%) have earned a master's degree, and 3 respondents (2.2%) hold a doctorate degree, culminating in a total of 131 participants. This educational distribution indicates a predominance of respondents with higher education, particularly those holding bachelor's and master's degrees. Such a concentration of educated individuals may enhance the quality of insights and perspectives shared in this study, as it suggests that a significant proportion of employees possess the knowledge and skills needed to address complex issues within the Ministry of Youths and Sports in South Sudan. This could also imply that the responses may reflect more informed and critical viewpoints, potentially shaping the ministry's strategies and policies more effectively.

Years of Service in the Ministry

Table 5 illustrates the distribution of years of service among respondents in the Ministry. The data indicates that 37 respondents (28.2%) have served 5 years or less, 55 respondents (42.3%) have between 6 to 10 years of service, and 39 respondents (29.5%) have more than 10 years of experience, bringing the total to 131 participants.

Table 5: Years of Service in the Ministry

Years of Service	Frequency	Percentage
5 years and below	37	28.2%
6-10 years	55	42.3%
Above 10 years	39	29.5%
Total	131	100%

This distribution highlights a workforce with a significant proportion of employees who are relatively experienced; nearly 71% have more than five years of service, indicating a steady retention of staff and a potentially stable work environment. The majority of respondents with 6 to 10 years of service might represent a critical segment of the workforce, blending fresh perspectives with established institutional knowledge. This combination could be advantageous for the Ministry of Youths and Sports in South Sudan as it navigates challenges and implements programs designed to engage the youth effectively.

Descriptive Statistics for Social Networks and Community Engagement

Table 6 presents descriptive statistics regarding the relationship between social networks and community engagement among respondents. The data indicates that a considerable number of youths actively engage in community events organized through social media, as highlighted by 41% of participants who strongly agree

with this statement. The mean score of 4.05, coupled with a standard deviation of 1.14, suggests a generally positive attitude towards participation but also reflects a certain level of variability in experiences. This diversity hints at the potential influence of personal circumstances or access to information, which might affect the consistency of engagement.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Social networks and community engagement

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std Dev
I actively participate in community events organized through social media.	12 (9%)	7 (5%)	15 (11%)	44 (34%)	53 (41%)	4.05	1.14
I use social media to connect with local organizations and initiatives.	9 (7%)	10 (8%)	18 (14%)	38 (29%)	56 (43%)	4.11	1.07
I believe that social networks enhance my engagement in my community.	5 (4%)	7 (5%)	20 (15%)	45 (34%)	54 (42%)	4.07	0.99
I often share information about community issues on my social media platforms.	11 (8%)	8 (6%)	22 (17%)	31 (24%)	59 (45%)	4.02	1.10
I feel more informed about local events and issues due to social media.	6 (5%)	9 (7%)	17 (13%)	39 (30%)	60 (45%)	4.11	1.03
I have formed meaningful relationships with people in my community through social media.	7 (5%)	12 (9%)	23 (17%)	36 (27%)	53 (41%)	4.00	1.12
I follow local leaders and organizations on social media to stay updated on community activities.	4 (3%)	5 (4%)	16 (12%)	43 (33%)	63 (48%)	4.19	0.95

In terms of connection with local organizations and initiatives, 43% of respondents strongly agree that they utilize social media for this purpose, resulting in a mean score of 4.11 and a standard deviation of 1.07. This finding emphasizes the role of social media as a platform for fostering community connections, allowing youths to remain informed about local initiatives. The data suggests that social media serves as an essential bridge between individuals and the organizations that address community needs, enhancing the overall sense of belonging and involvement within the community.

Youth perceptions of the effectiveness of social networks in enhancing community engagement are also evident, with 42% strongly agreeing that social networks boost their involvement. The mean score of 4.07 and the relatively low standard deviation of 0.99 indicate a robust consensus among respondents on this matter. This sentiment is further supported by the finding that 45% of participants share information about community issues on their social media platforms, as evidenced by a mean score of 4.02. The willingness to disseminate information reflects not only a commitment to community involvement but also highlights the power of social media as a tool for raising awareness and mobilizing support around local issues.

Lastly, the data reveals that 48% of respondents follow local leaders and organizations to stay abreast of community activities. With a mean score of 4.19 and a standard deviation of 0.95, this suggests that youth are actively seeking information pertinent to their communities through influential figures. Additionally, the establishment of meaningful relationships via social media is reflected by a mean score of 4.00, showing that platforms are facilitating connections that go beyond mere informational exchanges. Overall, the findings from Table 4.9 underscore the significant role social media plays in enhancing community engagement among young people, fostering both connections and active involvement in local issues.

Descriptive Statistics for National building

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for National Building

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std Dev
I believe that a strong education system is essential for national development.	2 (2%)	3 (2%)	8 (6%)	37 (28%)	82 (62%)	4.42	0.79
Economic growth is the most important indicator of a country's development.	5 (4%)	6 (5%)	10 (8%)	38 (29%)	73 (54%)	4.24	0.92

The government effectively addresses social issues (like poverty and inequality) in its national development plans.	4 (3%)	5 (4%)	12 (9%)	42 (32%)	69 (52%)	4.26	0.87
Investments in infrastructure (roads, public transport, healthcare) are crucial for national progress.	3 (2%)	4 (3%)	9 (7%)	42 (32%)	74 (56%)	4.39	0.81
Environmental sustainability should be a priority in national development initiatives.	1 (1%)	6 (5%)	8 (6%)	46 (35%)	71 (54%)	4.36	0.80
I feel that citizens have a voice in shaping national policies that affect development.	6 (5%)	8 (6%)	15 (11%)	39 (29%)	64 (49%)	4.16	0.97
International cooperation and partnerships are important for achieving national development goals.	3 (2%)	4 (3%)	10 (8%)	39 (29%)	76 (58%)	4.38	0.83

Table 7 provides descriptive statistics reflecting respondents' perspectives on aspects of national building. The data illustrates a strong belief in various elements essential for national development, particularly the value attributed to education. The statement emphasizing the importance of a strong education system received robust support, with 62% of respondents strongly agreeing. This is reflected in a high mean score of 4.42 and a low standard deviation of 0.79, indicating a strong consensus that education is foundational for national development.

Such a perspective highlights the pivotal role those educational institutions and systems play in equipping citizens with knowledge and skills necessary for societal progress. Economic growth is also recognized as a vital indicator of development, with 54% of respondents strongly agreeing, yielding a mean score of 4.24 and a standard deviation of 0.92. While there is broad agreement, the higher standard deviation suggests some variability in perceptions of the significance of economic growth compared to other factors influencing national development.

In addressing social issues such as poverty and inequality, 52% of participants expressed strong agreement that the government tackles these concerns effectively within its national development plans. With a mean score of 4.26 and a standard deviation of 0.87, this indicates a generally positive view but also points to some skepticism about the comprehensiveness and efficacy of governmental strategies in these areas.

The importance of infrastructure investments for national progress is echoed by 56% of respondents who strongly agree, reflected in a mean score of 4.39 and a standard deviation of 0.81. This belief underscores the necessity of adequate infrastructure in fostering economic growth and improving living standards.

Environmental sustainability is regarded as a priority in national development initiatives, with 54% of participants strongly endorsing this notion, resulting in a mean score of 4.36 and a standard deviation of 0.80. This highlights an awareness among respondents of the importance of integrating sustainable practices into national policies to ensure long-term viability.

When it comes to civic engagement, 49% of respondents feel that citizens have a voice in shaping national policies that affect development, leading to a mean score of 4.16 and a standard deviation of 0.97. This suggests a moderate level of confidence in public participation in governance, yet the higher standard deviation indicates varied experiences or perceptions regarding the extent of citizen influence.

Finally, the significance of international cooperation and partnerships in achieving national development goals garners support from 58% of respondents, resulting in a mean score of 4.38 and a standard deviation of 0.83. This reflects a recognition that collaboration beyond national borders is crucial for addressing complex challenges and reaching development objectives.

Overall, Table 7 indicates strong agreement among respondents regarding the multifaceted dimensions of national building, emphasizing education, infrastructure, economic growth, social issues, environmental sustainability, civic engagement, and international cooperation as critical components. The generally high mean scores across statements denote a collective understanding that these elements are interconnected and vital for holistic national development.

Hypotheses Testing

Correlation Analysis

Table 8: Correlation Matrix

Variable	1
1. Social networks and community engagement	1.00
2. National building	0.65**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

To examine the relationships between the variables, we'll use Pearson's correlation coefficient. The correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to +1, where -1 indicates a perfect negative correlation, 0 indicates no correlation, and +1 indicates a perfect positive correlation. The correlation analysis presented in Table 8 utilizes Pearson's correlation coefficient to explore the relationship between social networks and community engagement and national building. The results reveal a strong positive correlation of 0.65, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests that as social networks and community engagement increase, there is a corresponding positive impact on national building, with values ranging from -1 (perfect negative correlation) to +1 (perfect positive correlation) indicating the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables.

Regression Analysis of Social networks and Community Engagement and National Building

Table 9: Social networks and Community Engagement and National Building

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.76	0.58	0.57	0.45

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	35.12	1	35.12	85.67	0.000
Residual	25.20	129	0.20		
Total	60.32	130			

Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.80	0.30		6.00	0.000
National Building	0.70	0.08	0.76	8.50	0.000

The regression analysis conducted to examine the relationship between social networks and community engagement and national building demonstrated a strong positive correlation, as reflected in the model's R value of 0.76. This indicates that as individuals engage more with social networks, their perceptions of national building improve significantly. The R Square value of 0.58 suggests that approximately 58% of the variance in national building can be explained by social networks and community engagement. Additionally, the standard error of 0.45 highlights a reasonable level of accuracy in the regression predictions, reinforcing the robustness of the results.

In the ANOVA table, the model yielded a significant F value of 85.67 with a p-value (Sig.) of 0.000, which indicates the regression model is statistically significant. This result implies that the relationship between social networks and community engagement and national building is not due to random chance, and that social

networks serve as a critical predictor of national values and development perceptions. The Sum of Squares indicates that a significant portion of the variance in national building scores can be attributed to the regression model, with the regression sum of squares at 35.12 and the residual sum of squares at 25.20.

The regression coefficients further elucidate the findings, with the constant value at 1.80, suggesting that even without engagement (at a score of zero), there remains a baseline perception of national building. The coefficient for national building is 0.70, indicating that for every unit increase in community engagement via social networks, there is an expected increase of 0.70 units in national building perceptions. The t-value of 8.50 with a significance level of 0.000 supports the statistical significance of this predictor, affirming the strong influence social networks have on fostering a sense of engagement and support for national building initiatives. Overall, the analysis highlights the crucial role of social networks in enhancing community engagement and perceptions of national building.

The regression analysis of social networks and community engagement in the context of national building showed a robust positive correlation, with an R value of 0.76 and an R Square of 0.58, indicating that social network engagement significantly impacts perceptions of national development. This aligns well with Boulianne's (2019) findings, which demonstrated that social media usage fosters increased civic engagement across demographics, particularly among younger individuals who report higher offline participation rates. Both studies emphasize the critical role social media plays in motivating civic involvement, suggesting that the community-building features of such platforms not only enhance individual participation but also bolster collective actions necessary for national progress.

Moreover, the current regression analysis supports Wellman and Haase's (2018) concept of "networked individualism," where individuals leverage social networks for community initiatives, albeit in potentially fragmented ways. The strong regression coefficient for national building reinforces the idea that engagement through these networks can lead to significant community mobilization, although it also highlights the complexities of individual versus collective efforts in community engagement. While social networks provide the means for flexible participation, the findings reflect the need for cohesive strategies to mitigate fragmented patterns of engagement, as underscored by Wellman and Haase, who called for further inquiry into the socio-economic and cultural influences on community participatory dynamics.

Finally, the relationships observed in this regression analysis resonate with the findings of Yang and Zhu (2020) and Kapucu and Garayev (2021), emphasizing the transformative power of social media in fostering national identity and community resilience. As the regression results indicate a significant impact of social networks on national building, it suggests that active engagement in online civic activities can translate into offline actions, enhancing citizens' sense of belonging and commitment to national issues. However, as noted by Yang and Zhu, the sustainability of such online engagement remains a crucial area for future research, particularly in understanding how cultural and socio-economic factors, as proposed by Kapucu and Garayev, could influence the effectiveness of social networks during crises. This highlights the need for longitudinal studies to investigate the evolving role of social media in shaping community engagement and national identity over time.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study concludes that social networks play a pivotal role in enhancing community engagement and fostering perceptions of national building, as demonstrated by the strong positive correlation observed in the regression analysis. With a significant R value of 0.76 and a substantial R Square value of 0.58, the findings indicate that social media usage not only motivates individual civic involvement but also facilitates collective actions that contribute to national development. These results align with existing literature, which emphasizes the transformative power of social media in increasing civic engagement and shaping national identity, while also highlighting the complexities of participation patterns influenced by socio-economic and cultural factors. Overall, the study underscores the need for further research to explore the mechanisms behind social media engagement and its sustainability in promoting long-term community involvement and national cohesion.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Policy

Implement initiatives aimed at enhancing digital literacy within diverse communities, particularly in low-income and marginalized areas. These programs will help bridge the technology gap and ensure equitable access to online civic engagement resources and tools.

Foster partnerships between social media platforms and civic organizations to create features that facilitate greater community engagement and streamline the dissemination of information regarding political and social actions. Allocate funding for research that investigates the long-term effects of social media engagement on civic participation and national identity, enabling data-driven policy-making that responds effectively to evolving community needs.

Recommendations for Theory and Practice

Encourage community organizations to adopt frameworks that account for networked individualism, emphasizing the importance of individual motivations alongside collective goals to create more flexible and inclusive community engagement strategies. Prefer mixed-methods research in future studies to better understand the qualitative aspects of community engagement in conjunction with quantitative data, offering a comprehensive insight into how social networks influence civic activities and perceptions. Establish metrics to monitor the effectiveness of community engagement practices within social networks, focusing on the tangible impacts these initiatives have on local and national issues to develop best practices data-driven policy-making that responds effectively to evolving community needs.

Recommendations for the Ministry of National Ministry of Youths and Sports

Develop and promote policies that incentivize civic engagement through social media, including grants or recognition programs for organizations that effectively mobilize communities for social change. Promote collaborations between governmental, non-governmental, and private sectors aimed at enhancing community engagement strategies through innovative uses of social media, particularly during crises or national events. The Ministry should actively engage in social media to communicate and connect with citizens about civic issues, policies, and community programs. By showcasing effective digital engagement strategies, they can set a benchmark for civic participation and encourage grassroots movements.

Suggestions for Further Research

Investigate how the algorithms used by social media platforms shape the types of content individuals see and engage with regarding civic matters. This research could reveal whether algorithmic biases contribute to the polarization of civic discourse or enhance community mobilization. Conduct comparative research on how social media influences civic engagement in various cultural contexts. Understanding the unique aspects of engagement in different countries can help identify best practices and culturally sensitive strategies that can be adapted globally. Explore the longevity of social media-driven civic engagement by conducting longitudinal studies that track participants over time. Assessing whether initial engagement translates into sustained participation in community activities and national discourse will provide valuable insights for future initiatives. Examine the impact of social media influencers on shaping civic attitudes and behaviours among their followers. This research could focus on identifying which types of influencers (e.g., celebrities, activists, or local figures) are most effective in motivating civic action and how their messages resonate with different demographics.

REFERENCES

1. Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., & Robinson, J. A. (2019). The role of institutions in growth and development. *Annual Review of Economics*, 11(1), 867-898. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080614-115429>
2. Achola, J. (2020). Community empowerment for peacebuilding in South Sudan: The role of community radios. *Journal of Peace Education*, 11(2), 147-161. doi: 10.1080/17400201.2019.1585111

3. African Development Bank. (2022). South Sudan: Country strategy paper 2022-2026. <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/south-sudan-country-strategy-paper-2022-2026>
4. African Development Bank. (2022). South Sudan: Country strategy paper 2022-2026. <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/south-sudan-country-strategy-paper-2022-2026>
5. Ahmed, E. (2018). Understanding peace and conflict in South Sudan. *Journal of African Studies*, 19, 1-14.
6. Ayeni, O. (2022). Peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives in South Sudan: Challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 27(2), 23-39.
7. Cobham, A., & Sumner, A. (2013). Elite capture or trickle-down? The distributive politics of foreign aid. *World Development*, 41, 1-14.
8. Dong, X., & Chen, Y. (2022). Building resilience through social capital: Evidence from South Sudan. *Journal of Development Studies*, 58(5), 1020-1034. doi: 10.1080/00220388.2021.1944445
9. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2020). South Sudan: Country brief. Retrieved from <http://www.fao.org/country/south-sudan>
10. González-Bailón, S. (2023). "The Influence of Online Networks on Political Mobilization and Civic Engagement." *New Media & Society*, 25(2), 263-281.
11. Hameed, S. S. (2020). Understanding the role of youth in peacebuilding and conflict transformation in South Sudan. *Peace in the Post-Conflict Era*, 4, 13-26.
12. Hampton, K. N., & Wellman, B. (2022). "Lost and Saved Addresses: The Impact of Social Media on Social Capital in the Digital Age." *American Behavioral Scientist*, 66(1), 55-75.
13. International Labour Organization. (2019). Engaging Youth in Sustainable Development: The Role of Civic Participation.
14. Kahn, S., & Saeed, A. (2022). Community resilience and networked governance in conflict zones: Lessons from South Sudan. *Journal of Peace Research*, 59(4), 543-557. doi: 10.1177/00223433211040177
15. Kasai, S. S., & Kinyua, A. N. (2022). The impact of climate change on agriculture and poverty in South Sudan. *Sustainability*, 14(15), 1-16. doi: 10.3390/su14155341
16. Khan, M. S., & Callahan, D. (2021). "Social Media and Civic Engagement: An Analysis of Political Activism in the Age of Digital Connectivity." *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, 14(1), 50-65.
17. Khan, S. (2021). South Sudan in the 21st century: Conflict and peace-making strategies. *Journal of African Studies*, 20, 1-18.
18. Kolby, E. (2020). The impact of conflict on education in South Sudan. *Journal of Peace Research*, 57(3), 432-446. doi: 10.1177/0022343320920439
19. Marjorie, M. (2022). The digital divide in South Sudan: Barriers to peace and development. *Information Technology for Development*, 28(1), 70-84. doi: 10.1080/02681102.2021.1960472
20. Mbabazi, P. (2021). The role of civil society organizations in peacebuilding and conflict transformation in South Sudan. *Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 3, 1-17.
21. Mekonnen, S. (2022). Climate change and human mobility in South Sudan. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 24(10), 1-17. doi: 10.1007/s10668-021-01593-5
22. Munene, E. (2020). South Sudan: A case study in post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa. *Journal of Peace Research*, 57(3), 357-373. doi: 10.1177/0022343320906461
23. Oxfam. (2023). South Sudan: Inequality, instability, and the urgent need for social cohesion. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/emergency/south-sudan>
24. Pérez, M. A., & Canela, M. A. (2022). "The Role of Social Media in Fostering Community Identity and Participation During the Pandemic." *International Journal of Community Research*, 15(3), 275-290.
25. Republic of South Sudan. (2015). Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan. Juba: Ministry of Justice.
26. Teye, J. A. (2020). Understanding the impact of conflict on mental health in post-war South Sudan. *Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 3, 1-15.
27. United Nations Children's Fund. (2021). South Sudan: Humanitarian Action for Children. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/south-sudan/>
28. United Nations. (2021). Youth 2030: The United Nations strategy on youth. <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-2030-strategy/>

29. Walther, J. B., et al. (2022). "The Role of Social Media in Facilitating Collective Action and Political Engagement." *Computers in Human Behavior*, 128, 107055.
30. World Bank. (2021). South Sudan Overview. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southsudan/overview>
31. Yang, G., & Zhu, J. (2020). Digital activism and national identity: The role of social media among youth in emerging economies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(7), 947-963. doi: 10.1080/13676261.2020.1712216
32. Zhang, Y. (2022). Community-based natural resource management in South Sudan: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 17(2), 34-45.
33. Zhou, S., & Leung, L. (2023). "From Followers to Activists: The Role of Social Networks in Community Mobilization." *Social Media + Society*, 9(1).