

Digital Media and Contemporary Playwriting: Examining the Influence of Social Media on Character Development, Dialogue, and Narrative Structure in African Theatre

Osadiaye Ehigie Samuel^{1*}

¹Dept. of Theater Arts, Igbinedion University, Okada

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36348/sjhss.2026.v11i09.004>

| Received: 12.07.2026 | Accepted: 05.09.2026 | Published: 10.09.2026

*Corresponding author: Osadiaye Ehigie Samuel
 Dept. of Theater Arts, Igbinedion University, Okada
 Email: osadiayesamuel@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the influence of social media on contemporary African playwriting, focusing on character development, dramatic dialogue and narrative structure. It responds to the limited scholarly attention given to the dramaturgical implications of social media, as existing studies have largely emphasised its roles in theatre promotion, performance dissemination and audience engagement. The study adopts a qualitative textual-analysis approach, using selected contemporary African dramatic texts as primary materials and relevant scholarly publications as secondary sources. Through close textual analysis, the study investigates how digital communication The study closely analyses how digital communication integrates into characterisation, dialogue, and narrative organisation into characterisation, dialogue and narrative organisation. The findings reveal that social media has become an emerging dramaturgical resource in contemporary African theatre. It enables characters to construct multiple identities across physical and virtual spaces, intensifies interpersonal relationships and generates new forms of conflict through digital interactions, public exposure and archived communication. The research further demonstrates that social media enhances dramatic dialogue via text messages, posts, comments, emojis, hashtags, abbreviations, slang, and code-switching, while promoting fragmented, diverse, and multimodal communication forms. In addition, the networked and discontinuous nature of digital communication promotes nonlinear narrative structures, multiple perspectives, digital interruptions and movement between physical and virtual spaces. The study concludes that social media does not replace traditional African theatrical forms but extends and transforms their dramaturgical possibilities. It recommends greater attention to digital dramaturgy in African theatre scholarship, playwriting practice and theatre training.

Keywords: Social media, digital dramaturgy, African theatre, playwriting, character development, and narrative structure.

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution **4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)** which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Theatre has constantly evolved in response to changes in society, technology and patterns of human communication. African theatre, in particular, has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to absorb emerging social realities while retaining its connections to indigenous performance traditions, communal participation, oral expression and sociopolitical commentary. Contemporary African drama, therefore, cannot be understood exclusively through the conventional categories of stage, actor, audience and physical performance. The rapid expansion of digital communication has introduced new cultural spaces in which identities are formed, relationships are negotiated,

conflicts are expressed and stories are circulated. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, X and TikTok have consequently become significant components of contemporary African social life and, increasingly, of theatrical imagination.

The relationship between theatre and digital media has attracted growing scholarly attention because digital technologies have altered both the production and reception of theatrical performance. Mark and Smith, for example, demonstrate how Segun Adefila's *Corona Palava* utilised Facebook as a platform for virtual theatrical performance in Nigeria, arguing that such intermedial practices can expand theatre's educational and communicative possibilities. Their study is particularly significant because it establishes that social

media is not merely an advertising mechanism for theatre but can become part of the medium through which theatrical communication takes place (Mark and Smith). Similarly, Akoh and Ugwu observe that the emergence of social media has altered the Nigerian theatre environment by creating a cyberspace in which performers and audiences interact through views, reactions, comments and replies. The audience consequently becomes more participatory rather than remaining a purely observational body (Akoh and Ugwu 14).

The implications of this digital transformation extend beyond performance and audience engagement to the writing of drama itself. Contemporary playwrights operate within a communicative environment in which social interaction increasingly takes place through screens, messaging applications, online communities and digitally constructed identities. Consequently, playwrights now seek to represent experiences that extend beyond physical encounters. A character may communicate through a WhatsApp message, construct an identity through an Instagram profile, engage in public conflict through a social media post or experience rejection through online responses. Such developments provide playwrights with new materials for constructing character, dialogue, conflict and dramatic action.

The transformation is particularly important within African theatre because the continent's Theatrical traditions have historically remained responsive to the social, political and cultural circumstances of the communities in which they emerge. Nigerian drama, in particular, has consistently drawn upon contemporary realities as materials for dramatic representation, social criticism and cultural reflection. Ekevere *et al.*, demonstrate how drama interrogates political and social realities through characterisation, conflict, and dramatic action in their examination of Ola Rotimi's treatment of Nigerian political leadership. Their analysis of *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and *Holding Talks* reveals the continuing relationship between Nigerian dramatic writing and the socio-political conditions within which it is produced (Ekevere *et al.*, 666–705). Similarly, Ekevere and Aninye identify Rotimi's *Kurumi* as a dramatic intervention into questions of leadership and political responsibility, demonstrating how the playwright employs drama to expose weaknesses in Nigerian leadership and encourage social reflection (Ekevere and Aninye 77–92).

The relationship between Nigerian drama and its socio-cultural environment is also evident in the ways modern playwrights and directors appropriate traditional theatrical resources. Emasealu's study of the use of indices of traditional African theatre by modern playwrights and directors, particularly in Ola Rotimi's dramaturgy, demonstrates how indigenous performance conventions can be incorporated into modern dramatic

practices. The incorporation of traditional theatrical elements enables contemporary African theatre practitioners to maintain connections with indigenous performance traditions while adapting them to modern dramatic forms (Emasealu 27–47). This interaction between traditional theatrical forms and modern dramatic practice is significant because it demonstrates that Nigerian theatre has never been completely detached from its cultural heritage; rather, it continually negotiates between inherited performance traditions and contemporary artistic demands.

Similarly, Lawan and Abubakar situate Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* within the broader history of African theatre, postcolonial resistance and the reconstruction of historical experience. Their study demonstrates how historical drama can challenge colonial representations of African history and reconstruct the image of African political and cultural figures (Lawan and Abubakar 1–23). In particular, their discussion of Rotimi's use of indigenous language, music, songs, dance and traditional theatrical devices illustrates how cultural performance can become a vehicle for resistance, historical recovery and the affirmation of African identity (Lawan and Abubakar 14–17).

Taken together, these studies establish an important characteristic of Nigerian and African playwriting: drama does not exist independently of the social realities, political experiences and cultural traditions that shape its production. Rather, playwrights continually adapt their dramaturgical strategies in response to changing circumstances. In the past, playwrights often used the traditional stage, oral traditions, historical stories, and native performance styles to make social commentary. Today, however, playwrights work in a wider range of media. The emergence of social media, digital platforms and online performance spaces has therefore introduced new possibilities for theatrical production, dissemination and audience engagement. What has changed is not the fundamental social responsiveness of Nigerian drama, but the nature of the social environment and, consequently, the dramaturgical resources and platforms through which contemporary playwrights communicate with their audiences.

The rise of social media introduces precisely such a transformation. Digital communication has altered not only where people interact but also how they speak, construct identities and understand relationships. The language of contemporary communication increasingly includes abbreviations, hashtags, emojis, memes, code-switching, internet slang and compressed forms of expression. These linguistic practices inevitably provide new possibilities for dramatic dialogue. At the same time, social media creates fragmented forms of communication in which a narrative may be distributed

across messages, posts, comments, images and responses rather than presented through a single continuous sequence. This development presents the playwright with opportunities to move beyond conventional linear dramatic structures and explore fragmented, multiple, and networked forms of storytelling.

This development indicates that we should examine social media not merely as a technological tool for theatre but as a potential dramaturgical force. Digital media can influence the nature of characters, the language through which they communicate and the manner in which dramatic events Digital media can shape characters' nature, their communication language, and the organisation of dramatic events. The distinction between physical and virtual space may also become increasingly unstable. A character can be physically present on stage while simultaneously participating in a virtual world represented through projected messages, recorded video, online posts or other multimedia devices. Such possibilities challenge conventional assumptions about dramatic space, time and communication.

The significance of this development is also evident in recent scholarship on African theatre and digital technology. The African Theatre Association has identified digital technologies as an important area of contemporary research, particularly in relation to theatrical production, aesthetics, accessibility, networking, visibility and the creative process of playwriting. This scholarly interest indicates that digital transformation is becoming an important dimension of contemporary African theatre studies.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing penetration of social media into everyday African life and the growing use of digital platforms by theatre practitioners, scholarly discussions of African theatre have often concentrated more heavily on the use of technology for publicity, audience development, streaming and performance distribution than on its implications for the dramaturgical construction of the play itself. Existing studies have established that social media can expand theatre's reach and transform audience participation. Mark and Smith's examination of *Corona Palava*, for instance, focuses principally on the use of social media as a platform for virtual performance and audience engagement. Stellamaris and Ihentuge (195) emphasise the emergence of cyberspace as a new environment for actors, performances and participatory audiences.

While these contributions are important, a related question requires closer attention: what happens to playwriting when the social realities represented by playwrights are themselves increasingly mediated through social media? The question shifts attention from the use of digital technology to distribute theatre to the

ways in which digital culture may reshape the internal architecture of dramatic texts.

The problem addressed in this study is therefore the relative lack of focused examination of how social media influences three fundamental components of contemporary playwriting: character development, dramatic dialogue and narrative structure. A character created within a social-media environment may possess identities and behavioural patterns different from those of characters whose interactions occur exclusively in physical spaces. Likewise, dialogue constructed from digital communication may differ substantially from conventional stage dialogue, while the fragmented and simultaneous nature of online communication may encourage playwrights to experiment with nonlinear or networked narrative structures.

This study consequently investigates whether social media has become a substantive component of contemporary African dramaturgy and, if so, how its influence can be identified in the construction of characters, dialogue and narrative. The study does not assume that digitalisation has replaced conventional African theatre. Rather, it examines the ways in which established theatrical practices are being modified, extended or challenged by new forms of communication.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the influence of social media on contemporary African playwriting, with particular attention to character development, dramatic dialogue and narrative structure.

The specific objectives are to:

1. examine how social media influences the development and representation of characters in contemporary African dramatic writing;
2. analyse the ways in which social media communication transforms dramatic dialogue; and
3. Investigate how social media influences narrative structure and storytelling techniques in contemporary African theatre.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. How does social media affect character development in contemporary African playwriting?
2. In what ways does social media transform dramatic dialogue in African theatre?
3. How does social media affect the narrative structure and storytelling techniques in contemporary African drama?

1.5 Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative textual-analysis approach. Selected contemporary African dramatic texts

will constitute the primary materials, while scholarly books, journal articles and other credible academic publications will provide the secondary sources. The analysis will employ close reading to identify representations of social media practices and examine their dramaturgical consequences for characterisation, dialogue and narrative organisation.

The study will pay particular attention to characters whose identities or relationships are mediated through digital platforms, dialogue that reproduces or incorporates social media communication, and narrative structures that demonstrate fragmentation, multiple perspectives, digital interruptions, or movement between physical and virtual spaces. The approach is interpretive rather than statistical because the principal concern is to understand how digital culture is aesthetically and dramaturgically transformed into dramatic form.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to contemporary African theatre scholarship by shifting the discussion of social media from its familiar role in theatre promotion and audience engagement to its implications for playwriting and dramaturgy. It argues that the digital environment in which contemporary Africans live may also constitute an important context within which contemporary African drama is imagined and written.

The study is also significant for playwrights and theatre practitioners because it identifies the creative possibilities associated with digital forms of communication. Understanding how social media affects character construction, dialogue and narrative organisation may encourage playwrights to experiment with emerging forms without abandoning the cultural and aesthetic foundations of African theatre.

For scholars, the study provides a basis for further investigation into digital dramaturgy, intermediality and the changing relationship between African theatre and new media. It also contributes to the broader debate concerning how African dramatic forms respond to technological and cultural transformation.

Ultimately, the study contends that the influence of social media on contemporary African playwriting should not be reduced to the presence of smartphones, internet platforms or digital references within dramatic texts. Its deeper significance lies in the possibility that digital culture is altering the ways characters are imagined, the ways they communicate and the ways their stories are organised. Social media, therefore, is increasingly relevant not only to the circulation of African theatre but also to its changing dramaturgical language.

2. DIGITAL MEDIA AND CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN THEATRE

2.1 Digital Media and the Changing African Theatre Landscape

The development of digital media has introduced significant changes into the production, circulation and reception of African theatre. Although theatre has historically depended upon the physical and immediate relationship between performer and audience, the emergence of digital technologies has expanded the spaces, forms and possibilities through which theatrical communication can occur. In the Nigerian context, Imiti observes that theatre in the digital era operates within an increasingly interconnected media environment in which digital technologies influence theatrical production, dissemination and audience engagement (93–100). The contemporary theatre practitioner can therefore create, promote, distribute and discuss theatrical work through digital platforms that were unavailable to earlier generations of playwrights, directors and performers. Digital media consequently represents not merely an additional channel for theatre but an environment that is reshaping how theatrical experiences Digital media thus serves not just as an extra channel for theatre, but as a transformative environment that reshapes the conception, production, and experience of theatrical works., produced and encountered.

This transformation is further illuminated by the changing relationship between live theatre and other media. Haruna's discussion of the symbiotic relationship between live theatre and other media demonstrates that theatrical practice does not necessarily lose its identity when it interacts with emerging media technologies. Rather, theatre can establish productive relationships with other media forms, allowing technological platforms to complement, extend and transform live performance. Such media convergence can expand the reach of theatrical productions while creating new opportunities for interaction among performers, technologies and audiences (Haruna). The implication is that the boundaries between conventional theatre and other forms of media communication are becoming increasingly fluid. Digital platforms can therefore function not only as mechanisms for recording, promoting or distributing theatrical productions but also as creative spaces that influence theatrical aesthetics, audience participation and the organisation of contemporary performance.

The transformation is particularly evident in contemporary Nigerian directing practice, where digital technologies are increasingly becoming part of the aesthetic vocabulary of theatrical production. Enyaosah's examination of digital directing aesthetics in Lagos theatres, with particular attention to Austen-Peters' *Wakaa! The Musical* demonstrates how digital approaches can influence the visual, technical and directorial dimensions of contemporary Nigerian theatre

(Enyaosah). The incorporation of digital technologies into directing consequently suggests a movement beyond the traditional understanding of theatre as an exclusively physical event towards a more technologically mediated performance environment. Taken together, Imiti, Haruna and Enyaosah demonstrate that Nigerian theatre is not isolated from the technological transformations affecting contemporary cultural production. Instead, it is actively negotiating the possibilities created by digital media, technological convergence and new directing aesthetics. This development provides an important foundation for examining social media not simply as a promotional instrument but as an emerging theatrical environment in which Nigerian performances can be produced, circulated, experienced and discussed.

However, we should not interpret the significance of this transformation solely in technological terms. Digital media has become embedded in everyday social experience, and contemporary playwrights increasingly represent a world in which communication, relationships and identity are mediated through digital technologies. Consequently, the digital environment provides not only a means of distributing theatre but also a source of dramatic material. As Mark and Smith demonstrate in their examination of Segun Adefila's *Corona Palava*, social media can function as a theatrical platform capable of extending performance beyond conventional physical spaces (550–58). Their study is important to the present research because it demonstrates that the relationship between theatre and social media is not necessarily external. Digital platforms can be incorporated into the theatrical process itself.

This development corresponds with the wider transformation of African cultural production. The African theatre practitioner now operates within an environment characterised by increased digital connectivity, online audiences and rapid circulation of cultural materials. Akoh and Ugwu observe that social media theatre in Nigeria has created a cyberspace in which actors and audiences interact, thereby expanding the possibilities of theatrical participation (14–26). The implication is that theatre is increasingly capable of existing simultaneously in physical and digital environments.

The distinction between theatre and digital media is therefore becoming less rigid. A dramatic work may begin as a conventional stage text but acquire additional dimensions through digital circulation, online discussion, recorded performance or audience interaction. More importantly for playwriting, the social realities represented in such drama increasingly emerge from a digitally mediated society. Characters inhabit worlds in which mobile phones, social media platforms and online communities influence interpersonal relationships and social behaviour. The playwright

consequently encounters a new repertoire of dramatic experiences from which character, dialogue and conflict can be constructed.

2.2 Social Media as a Dramaturgical Space

Social media should not be regarded merely as an instrument for publicising theatrical productions. It can also function as a dramaturgical space: a communicative environment within which dramatic events, identities and relationships are imagined and represented. The term is useful because it shifts attention from technology as a tool to technology as an element of dramatic construction.

In conventional drama, the stage provides the principal spatial environment in which characters encounter one another and dramatic action develops. Social media complicates this arrangement by introducing virtual spaces that can coexist with physical dramatic spaces. A character may be physically located in one place while communicating with another character through WhatsApp or responding to a public post on social media. Dramatic action can consequently occur without physical co-presence. The playwright can exploit this condition to create simultaneous conversations, hidden interactions and conflicts that unfold across different locations.

Such possibilities are particularly relevant to African theatre because contemporary African drama has consistently demonstrated an engagement with changing social, political, linguistic and cultural realities. Ekevere and Aninye's examination of Ola Rotimi's *Kurumi*, for instance, demonstrates how Nigerian drama interrogates questions of leadership, political responsibility and the relationship between individual action and wider social structures (77–92). Similarly, Ekevere, Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide, Omessah and Onyari show how Rotimi deploys dramatic representation in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and *Holding Talks* to interrogate Nigerian political leadership and its consequences for society (666–705). Momoh extends this understanding through his analysis of *Hopes of the Living Dead*, arguing that Rotimi dramatises leadership and collectivism as responses to social oppression and political marginalisation. The play's representation of Harcourt Whyte and the lepers demonstrates how collective organisation and purposeful leadership can become instruments of resistance against oppressive structures (Momoh 129–32). Thus, Rotimi's dramaturgy does not merely reproduce social realities; it transforms them into dramatic sites for political consciousness, resistance and social reflection.

The social responsiveness of Rotimi's dramaturgy is also evident in his treatment of language. Adeoye's study of the socio-dramatic transition of language in Rotimi's plays demonstrates that the playwright's use of language changes in response to

social, cultural, political and generational circumstances. Adeoye identifies a movement in Rotimi's dramaturgy from neo-classical language towards multicultural linguistic aesthetics, indigenous expressions and street language, thereby demonstrating the flexibility of dramatic language as a vehicle of communication between theatre and its changing audience (107–18). This linguistic adaptability is significant to the present study because it establishes that dramatic form and communication are not static; they evolve alongside the society that theatre represents. Rotimi's willingness to incorporate changing linguistic forms suggests that playwrights must continually negotiate emerging modes of social interaction and communication.

The relevance of these studies to the present argument therefore lies not in their direct treatment of social media, which is not their principal concern, but in their broader demonstration that African dramatic writing responds to the social realities of its historical moment. Ekevere and Aninye foreground leadership and political responsibility; Ekevere *et al.*, emphasise the dramatic interrogation of political power; Momoh highlights collective resistance and social mobilisation; while Adeoye demonstrates the capacity of dramatic language to evolve in response to changing social and cultural conditions (Ekevere and Aninye 77–92; Ekevere *et al.*, 666–705; Momoh 129–32; Adeoye 107–18). If dramatic content, language and theatrical strategies are continually shaped by changing social circumstances, then the emergence of digital communication represents another significant transformation in the environment within which contemporary theatre operates. As social interaction, political discourse and cultural exchange increasingly occur through digital platforms, contemporary Nigerian playwriting and performance inevitably encounter social media and cyberspace as part of the social world they represent. New media can therefore be understood not simply as technological tools for distributing theatre, but as emerging dramaturgical spaces through which political ideas, social criticism, cultural identities and theatrical experiences can be created, circulated and negotiated.

Social media also creates a distinctive relationship between private and public communication. A conventional conversation may remain restricted to the characters participating in it, whereas a social media post may become visible to a potentially unlimited audience. This distinction provides the playwright with new possibilities for dramatic conflict. A private message can be leaked; a photograph can become public; an apparently harmless comment can generate widespread controversy; and an individual's carefully constructed online identity can be challenged by information from the offline world. Such situations provide dramatic opportunities because they place questions of secrecy, reputation, identity and power within an expanded communicative environment.

The dramaturgical significance of social media therefore resides partly in its ability to transform who can see, hear and respond to dramatic communication. The conventional theatrical distinction between character and audience can become more complicated when the dramatic world itself contains an imagined online audience. A character's social media followers may function almost like a secondary audience within the play, while the actual theatre audience observes both the character and the character's digital performance. The playwright can thus create layers of spectatorship in which characters become performers within their own fictional social media environments.

2.3 Digital Communication and the Contemporary Playwright

The increasing importance of social media also affects the playwright's choice of dramatic language. Contemporary digital communication is characterised by speed, brevity, informality and multimodality. Meaning can be conveyed through words, photographs, emojis, hashtags, videos, reactions and hyperlinks. These characteristics provide playwrights with forms of communication that differ from conventional spoken dialogue.

The dramatic possibilities of digital communication become especially apparent in the representation of younger characters. Social media is deeply integrated into many aspects of contemporary youth culture, including friendship, romance, political expression, entertainment and professional networking. Consequently, a playwright who seeks to represent contemporary African youth realistically may find it increasingly difficult to exclude digital communication from character interaction.

Digital communication also allows the playwright to represent simultaneous voices. A conventional dialogue normally involves an exchange between two or more characters, but an online conversation can involve numerous participants responding at different moments. The dramatic text can reproduce this structure through overlapping messages, comments, posts and responses. Such techniques may produce a fragmented form of dialogue that reflects the communicative experience of social media users.

The implications extend to narrative structure. Social media communication is usually experienced as a complex, non-linear sequence. Users encounter old posts, new messages, notifications, photographs and comments in constantly shifting combinations. The playwright can reproduce this fragmented experience by arranging dramatic events around digital traces rather than a strictly chronological sequence. A past event may be revealed through an old message; a character's secret may emerge through a photograph; or an apparently

minor social media post may become the catalyst for a major dramatic conflict.

This development suggests that social media can influence not only the content of contemporary African drama but also its form. The digital environment provides new models for constructing characters, organising dialogue and arranging narrative information. The contemporary playwright therefore possesses an expanded dramaturgical vocabulary in which physical action can interact with digital communication.

2.4 Digital Media and the Transformation of Dramatic Form

The movement from conventional theatrical communication towards digitally mediated forms should not, however, be interpreted as a complete rejection of established African theatrical practices. Rather, contemporary African theatre demonstrates a process of adaptation in which traditional and modern forms can coexist. Oral performance, music, dance, storytelling and communal participation remain important elements of African theatrical practice, while digital technology provides additional possibilities for representation and interaction.

The significance of social media consequently lies in its capacity to extend rather than simply replace existing theatrical forms. A playwright may retain conventional dramatic dialogue while incorporating WhatsApp messages, employ a linear plot while interrupting it with social media posts, or construct a traditional character whose identity is complicated by digital self-presentation. Such combinations illustrate the hybrid nature of contemporary dramatic practice.

This hybridity is particularly important when examining African theatre because digitalisation does not occur in a cultural vacuum. African playwrights adapt global technologies to local social realities, languages, political circumstances and cultural practices. Social media may therefore become a site where indigenous identities encounter globalised forms of communication. The resulting dramatic texts can reveal tensions between tradition and modernity, public and private identity, physical and virtual existence, and local cultural values and global digital culture.

The central argument of this study is consequently that social media should be approached as an emerging component of contemporary African dramaturgy. Its influence is visible not merely in the technological references contained within dramatic texts but in the changing ways characters are constructed, dialogue is organised and narrative information is presented. The following chapters examine these transformations more closely, beginning with the influence of social media on character development.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN PLAYWRITING

3.1 The Emergence of the Digitally Mediated Character

Characterisation constitutes one of the principal foundations of dramatic writing because characters provide the human agency through which dramatic action, conflict and thematic ideas are realised. In conventional dramatic practice, the playwright develops character through speech, action, relationships, physical behaviour and the circumstances surrounding the character. The emergence of social media, however, has introduced additional dimensions through which fictional identities can be constructed and interpreted. In contemporary African playwriting, characters increasingly inhabit a social environment in which personal identity is communicated not only through physical interaction but also through digital profiles, messages, photographs, posts and online responses.

The digitally mediated character is therefore not simply a character who possesses a mobile phone or uses the internet. Rather, the character's identity may be partly constructed through participation in digital spaces. Social media enables individuals to present selected versions of themselves to different audiences, thereby creating distinctions between private identity and public identity. This distinction provides the contemporary playwright with an additional mechanism for exploring character psychology. A character may appear confident online while experiencing insecurity offline, construct an idealised identity for social-media followers while concealing personal difficulties, or use anonymity to express attitudes that would be difficult to articulate in face-to-face interaction.

Such possibilities are consistent with the broader capacity of African drama to represent the relationship between individual identity and social structures. Ekevere *et al.*, 's examination of Ola Rotimi's dramatic representation of Nigerian political leadership demonstrates how characters can function as vehicles through which questions of power, responsibility and social values are examined (Ekevere *et al.*, 666–705). Although their study is not concerned with social media, its treatment of character and social context is relevant to the present argument. Characterisation in African drama frequently derives its significance from the relationship between the individual and the wider social environment. In the digital era, social media constitutes an increasingly important part of that environment.

The contemporary African playwright therefore has the opportunity to represent characters whose identities are shaped by both physical and virtual relationships. The dramatic character can have an offline identity, an online persona and, in some cases, several different digital identities. This multiplicity can generate

dramatic tension because the character may be required to negotiate conflicting versions of the self. A private message may contradict a public post; an online photograph may expose a concealed relationship; or information circulated by another user may undermine the identity that a character has carefully constructed.

3.2 Social Media and the Construction of Public and Private Identity

One of the most significant influences of social media on character development is the destabilisation of the boundary between public and private identity. In traditional dramatic representation, the distinction between what a character says publicly and what the character privately thinks can be explored through soliloquy, aside, confidential conversation or dramatic irony. Social media introduces another mechanism through which this distinction can be represented.

A social media profile can function as a form of self-presentation. Characters may select photographs, statements, locations and personal information to construct an identity for their followers. The profile consequently becomes analogous to a dramatic mask: it reveals some aspects of the character while concealing others. The playwright can exploit this difference between performed identity and concealed identity to create irony and conflict.

This process is particularly relevant to contemporary African societies in which social media has become increasingly integrated into everyday communication. The theatrical character can now be represented as someone who performs identity before two different audiences: the physical community and the digital community. These audiences may have different expectations, and the character may alter behaviour according to the audience being addressed.

The distinction between online and offline identity can also deepen the psychological dimension of characterisation. A character who receives constant approval through likes and comments may become dependent upon digital recognition, while another may experience anxiety because of negative comments, public criticism or exclusion from online communities. Social media can therefore provide the playwright with dramatic means of representing psychological pressures that are difficult to observe externally.

The significance of these developments lies in the fact that digital identity is often relational. A character's online identity is constructed not only by what the character posts but also by how other users respond. Likes, comments, shares and reactions become part of the character's social environment. The character is consequently shaped by an imagined or actual digital audience.

3.3 Digital Communication and Character Relationships

Social media also transforms the manner in which dramatic relationships are developed. Conventional dramatic relationships are often represented through physical meetings, telephone conversations, letters and face-to-face exchanges. Digital communication introduces speed, immediacy and simultaneous interaction into these relationships. Characters can communicate across geographical boundaries without requiring physical presence.

The consequences for character development are considerable. A relationship can develop almost entirely through digital interaction, while a conflict can emerge from a message that is misunderstood, deliberately ignored or publicly exposed. The playwright can therefore construct relationships around the circulation of digital information. Friendship, romance, political alliances and family relationships may all be affected by online communication.

Mark and Smith's analysis of *Corona Palava* demonstrates the extent to which digital media can alter the relationship between theatrical production and its audience. Their discussion of social media theatre in Nigeria illustrates how online platforms can facilitate interaction and participation beyond the conventional theatre space (550–58). While their primary concern is theatrical performance rather than characterisation, their findings support the broader proposition that digital platforms create new forms of interaction. For the playwright, such interaction can become material for character construction.

Digital communication can also intensify dramatic conflict because messages create permanent or semi-permanent records of interaction. Spoken words may disappear once uttered, but a written message can be saved, forwarded, captured or reproduced. A character can therefore be confronted with previous statements in ways that complicate the development of dramatic conflict. The past remains digitally accessible and can return unexpectedly to affect the present.

This characteristic creates an important difference between conventional and digitally mediated character relationships. In a conventional dramatic setting, a character's past may have to be reconstructed through dialogue or exposition. Within a social-media environment, the past can be represented through archived messages, photographs, posts and other digital traces. The playwright can consequently reveal character history indirectly rather than through conventional exposition.

3.4 Social Media, Youth and Changing African Identities

The relationship between social media and character development is particularly significant in representations of African youth. Young people occupy a central position in contemporary digital culture, and their identities are frequently negotiated through online communities. For the contemporary African playwright, this creates opportunities to represent generational tensions, changing cultural expectations and competing definitions of identity.

The digitally connected young character may simultaneously participate in local cultural practices and global digital cultures. Such a character may speak a local language at home, use English or another official language in formal settings, and employ abbreviated or hybrid language online. The character consequently embodies the cultural complexity of contemporary African society.

This linguistic and cultural hybridity can become a significant feature of characterisation. Social media communication frequently encourages code-switching, slang, abbreviations and the incorporation of globally circulating expressions into local speech. The playwright can employ these linguistic practices to establish age, social background, education, technological familiarity and cultural orientation.

The character may also experience conflict between inherited cultural expectations and digitally acquired values. A young person may use social media to challenge parental authority, question established gender expectations, participate in political debates or establish relationships outside the immediate community. Digital communication therefore becomes part of the character's process of negotiating social identity.

The significance of this development is that social media does not merely provide contemporary characters with new activities; it can alter the conditions under which character identity is formed. The character exists within multiple communities, receives information from geographically distant sources and can construct an identity before audiences that extend beyond the immediate physical environment.

3.5 Social Media, Character Conflict and Dramatic Tension

Character conflict remains fundamental to dramatic writing, and social media provides new mechanisms through which such conflict can be generated. A social-media post can provoke disagreement; an image can reveal a secret; a private message can expose betrayal; and an online accusation can become a public crisis. The speed at which

information travels through digital networks can accelerate dramatic action.

The digital environment can also create conflicts between intention and interpretation. A character may post a message with one intention while other characters interpret it differently. Because social media communication lacks many of the contextual cues available in face-to-face interaction, ambiguity can become a source of dramatic tension. The playwright can exploit this ambiguity to create misunderstanding, suspicion and confrontation.

Furthermore, the public nature of social media communication can transform private conflict into communal conflict. A disagreement between two characters may become visible to hundreds or thousands of virtual observers. The dramatic consequences therefore extend beyond the original participants. The playwright can use this feature to explore contemporary questions of reputation, shame, public judgement and social pressure.

Akoh and Ugwu's discussion of social-media theatre in Nigeria is useful in this regard because it identifies cyberspace as an environment in which actors and audiences can interact through digital platforms (14–26). This expanded communicative environment also provides a model for understanding how characters can exist within multiple layers of social observation. A character may be watched, judged and responded to by audiences within the fictional digital world as well as by the actual theatre audience.

3.6 Character Development as Digital Dramaturgy

The preceding discussion demonstrates that social media can influence character development at several interconnected levels. First, it creates new forms of identity construction through online self-presentation. Secondly, it transforms relationships by allowing characters to communicate across physical and geographical boundaries. Thirdly, it creates new forms of conflict through the rapid circulation and permanence of digital information. Finally, it provides playwrights with new ways of representing youth identity, cultural hybridity and psychological tension.

The digitally mediated character should therefore be understood as part of the wider transformation of contemporary African dramaturgy. The importance of social media does not lie merely in its appearance as a subject within dramatic texts. Its deeper significance lies in the way its communicative logic can influence the construction of dramatic personalities and relationships.

Contemporary African playwriting consequently encounters a character who is capable of existing simultaneously in physical and virtual spaces.

Such a character can speak to another person on stage while communicating with hundreds of people online; can construct one identity for the physical community and another for a digital audience; and can carry an accessible archive of previous interactions into present dramatic circumstances. These possibilities expand the playwright's resources for representing identity and conflict.

Social media thus becomes an important component of contemporary characterisation because it changes the social environment within which characters act, communicate and develop. The next chapter extends this argument by examining how these changes affect dramatic dialogue and narrative structure, particularly through the incorporation of digital language, fragmented communication and nonlinear storytelling.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA, DRAMATIC DIALOGUE AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN THEATRE

4.1 Social Media and the Transformation of Dramatic Dialogue

Dialogue is one of the principal mechanisms through which dramatic action is conveyed. One of the principal mechanisms for communicating dramatic action is dialogue. Through dialogue, characters reveal their personalities, establish relationships, negotiate conflicts and advance the plot. Traditional dramatic dialogue is primarily conceived as spoken communication between characters within a theatrical environment. The expansion of digital communication, however, has introduced new forms of interaction that challenge this conventional understanding. Contemporary social media platforms have created communicative practices involving text messages, comments, posts, emojis, hashtags, abbreviations, images, voice notes and other digital forms. These practices provide contemporary African playwrights with new possibilities for constructing dramatic speech and interaction.

The significance of social media in enhancing dramatic dialogue is profound. Therefore, social media's significance to dramatic dialogue extends beyond merely introducing technological vocabulary into a play. to the introduction of technological vocabulary in a play. Its deeper influence concerns the form, rhythm and context of communication. A character communicating through WhatsApp, for example, does not necessarily speak in the same manner as a character engaged in face-to-face conversation. Digital communication tends to favour brevity, immediacy and informality. The playwright can reproduce these qualities to establish character, social background, age and emotional condition.

Mark and Smith's study of Segun Adefila's *Corona Palava* demonstrates the capacity of social media to become part of theatrical communication itself.

Their analysis of the virtual performance illustrates how social media platforms can create alternative environments for theatrical interaction and communication (550–58). This development has implications for playwriting because playwriting shows that digital communication can integrate into dramatic form rather than remain external to it.

The contemporary playwright can consequently present dialogue through multiple communicative channels. A dramatic exchange may involve spoken words, text messages, social media posts and visual responses. Such an arrangement can create layers of communication in which what a character says aloud differs from what the same character communicates digitally. The resulting contrast can provide dramatic irony and reveal dimensions of character that conventional dialogue may conceal.

4.2 Digital Language and the Linguistic Texture of Contemporary Drama

Social media has also contributed to the emergence of distinctive linguistic practices. Digital communication frequently involves shortened expressions, abbreviations, slang, emojis, hashtags, code-switching and the incorporation of popular online expressions. These forms are particularly significant in African contexts, where multilingualism and code-switching are already important features of everyday communication.

The contemporary African playwright can therefore employ digital language as a means of establishing authenticity. A young character's use of internet slang, abbreviations or a mixture of English and an indigenous language can communicate age, social identity and technological familiarity without requiring extensive explanatory dialogue. Language becomes both a vehicle of communication and a marker of characterisation.

Digital language may also produce a more immediate representation of contemporary social experience. Theatre has always depended upon the ability of playwrights to create believable speech, but social media introduces a communicative register that differs from formal written language and conventional theatrical dialogue. The incorporation of this register can make dramatic characters appear more closely connected to contemporary life.

At the same time, the playwright must negotiate the tension between authenticity and theatrical intelligibility. Digital expressions that are immediately familiar to one generation may become obscure to another. Similarly, internet slang can change rapidly. A dramatic text that reproduces contemporary digital language too literally may therefore face temporal restrictions. The skilled playwright must consequently

transform digital language into dramatic language rather than simply reproduce online conversations.

This distinction is important because theatre is not a transcript of everyday life. The playwright selects, compresses and structures communication for dramatic purposes. Social media: While social media may provide the raw material, dramaturgical judgement determines which elements to retain and how they contribute to character, conflict, and narrative development. While social media provides the raw material, dramaturgical judgement determines which elements Social media supplies the raw material, but dramaturgical judgement decides which elements to keep and how they enhance character, conflict, and narrative development. and how they contribute to character, conflict, and narrative development.

4.3 Social Media and the Expansion of Dramatic Space

The influence of social media on dialogue Social media's influence on dialogue closely connects to the transformation of dramatic space. Conventional stage dialogue generally requires characters to share a physical or represented theatrical environment. Digital communication disrupts this requirement because characters can communicate across geographical distances.

Stellamaris and Ihentuge's examination of social-media theatre in Nigeria identifies cyberspace as an environment in which actors and audiences can interact beyond the traditional theatrical space (195). Their argument is significant because it illustrates the growing importance of virtual space in contemporary Nigerian theatre. The same principle can be applied to dramatic writing: characters no longer need to occupy the same physical space for their interaction to become dramatically significant.

This development expands the playwright's possibilities for representing relationships. Two characters: Digital communication allows two characters to remain continuously connected, even when separated by geographical distance. by geographical distance, but they remain continuously connected through digital communication. A character living in Lagos may communicate with another in London, Johannesburg or Nairobi without the playwright having to stage a physical journey. The virtual environment therefore becomes an extension of dramatic space.

The expansion of space can also generate dramatic contrasts. A character may appear physically isolated while simultaneously participating in an intense online conversation. Conversely, a character may be surrounded by people but remain emotionally dependent upon virtual relationships. These contrasts can deepen the psychological and thematic dimensions of the drama.

Digital space can, consequently, function as both a setting and a dramatic mechanism. It provides the environment in which characters communicate while simultaneously determining how information moves between them.

4.4 Social Media and Fragmented Narrative Structure

The influence of social media extends beyond dialogue to the organisation of narratives. Conventional dramatic narratives often rely upon identifiable sequences of exposition, rising action, climax and resolution. Although contemporary playwrights have long experimented with nonlinear structures, social media provides new cultural and formal models for fragmentation.

The experience of social media communication is inherently discontinuous. Users move between posts, messages, photographs, videos, comments and notifications. Information may appear without chronological context, while earlier events can re-emerge through archived material. The playwright can reproduce this experience by constructing narratives from fragments rather than presenting events through a single continuous chronological sequence.

A dramatic narrative may, for example, begin with a social media post describing an event and subsequently reconstruct what happened through messages, conversations and recollections. The audience is required to assemble the sequence of events from different pieces of information. This method can create suspense because the audience possesses fragments of knowledge rather than complete information.

The fragmented narrative also corresponds with the multiplicity of perspectives characteristic of social media. An event may be represented through several posts, each offering a partial interpretation through several posts by different characters, each providing a partial interpretation. There is consequently no single authoritative account of the event. This structure allows the playwright to explore questions of truth, perception, and interpretation.

Such a narrative technique holds significant potential for contemporary African theatre, as it enables the representation of social realities as contested experiences. This narrative technique holds significant potential for contemporary African theatre because it allows for the representation of social realities. This narrative technique holds significant potential for contemporary African theatre, as it allows for the representation of social realities as contested experiences. as contested experiences. Different characters can present different versions of the same political, social or personal event. The audience must therefore evaluate competing narratives rather than

simply receiving information from an omniscient dramatic authority.

4.5 Multiple Voices and Participatory Storytelling

Social media also encourages a form of narrative plurality in which multiple voices can participate in the construction of meaning. Posts, comments, replies and reposts allow individuals to respond to an original statement and potentially transform its meaning. The resulting network of communication resembles a dramatic chorus composed of multiple contemporary voices.

Theatrically, this structure can challenge the traditional distinction between principal characters and peripheral observers. A social-media audience can become an active participant in the dramatic event by commenting upon, interpreting or contesting what has occurred. Akoh and Ugwu's discussion of cyberspace and audience participation provides an important basis for understanding this shift, as social media allows theatrical communication to extend beyond the conventional performer-audience relationship (14–26).

For the playwright, the participatory character of social media provides opportunities to represent communities rather than only individuals. A dramatic event can acquire significance through the responses it generates among a virtual community. The reactions of multiple characters can therefore become part of the narrative itself.

This structure also introduces the possibility of dramatic irony. The audience may observe a character's online presentation while simultaneously knowing information that the character's digital followers do not possess. Alternatively, different characters may possess different fragments of information, creating a network of partial knowledge. Such structures can intensify suspense and complicate the audience's interpretation of dramatic events.

4.6 Digital Archives, Memory and Narrative Time

Another important influence of social media is its relationship with memory. Digital communication produces records of past interactions. Messages, photographs, posts and videos can remain accessible long after the original event has occurred. This characteristic provides playwrights with new mechanisms for representing dramatic memory.

In conventional drama, the past is often introduced through dialogue, flashback, narration or recollection. Digital archives provide another means through which the past can return to the present. A character may discover an old message, encounter a forgotten photograph or revisit an earlier social media post. The digital record becomes evidence of what happened.

This technique can alter narrative time. The playwright does not necessarily have to reproduce an event as a conventional flashback. Instead, the past can appear through a digital artefact that interrupts the present. The audience may encounter an old message before understanding the circumstances in which it was written. The narrative consequently moves backwards and forwards as information is gradually revealed.

Digital archives can also function as instruments of power. A character who possesses an incriminating message or photograph may have the ability to expose another character. The preservation of information therefore becomes a source of dramatic conflict. What was once private can become publicly accessible, and the past can acquire new consequences in the present.

4.7 From Linear Drama to Networked Narrative

The combined effects of digital dialogue, virtual space, fragmented communication and digital memory point towards a broader transformation in dramatic structure. Social media provides a cultural model of networked storytelling, in which characters, events and information are connected through multiple channels rather than arranged along a single linear path.

This does not mean that contemporary African playwrights have abandoned conventional narrative structures. Rather, social media provides additional formal possibilities. A play can combine linear scenes with digital interruptions, conventional dialogue with online messages, and physical action with virtual communication. The result is a hybrid dramaturgy in which traditional and digital forms coexist.

The concept of hybridity is particularly useful for African theatre because African dramatic traditions have historically incorporated multiple artistic forms. Oral narration, music, dance, ritual, storytelling and visual spectacle can coexist within a single theatrical event. Digital media can therefore be understood as another element entering an already heterogeneous theatrical tradition.

The significance of this development is that social media does not simply give playwrights new subjects; it can provide them with new structural principles. The fragmented, interactive and networked qualities of digital communication can be translated into dramatic form. Characters may communicate through multiple channels, narratives may unfold across different temporalities, and audiences may be required to reconstruct events from dispersed information.

4.8 Implications for Contemporary African Playwriting

The influence of social media on dialogue and narrative structure ultimately demonstrates that digital

culture has become relevant to the formal development of contemporary African drama. The playwright now has access to communicative forms that can reproduce the rhythms and complexities of contemporary digital life. Dialogue can move between spoken and written forms, while narrative can move between physical events and virtual traces.

The importance of these developments One should not measure the importance of these developments solely by the number of digital references in a play. simply by the number of digital references contained in a play. The more significant question is whether digital communication changes the dramaturgical logic of the text. When a WhatsApp conversation replaces a conventional stage encounter, when a social-media post becomes the source of dramatic conflict, or when an archived digital message reveals a previously concealed event, social media has moved from being a subject of drama to becoming part of its structure.

The contemporary African playwright is therefore working within an expanded dramatic environment in which physical and digital spaces interact. Social media can influence the rhythm of dialogue, the distribution of dramatic information, the representation of memory and the organisation of narrative time. It can also create new relationships between characters and audiences by introducing virtual communities into the fictional world.

The central implication is that contemporary African playwriting is increasingly capable of reflecting a society in which communication is simultaneously local and global, physical and virtual, private and public. Social media does not eliminate the foundations of African theatre; instead, it offers new materials for reinterpretation. The result is an emerging dramaturgy in which digital communication becomes an integral part of character interaction, dramatic language and narrative construction.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study has examined the influence of social media on contemporary African playwriting, with particular attention to character development, dramatic dialogue and narrative structure. The study establishes that the growing integration of digital communication into African social life has implications not only for the production, circulation and reception of theatre but also for the ways in which dramatic texts can be conceived and structured. Social media has consequently emerged as an important component of the contemporary playwright's creative environment.

The first major finding is that social media affects how characters develop by creating new forms of

identity construction and interpersonal interaction. Contemporary characters can exist simultaneously within physical and virtual environments, presenting different versions of themselves to different audiences. Online profiles, photographs, posts, comments and private messages can become extensions of character identity. This development enables playwrights to explore the tension between public and private selves, self-presentation and authenticity, as well as the psychological effects of digital approval, criticism and surveillance. Characterisation is therefore no longer restricted to physical behaviour and spoken interaction; it can also emerge through the character's digital presence.

The second finding concerns the transformation of dramatic dialogue. Social media has expanded the communicative resources available to the playwright by introducing text messages, online posts, comments, emojis, abbreviations, hashtags, slang and other forms of digital expression. As Akoh and Ugwu demonstrate in their study of social-media theatre in Nigeria, cyberspace has created new possibilities for interaction between performers and audiences (14–26). Similarly, Mark and Smith's analysis of *Corona Palava* demonstrates how social media can become an environment for theatrical communication rather than merely a means of promoting theatre (550–58). For contemporary playwriting, this development creates opportunities for dialogue to move between spoken, written and digitally mediated forms.

The third finding is that social media can influence narrative structure. The fragmented and networked character of online communication provides playwrights with alternative ways to organise dramatic information. Digital messages, posts, photographs and archived materials can interrupt chronological progression and reveal information from different points. Multiple characters can provide competing accounts of the same event, thereby creating multi-perspectival narratives. Consequently, social media can encourage movement away from exclusively linear storytelling towards fragmented, networked and hybrid dramatic structures.

These findings reinforce the broader observation that African drama has historically responded to changing social, political and cultural realities. Ekevere *et al.*, demonstrate how Ola Rotimi's drama engages questions of political power and leadership through dramatic representation, particularly in *The Gods Are Not to Blame, Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and *Holding Talks* (666–705). Ekevere and Aninye similarly establish that *Kurumi* functions as a dramatic interrogation of leadership, political responsibility and the consequences of individual decisions within wider social structures (77–92). Momoh extends this understanding by examining leadership and collectivism in *Hopes of the Living Dead*, demonstrating

how Rotimi employs drama to explore collective action, social oppression and the possibilities of resistance through organised leadership (129–32). These perspectives indicate that Rotimi's dramaturgy consistently transforms contemporary political and social conditions into dramatic material through which audiences are encouraged to reflect critically upon their society.

Recent scholarship on **Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again** further demonstrates the socio-political responsiveness of Rotimi's theatre. Yeboah and Agbevenu's textual and theatrical investigation reveals how Rotimi employs madness, political satire, characterisation, language and theatrical performance to expose dysfunctional political authority and patriarchal power. Their analysis shows that Lejoka-Brown's political ambition becomes a theatrical representation of leadership detached from social reality, while the domestic space functions as a microcosm of the wider political arena (Yeboah and Agbevenu 148–59). Their discussion of the actor's body, audience engagement and the politics of laughter further demonstrates that Rotimi's theatre does not merely communicate political ideas through dialogue; rather, it uses theatrical form and performance to involve audiences in the process of political critique (Yeboah and Agbevenu 154–58). This reinforces the argument that African drama is adaptable not only in its thematic concerns but also in the formal and performative strategies through which those concerns are communicated.

The relationship between dramatic practice and changing social environments is also evident in scholarship on African theatre and its historical development. The OpenEdition study by Ezenwa-Ohaeto contributes to an understanding of modern Nigerian drama as a form that negotiates social, cultural and historical transformation (25–35). Read alongside the studies of Ekevere et al., Ekevere and Aninye, Momoh, and Yeboah and Agbevenu, this scholarship demonstrates that African drama continually adjusts its thematic and theatrical vocabulary in response to the conditions of its society. Consequently, the relevance of this tradition to the present study does not lie in claiming that earlier scholars were directly concerned with social media, but in recognising the enduring adaptability of African dramatic practice. If political power, leadership, collective resistance, language and cultural identity have historically provided important materials for African playwrights, then the emergence of digital communication constitutes another significant social condition to which contemporary theatre must respond. In this sense, social media can be understood as part of the evolving social environment within which contemporary Nigerian theatre is produced, circulated and experienced.

In the digital age, social media is therefore not simply an external technological development but part of the social environment within which contemporary Nigerians communicate, debate political issues, construct identities and consume entertainment. The emergence of digital platforms consequently creates new possibilities for theatrical expression, dissemination and audience participation. Just as Rotimi adapted dramatic language, political satire, indigenous performance resources and theatrical conventions to engage the realities of his time, contemporary playwrights and performers can appropriate social media as an additional theatrical space through which social and political realities are represented and contested. The transition from the conventional stage to digital platforms should therefore be understood less as a rupture with African theatrical tradition than as another stage in the continuing adaptation of theatre to changing forms of social interaction and communication.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that social media is becoming more than a technological instrument for distributing or advertising African theatre. It increasingly functions as a dramaturgical resource capable of influencing the construction of characters, the organisation of dialogue and the structure of dramatic narratives. The contemporary African playwright operates within a social environment where communication, identity, relationships, and public discourse are increasingly mediated by digital technologies. The contemporary African playwright navigates a social environment where digital technologies increasingly mediate communication, identity, relationships, and public discourse. by digital technologies. It is therefore inevitable that these developments will find expression within dramatic writing.

The influence of social media on character development is particularly significant because digital platforms provide characters with additional spaces in which identity can be performed and contested. The distinction between the physical self and the virtual self can become a source of dramatic conflict, while online interactions can deepen relationships or generate new forms of tension. The character is consequently capable of becoming both a participant in and a performer before a digital audience.

Similarly, the incorporation of social media language into dramatic dialogue demonstrates the adaptability of African playwrights. Contemporary playwrights can draw upon the linguistic practices of digital communication to represent the speech patterns, identities and experiences of contemporary characters. Yet the most successful dramatic use of social media does not consist merely of reproducing online language. Rather, the playwright transforms the communicative

characteristics of social media into purposeful dramatic action.

Narrative structure is perhaps where the deeper formal implications of digital media become most apparent. Social media operates through fragments, multiple voices, simultaneous interactions and constantly circulating information. When these characteristics enter dramatic writing, they can produce narratives that move across different temporalities and perspectives. Such dramaturgical experimentation enables the playwright to represent contemporary experience in forms that correspond to the fragmented nature of digital life.

The study therefore argues that the relationship between social media and African theatre should be understood as a process of adaptation and transformation rather than replacement. Digital media does not make traditional African theatrical forms obsolete. Instead, it introduces additional aesthetic and communicative possibilities into an already diverse theatrical tradition. Oral performance, storytelling, music, ritual, physical performance and conventional dramatic dialogue can coexist with digital communication and virtual forms.

Ultimately, the significance of social media to contemporary African playwriting lies in its capacity to reshape the relationship between character, language, narrative and audience. The digital environment provides new spaces in which characters can exist, new forms through which they can communicate and new structures through which their stories can unfold. Contemporary African drama consequently stands at an important point of dramaturgical transformation, where established theatrical practices encounter the rapidly changing realities of digital culture.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations The study's findings lead to the following recommendations: The study's findings lead to the following recommendations: The study's findings lead to the following recommendations:

1. **African playwrights should explore digital dramaturgy more deliberately:** Social media should be treated not merely as a subject or promotional tool but as a creative resource capable of generating new forms of characterisation, dialogue and narrative.
2. **Theatre scholars should devote greater attention to digitally mediated African drama:** Further research is necessary to document how WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, X and other platforms are influencing dramatic writing, performance and audience participation.
3. **Theatre training institutions should incorporate digital dramaturgy into contemporary playwriting studies:** Emerging playwrights should

be equipped to understand both the aesthetic possibilities and limitations of digital communication.

4. **Future research should undertake close textual studies of individual African plays that employ social media:** Such research would enable scholars to distinguish between superficial technological references and more profound transformations in dramatic form.
5. **African theatre practitioners should preserve the cultural foundations of African theatre while experimenting with digital forms:** The objective should not be to imitate Western or global digital practices but to develop culturally relevant dramaturgies that respond to African experiences of technological change.

In conclusion, social media has become a more and more important part of the modern African dramatic imagination. Its influence: We can identify it in how characters construct their identities, communicate, and organise their stories. This influence is evident in how characters construct their identities, communicate, and organise their stories. The future of African playwriting will therefore be shaped not only by the relationship between theatre and traditional cultural forms but also by the playwright's ability to negotiate the opportunities and challenges presented by an increasingly digital society.

WORKS CITED

- Adeoye, AbdulRasheed Abiodun. "Socio-Dramatic Transition of Language Use in the Plays of Ola Rotimi." Marang: Journal of Language and Literature, vol. 26, 2015, pp. 101–122. <https://journals.ub.bw/index.php/marang/article/view/447>.
- Akoh, Ameh Dennis, and Anthony Echefonachukwu Ugwu. "The Viability of Social Media Theatre in Nigeria and the Proliferation of Actors and Audience in the Cyberspace." Nigerian Theatre Journal: A Journal of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists, vol. 23, no. 1, 2023, pp. 14–26. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ntj.v23i1.2>.
- Ekevere, Francis Oghenekaro, Alero Uwawah Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide, C. C. Omessah, and A. J. Onyari. "Critiquing Power: Ola Rotimi's Interrogation of Nigerian Political Leadership." Cognizance Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, vol. 5, no. 1, 2025, pp. 666–705. <https://doi.org/10.47760/cognizance.2025.v05i01.051>.
- Ekevere, Francis Oghenekaro, and Nkechi Philomina Aninye. "The Leadership Question in Nigeria Politics: A Look at Ola Rotimi's 'Kurumi.'" International Journal of Arts and Humanities, vol. 11, no. 7, 2023, pp. 77–92. <https://doi.org/10.54978/ijah.2023.659306>.
- Emasealu, Emmanuel Calvin. "The Use of Indices of Traditional African Theatre by Modern

- Playwrights/Directors: The Example of Ola Rotimi." 1998, pp. 27–47.
- Ezenwa-Ohaeto. "Cultural Imperative and Social Validity in Modern Nigerian Drama: The Plays of Saro-Wiwa, Nwabueze and Irobi." [Book Title], Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 2000, pp. 25–35. OpenEdition Books, <https://books.openedition.org/pufr/3776>.
 - Enyaosah, Damian. "Digital Directing Aesthetics in Lagos Theatres: An Examination of Austen-Peters' Wakaa the Musical." *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2024, pp. 126–137. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2024.124009>.
 - Haruna, Baba. "Symbiotic Relationship between Live Theatre and the Other Media: A Metaphor of the Epiphyte." *Journal of African Arts and Culture*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2025. <https://journals.uew.edu.gh/index.php/jaac/article/view/621>.
 - Imiti, Aghogho Lucky. "Nigerian Theatre in a Digital Era and Environment." *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2022, pp. 93–100. <https://doi.org/10.25082/IJAH.2022.01.002>.
 - Lawan, Mubarak Ibrahim, and Habib Awais Abubakar. "African Theatre, History and Postcolonial Resistance: An Appraisal of Ola Rotimi's Ovonramwen Nogbaisi." 2018, pp. 1–23.
 - Mark, Tekena Gasper, and Philip Smith. "Theatre on Social Media in Post COVID-19 Nigeria: Segun Adefila's Corona Palava as a Virtual Performance." *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2022, pp. 550–558. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2021.1997582>.
 - Momoh, Caleb Obaniyi. "Leadership and Collectivism in African Drama: Ola Rotimi's Hopes of the Living Dead." *US-China Foreign Language*, vol. 8, no. 10, 2010, pp. 129–132.
 - Stellamaris, Ogbonna Kelechi, and Chisimdi Ihentuge. "New Media as Theatre Stage for Political Education: A Study of Selected New Media Skits on the 2023 Nigerian General Elections." *Nigeria Theatre Journal: A Journal of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2024, pp. 195–204. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ntj.v24i2.7>.
 - Yeboah, Godfred Asare, and Judith Sena Agbevenu. "Madness, Power, and Political Satire in Ola Rotimi's Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again: A Textual and Theatrical Investigation." *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2026, pp. 148–159. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.1301014>.