



Using Theatre for Development to Teach Social Media's Impact on Nigeria's Justice System: A Case Study at COOU Law Faculty

Abstract: Social media have continued to impact directly on various aspects of human endeavours, the law profession inclusive. This study therefore investigates the pedagogical effectiveness of stage performances in enhancing law students' comprehension of the influence of social media on the justice system. The study addressed the challenge of engaging students with complex, contemporary issues that often lack interactive teaching approaches. Adopting the constructivist learning theory which emphasizes active engagement and experiential learning, the study employed qualitative methodology which involved analysis of case study production while data were collected through participant observation and post-production feedback from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Findings show that stage performances can significantly improve law students' critical understanding, foster active engagement, and facilitate critical discussions on social media's role in contemporary justice processes in Nigeria while bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical understanding. By highlighting the potential of performing arts towards enrichment of legal education, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on the role of arts-based approaches in legal education while offering insight into the potential of TFD as an interdisciplinary cum multidisciplinary pedagogical tool.

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Introduction

Marshal McLuhan's prediction decades ago about the world becoming a global village has not only turned out a reality, but the materialization of that prediction has also radically impacted on the human society in many ways. The global-village nature of the world which means that distance between individuals and communities has been dramatically reduced has made contemporary society intriguingly dynamic to the extent that its *modus operandi*, knowledge production

and ideology tend to constantly evolve. In fact, various trends have continued to emerge in different areas of human society, orchestrated by constant innovations that characterize Information Communication Technology (ICT) which birthed what is today known as 'digital communication'. Part of the fallout of the transformations in digital communication technology is the Internet and its ally, the social media. The Internet which according to Sadegh Feizollahi, Alireza Shirmohammadi, Zahra Safari and Mohammad Kaherh is referred to as the latest Information Communication Technology that revolutionized communication heralded the emergence of the social media (605).

Social media as an Internet-enabled media can best be referred to as the 'game changer' due to its overreaching impact on almost every facet of human endeavour. Ebuka Ilukwe and Chidimma Ebubeoha while affirming social media's influence on contemporary broadcast media practice holds that it enabled what is today known as "participatory programme presentation ... which makes the public not just core consumers but also partial producers of



media content” because of the immediacy and interactive platforms it provides (77). Prakriti Goswami while adopting a deconstructive approach in defining social media holds that “social ... means anything that is of society and media ... relates to the various channels of communication. It thereby includes all technology whether digital, text, or visuals that is used as a means of speech, expression, and ideas through various networks in society. In short, it is a web-based technology” (b801). Going by this definition, social media can be said to have become the hub for human activities in this present age.

In recent years, social media has, in fact, emerged as a transformative force across various other sectors, disrupting traditional communication paradigms and reshaping societal interactions. Its pervasive influence extends into the legal domain, particularly impacting Nigeria’s justice system, where social media platforms serve as tools for evidence gathering, mobilization of public opinion, and sometimes even as catalysts for justice or injustice (Bello 84). The dynamic and often complex relationship between social media and the justice process warrants an in-depth understanding, especially for law students who are future custodians of justice.

However, engaging students with such contemporary and often multifaceted issues presents pedagogical challenges. Conventional lecture-based approaches may fall short in fostering critical thinking or experiential understanding of real-world implications, especially when dealing with the rapid evolution of social media’s role in legal contexts. There is therefore a pressing need for innovative teaching methods that actively involve students, stimulate critical discussion, and bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical realities. And this is where Theatre for Development (TfD), as an

arts-based pedagogical tool, offers a promising avenue for enhancing legal education.

Through stage performances, students can visualize and dramatize complex issues, facilitating experiential learning and active engagement. Chiduo Obadiogwu affirms that TfD “as an aspect of development communication using theatrical idioms, embracing participatory development policy” is a potent pedagogical tool employed in educating a number of university communities in Nigeria (25). This approach aligns with the constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that learners construct knowledge actively through participation, reflection, and social interaction (Olusegun 66). By integrating theatre, students are encouraged to critically analyze social media’s influence on Nigeria’s criminal justice processes, thus deepening their understanding and fostering critical discussions.

Statement of the Problem

Although the use of stage performances in legal pedagogy may not be entirely novel, its application as a tool within a multidisciplinary framework – combining arts, law, and social sciences remains underexplored. This research therefore investigated how arts-based pedagogical strategies, specifically stage performances within the Theatre for Development (TfD) framework, enhanced law students and the Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, Anambra State audience’s comprehension of social media’s impact on Nigeria’s justice system. By focusing on the pedagogical effectiveness of such interventions, this study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for innovative, experiential, and interdisciplinary approaches in legal education. It also demonstrates how theatre, as a form of arts-based education, can serve as a catalyst for active learning, critical thinking, and social awareness among law students, and the larger



university audience thereby preparing them better for contemporary legal challenges.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative research methodology to evaluate the pedagogical impact of stage performances specifically Theatre for Development (TfD) – on law students' understanding of social media's influence on Nigeria's justice system. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards arts-based pedagogical interventions. The research adopted a case study design, focusing on the implementation and assessment of the theatrical performance entitled "For the Love of Tik Tok" staged during the Law Students' Week at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. This design facilitated a comprehensive analysis of the performance's pedagogical efficacy within its real-life educational context.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected through multiple qualitative instruments:

- Participant Observation: Researchers observed rehearsals, script development workshops, and the actual performance to understand the process and immediate reactions of participants.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Data were also gathered through FGDs conducted as part of the post-performance follow-up. The FGDs were in three distinct categories:
- Category A: Law students who participated directly in script drafting and acting.
- Category B: Law students and faculty members who watched the performance and provided feedback.

- Category C: Broader university community members, including students and non-academic staff who witnessed the performance.

Each FGD session was guided by semi-structured questions aimed at eliciting perceptions regarding the educational impact of the drama, critical engagement, and social awareness.

Interview: Interview was employed in eliciting in-depth feedback from the Law Faculty's Staff Adviser regarding the TfD's effectiveness in enhancing pedagogical engagements among his students.

The Constructivist Learning Theory and Arts-Based Pedagogy in Legal Education

The integration of stage performances into legal pedagogy to enhance understanding of social media's impact on Nigeria's justice system necessitates a solid theoretical foundation. This study thus predominantly draws upon the Constructivist Learning Theory which underscores active engagement, experiential learning to interrogate the pedagogical and transformative power of arts in education.

Constructivism, rooted in the works of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Mara Montessori, John Dewey posits that learners do not passively absorb information but actively construct knowledge through experience, reflection, and social interaction. von Glasersfeld while reviewing the ideological stances of the above-mentioned education scholars, emphasizes the importance of social context and dialogue in cognitive development, suggesting that learning is a social process facilitated by cultural tools such as language, symbols, and, relevantly, performative arts which teach through demonstration (qtd. in Olusegun 66). Olusegun further dissects the meaning and implication of the Constructivist Learning Theory. According to him, it



... is basically a theory which is based on observation and scientific study, about how people learn. It says that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. When we encounter something new, we have to reconcile it with our previous ideas and experience, maybe changing what we believe, or maybe discarding the new information as irrelevant ... To do this, we must ask questions, explore, and assess what we know. In the classroom, the constructivist view of learning can point towards a number of different teaching practices. In the most general sense, it usually means encouraging students to use active techniques (experiments, real-world problem solving) to create more knowledge and then to reflect on and talk about what they are doing and how their understanding is changing. (67)

The above assertion justifies the adoption of the theory in interrogating how Theatre for Development projects can be used in tasking the mental and ideological mindsets of people on contemporaneous issues relating to social media.

In the context of legal education, constructivism advocates for pedagogical approaches that involve students in active discovery and critical thinking rather than mere transmission of knowledge. It holds that students expand their knowledge horizon by relating new concepts or approaches to what they already know or had been taught. Liker Cirik, Esma Colak and Defne Kaya while contending that constructivist learning environment should be encouraged adds that constructivism helps “students to discover, discuss and interpret knowledge; ... Such a learning environment supports students to take responsibility for their own learning. To expect students to take responsibility for learning and construct their knowledge it is important to

employ mental processes like questioning, problem-solving and researching” (31). Hence, when law students participate in theatre performances that dramatize social media’s influence on justice, they are not just passive recipients but active participants in constructing their understanding of complex issues. The dramatization provides a simulated environment where students can explore diverse perspectives, analyze social dynamics, and internalize lessons through experiential engagement.

Furthermore, the constructivist approach aligns with Experiential Learning Theory, articulated by David Kolb, which emphasizes learning through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Theatre performances serve as a concrete experience, stimulating reflection and critical analysis among target audience, thereby fostering deeper understanding (Walker et al n.p). This aligns with the study’s objective to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical understanding of social media’s role in the justice process.

Arts-based pedagogy encompasses teaching and learning strategies that utilize arts like drama, music and dance to facilitate engagement and learning. Theatre, as a form of arts-based education, offers a unique pedagogical tool that encourages empathy, reflection, and critical thinking (Dugga 63). Unlike the conventional theatre that expects the audience to visit it, Dugga further identifies TfD as a unique pedagogical tool used in reaching the unreached both within and beyond the ivory tower (64 – 65). In the context of legal education, arts-based approaches such as role-play, dramatization, and theatre for development (TfD) have gained recognition for their ability to simulate real-life scenarios, foster active participation, and stimulate dialogue on sensitive or complex issues.



Samuel Kafewo, Tor Iorapuu and Emmanuel Dandaura while acknowledging Steve Abah's pioneering contributions in Theatre for Development studies and practice in Nigeria, state that

... at the centre of the TFD process which begins from conceiving the workshop to implementation and follow-ups is participation in the drama-making process. This participation allows the people to write their own story in action. It is the complex nature of such actions that Abah calls 'perforaltics' and this is a new lexicon in the field of Theatre for Development. Abba defines perforaltics as "the oral and gestural amalgamation of a community's cultural systems into a dramatic representation of their own reality". (4)

The Theatre for Development (TfD) model in essence emphasizes participatory, community-oriented theatre that aims to educate, empower, and catalyze social change. When adapted to legal education, TfD techniques can transform passive learners into active co-creators of knowledge, facilitating a deeper understanding of the social and legal implications of social media in Nigeria. The COOU theatre for Development provided the students an opportunity to embody different roles, explore multiple viewpoints, and reflect on societal issues like social media's influence on justice, which might be difficult to grasp through conventional lectures. Furthermore, this framework recognizes the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in addressing contemporary legal challenges. The convergence of arts, social sciences, and law illustrates that understanding social media's impact requires insights from communication studies, sociology, and legal framework. Arts-based pedagogy, therefore, serves as an effective interdisciplinary tool that contextualizes legal theories within real-world social dynamics, fostering holistic understanding.

In sum, the theoretical foundation of this study rests on the principles of Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes active, experiential, and social learning, and Arts-Based Pedagogy, which advocates for the use of theatre to facilitate engagement, empathy, and critical thinking. This theory supports the premise that stage performances, as an arts-based educational strategy, can significantly enhance law students' comprehension of the intricate relationship between social media and Nigeria's justice system. It underscores the potential of arts-based, experiential learning to foster critical legal consciousness and social awareness among students.

Theatre for Development (TfD) as a Multidisciplinary Pedagogical Tool: The COOU Theatre Arts – Law Project Example

Theatre in broad sense encompasses all stage performances designed for the purpose of educating, informing and entertaining the audience. This triadic function of theatre is the reason Olalekan Akashoro, Jimi Kayode and Shaibu Hussein regard theatre "whether in the literary or performative form" as an indispensable tool in national development that is often wielded for pedagogical purposes (107). The pedagogical relevance of theatre is both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. Interdisciplinary in the sense that theatre often intersects with another discipline within the arts / humanities disciplines or any other discipline for that matter. Its multidisciplinary characteristic implies that theatre interconnects with multiple disciplines. Ebuka Ilukwe, Jude Orakwe and Chiamaka Okoye identify the intersection of theatre arts and law in the aspect of creativity and intellectual property as good example of how the arts and other disciplines interconnect (114 – 115). This already existing relationship between the duo prove that theatre can be a useful tool for legal education.



Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Theatre Arts team, as part of its social responsibility to the university community, initiated discussions with the institution's Law Faculty administration and students' association regarding the intricacies of legal education and how drama can be adopted as a pedagogical tool. The discussions tilted towards legal education and practice in the age of social media. As the discussions advanced, the team saw the need to expand the scope of the project and include the larger university community as part of the potential beneficiaries owing to the inclusion of social media as a vital arm of contemporary society. At the end of the preliminary discussions and research, the team found that it needed to demonstrate that theatre can be adopted as a pedagogical tool for enhancing legal education among law students on the one hand and sensitizing the entire university community on the opportunities, challenges and potential dangers in social media usage on the other hand.

The interactions precipitated the creation of an 8-man script drafting crew which was made up of 4 Theatre Arts and 4 Law students. The script drafting was organized in the form of a workshop which had the researchers as the supervisors. While the theatre arts students crafted the play script, paying attention to certain artistic and technical details, the law students provided some legal dimension to the narrative. The crew finally came up with a script entitled "For the Love of Tik Tok". Next was the rehearsal stage. Cast constituted Theatre Arts and Law students. The Law students were to play lawyer and judge roles in the play. The performance was engrafted into the faculty's Law Students' Association week which had the theme, "The Impact of Social Media on the Justice System: Challenges and Opportunities". The drama which was crafted to reflect the topic was performed during the association's banquet with members of the

university community, which included staff and students, in attendance.

The drama staged at Law Faculty Moot Court centered around one self-acclaimed celebrity Tik Toker, named London whose real name is Nkeonyelu Amadi. London displays expensive lifestyle on social media which obviously is beyond her earnings as a fuel attendant in one of the filling stations in town. London 'lives' on social media, exhibiting exaggerated buoyancy and flamboyance to the consternation and jealousy of her colleague and neighbour Lizzy. London would later be fingered as the suspected agent that connived with armed robbers that attacked the filling station where she works. She is arrested and sued but events took a sudden turn as trial judge ruled that the prosecutors failed to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that she is culpable of the crime. Meanwhile subplot to the story captured a certain man who attempts to sneakily cross the border but is stopped by Greg, an upright immigration officer who had initially turned down offers to traffic contraband goods across the border. Greg identifies the said man as a fraudulent native doctor who recently went viral on social media for alleged criminal activities and is currently on the police wanted list. The man is apprehended albeit escape attempt. The drama ends with plot twist as one of the armed robbers that attacked the filling station is apprehended upon thorough underground investigations. He identifies Lizzy, London's adjudged innocent colleague as their agent. London is finally discharged and acquitted while Lizzy is jailed.

Analysis and Discussion of the Case Study Project

"For the Love of Tik Tok" enhanced pedagogical engagements on the impact of social media on the justice system. It weighed the pros and cons of social media in the dispensation of justice. The drama was a collaborative performance staged during the



2025 edition of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Law Faculty Students' Week banquet. It explored the extent social media impacts on the justice system and legal practice in general and also captured the implications of social media usage in the society. The performance received wide acclaim from audience members. Postproduction follow-up was organised to receive feedback on the level of impact the drama had on the participants and audience. As earlier stated, three distinct categories of Focus Group Discussion were held:

- Category A: FGD with participant observers consisting of Law students who were part of the script drafting and performance.
- Category B: FGD with Non-participant observers consisting of Law students who were interviewed during the research stage and also watched the performance.
- Category C: FGD with university community observers made up of majorly students and some non-academic staff who witnessed the performance.

During the FGD with Category A, the discussants who were eight (8) in number, consisting of four (4) students involved in the script and acting respectively explained that the TFD Project expanded their critical mindset. They affirmed that the playmaking process, scripting and acting, provided them an opportunity to sharpen their intellectual swords and to brood deeper on the issue of social media, the justice system, and the broader society. It also helped them understand how real life experiences can be appropriated into the creative arts citing the case of the fleeing suspected Billionaire Enugu ritualist and kidnapper who was apprehended by an eagle-eye immigration officer at the Seme Border while attempting to escape justice by crossing over from Nigeria to Benin Republic after he went viral on social media as a wanted

criminal in May 2025 as reported in Nigerian national dailies. The skilful appropriation of such real life event into a dramatic form broadened their intellectual horizon on the intersection of reality and dramatic fiction. On the other hand, the actors also explained that the process concertized the knowledge on a subject they had learned in class while helping them understand that the stage and real life are like two sides of a coin.

Discussants in the Category B FGD numbered twelve (12) made up of six (6) boys and six (6) girls. This selection was intentionally done in order to create gender balance and promote inclusivity. The discussants also affirmed the pedagogical impact of drama and its interdisciplinary relevance to legal education. They discussed the various perspectives the performance had impacted on their understanding of the intersection of the social media and the justice system. Such practical example, according to them, expanded the discourse of social media and justice beyond the conventional classroom teaching methodology. While observing that real life examples drawn from cases that has been adjudicated or being adjudicated on are part of their legal education and training, they however concede that those instances seem more like mere recitals. The drama which captures the realities of average Nigerians, their social media lifestyle and entanglement with the law gave better view of the how and why certain rulings / judgements favour a party against the other. The discussants unanimously held that the dramatized situations strengthened their understanding of the justice system while triggering further discussions on the intertwin of social media and law.

Staff adviser of the student's association while affirming the locus standi of the discussants during an interview with the researchers revealed that the Tfd provoked critical engagements among Year One students in the



faculty who, according to him, were intrigued how such complex topic was treated using drama. He explained that many of the students relied on the drama to initiate critical discussions during the classes he had been having with them after the performance. This development further reaffirms TfD's pedagogical efficacy. He further stated that a striking perspective to their discussion of the drama is the matter of evidence in the court of law. He explained that he now observes that the students now understand better the need to limit assumptions. Having understood that social media is fraud with unprovable and limited evidence that easily pass as assumption when placed under the weighing scale of the law, he averred that trainee practitioners should understand the expediency of following due diligence in testing the admissibility of any social media evidence produced in the court of law.

Data gathered during the Category C FGD showed that the drama effectively sensitized the university community on the consequences of social media misuse. The discussants were an ad-mix of staff and students at the university numbering twelve (12). By exploring the challenges and opportunities of the social media through the stage performance, the discussants explained that the play challenged them to exercise some restraint while "living their lives on social media" as uncensored contents may pose certain negative implications in the present or future. Hence, self-regulation of social media is paramount. Learning that the social media can be likened to a double-edged sword, many of the student-respondents discussed the need to apply caution while exploiting the potential gains of the social media. They learnt to resist the lure of the sometimes-deceitful glamour of online contents.

Summarily, all data gathered from the FGDs, and interview reinforce the study's theoretical framework – the efficacy of active engagement,

experiential learning, reflection and critical analysis of identifiable real-life situations. Discussants from the three categories of FGDs were able to identify with the fake lifestyle the main character – London – displayed online. Her "celebrity vibes", showing off of expensive wears and locations while in reality she lives in a "face me, I face you" (a popular Nigerian phrase that describes a mini-building where multiple individuals or families share a common entrance, hallway, and courtyard and their doors face each other) apartment and works as pump attendant despite being a graduate gave the performance a "Gen Z" perspective. Other "Gen Z" cultural tools evident in the language and dress patterns of social media freaks like London, Lizzy and Chinaza – the three co-tenants that work in the same filling station – made the performance more relatable which draws upon the Constructivist Learning Theory to drive home its message.

Findings / Result

The study's findings affirm that stage performances, within an arts-based pedagogical framework, significantly enhance legal students' comprehension of complex issues surrounding social media and the justice system. The findings and results of the study are captured hereunder:

- **Enhanced Critical Understanding:** Participants reported that dramatizations like "For the Love of Tik Tok" provided realistic, relatable scenarios that deepened their understanding of how social media influences legal processes. For instance, students appreciated the dramatization of social media evidence admissibility, which clarified the importance of due diligence and reliability in digital evidence.
- **Active Engagement and Reflection:** FGDs revealed that students who participated in script development and acting



experienced heightened engagement, fostering active learning. Non-participant observers also acknowledged that watching the performance stimulated critical discussions that would not typically emerge in conventional classroom settings.

- **Interdisciplinary Appreciation:** The performance bridged legal concepts with social and cultural dimensions, especially through depiction of “Gen Z” social media behaviours. This interdisciplinary approach made complex legal issues more accessible and relatable, reinforcing constructivist principles.
- **Sensitization and Social Awareness:** Broader university communities expressed increased awareness of the dangers of social media misuse, including the potential for false evidence and the importance of digital literacy. The drama’s portrayal of social media lifestyle illusions resonated with audiences, prompting reflection on authenticity online.
- **Pedagogical Efficacy of TfD:** The project demonstrated that theatre could serve as a powerful pedagogical tool that encourages experiential learning, critical thinking, and social consciousness among students and the university community.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the above findings and results, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Institutionalize Arts-Based Pedagogy:** The academia should integrate theatre and arts-based strategies into their curricula, especially for teaching contemporary issues like social media’s impact on legal, psychological and other related issues.
2. **Curriculum Development:** Interdisciplinary modules that combine legal education with arts and social sciences, fostering holistic understanding

and critical engagement should be developed and encouraged.

3. **Regular Performance-Based Learning:** Schedules of staged performances, workshops, and interactive sessions to continuously engage students with evolving social issues should be established in universities and other higher institutions.
4. **Capacity Building:** Departments of Theatre Arts should pay greater attention to training TfD methodologies to enhance the quality and relevance of performances as pedagogical tools.
5. **Community Engagement:** Such theatre initiatives should be extended beyond the university to sensitize the wider community on social media literacy, digital rights, and legal responsibilities.

In conclusion, this study highlights the need to foster interdisciplinary collaborations in the academia while underscoring the fundamental role of theatre in achieving such goal. It also underscores the transformative potential of stage performances within an arts-based pedagogical framework to enhance legal education on social media and criminal justice. The positive feedback from students, faculty, and the broader university community demonstrates that theatre can effectively bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical understanding. By fostering active participation, critical reflection, and social awareness, arts-based approaches such as TfD can prepare law students to navigate the complex digital landscape ethically and effectively. This research advocates for the broader adoption of arts-integrated pedagogy across disciplines, emphasizing its role in cultivating socially conscious, critical thinkers equipped to handle contemporary legal challenges.



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