POLITICIKING ON VIRTUAL PLATFORMS: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN 2019 POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract

This paper sought to x-ray extent to which social media have aided in the dissemination of politically related information with regards to the 2019 elections giving the people a neutral platform to air their opinion and add their inputs on who governs them and how such activities should be done. The researchers adopted the Survey Research Method using the tool of questionnaire to gather relevant data studying the Owerri Metropolis of Imo State Nigeria with a population of 215,038 arriving at a sample size of 399 using the Taro Yamaen Formula to arrive at a manageable sample size while maintaining representativeness of respondents. The study was anchored on the Information Seeking Behavior theory of communication. The researchers discovered that respondents are vast in the usage of social media app, revealing that over period come across politically related stories and that the rate of high political stories both real and fake are released into social media platforms is on the high increase questioning the existence of media gate keepers. The researchers therefore recommended that the users of social media platforms both posters and consumers should be mindful of information passed across as it was discovered during the course of the research that these social media platforms affects the way people view politics in Nigeria and political behavior/culture can be shaped positively or negatively based on the information accumulated and digested by the people.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the role of social and digital media (web 2.0) has been amplified to becoming a veritable tool in enhancing social change and political engagement Dungse, Mato, Makinde and Chidozie, (2018). In effect, digital technology is making it possible for the average citizen to become more involved in political decisions with the reduction in the cost of communication. Citizens are no longer passive consumers of political party propaganda but can challenge discourse, share alternative perspectives and air their own opinions. Hence, social media was effectively designed as a tool for the

empowerment of the user by giving the user broadcast power through the provision of a flexible and multiple means for sending and receiving political information. Bekkers, Beunders, Edwards and Moody (2011, p. 209) averred that these technologies are potentially powerful tools for collecting and dissemination information, for building organizations, and for mobilizing for action'. When examined against contemporary realities, the internet is revolutionist the political culture in Nigeria from a passive to a participatory one. With the 2011 elections observed as a prominent period where politicians, political parties and the electorates alike employed social media as a medium for political participation (Udejinta, 2011; Bartlett, Krasodom-Jones, Daniel, Fisher and Jesperson, 2015). Similarly, the fuel subsidy removal protest, the Bring back our girls campaign and the 2015 election campaign has also witnessed a milestone in the use of the social media in Nigerian politics. This has aptly been captured by Bosch and Mutsvairo (2017) in their assertion that the increased dispersion and popularity of social media networking sites like Twitter have led to their widespread use by citizens as a vehicle for the expression of civic participation and engagement'. Against this backdrop, citizen's engagement on Twitter has continued to rise as social and digital media present a leveled playing ground for collaboration, interaction and engagement which undermines the elites propaganda.

Indisputably, citizens of Nigeria across the globe are positively involved through commenting and posting about forth coming elections plus the just concluded ones, political and participation and engagement are improving and dialogues are emerging Opeyemi, (2011). The role of social media in different spheres of human life have transcended personal living to even national level as issues of national and international concern are been debated on different social media platforms by citizens, government officials, corporate bodies and so on. the role of social media cannot be ignored in political processes. It is not the only factor influencing political outcomes as politics is made complex process but it is a vital phenomenon in process of politics and electioneering campaign in this era and age.

In the world today, all forms of media and their tools are considered important factors that promote democracy and good governance. Through the media, the voice of the people, as well as their thoughts on political issues are resonated. There is also an apparent synergy between the new media tools available today and the political life of people, and it typically sets the stage for a potent, interactive and virulent version of political communication Bandipo (2016).

Broad categories of new media tools in question include the Social Media, Instant Messaging Services and Big Data Analytical tools to mention a few. They consist of our everyday tools for mobile communication sufficiently tweaked and repurposed for political communication. Often times, they do not require much overhead in terms of cost, neither is their use constrained by geographic space and time. Their main requirement is technical competence, analytical competence and interpretive capability (Bandipo, 2016). On these bases, this study sought to examine or analyse the use of social media platforms for 2019 electioneering process in Nigeria.

Statement of problem
Elections in Nigeria, particularly since 1999 when the military relinquished political power have remained the major way of achieving legitimate rule studies of Nigeria elections have underlined of country's adoption of the Western model of liberal democracy. But whether this electoral model has enhanced democracy in Nigeria and Africa is debatable.

However, it had earlier been distinguished the necessary and ultimate requirements to achieving a democratic order. The right to vote might ensure legitimacy in governance, freedom of press leads to an open society and freedom of information from this stand point, a sound electoral process is meant to achieve four fundamental goals; accountable rulers, open society, social justice and an enthusiastically participating citizenry.

There are indications that the 2019 general elections may attract some relatively higher degree of political participation than the previous elections held in Nigeria since indispence in 1960. This is in view of a number of factors, notable among which is the rise in social media usage which has been observed to

have direct implications for political socialization and participation. However, it can be noted that a relatively higher degree of political participation may not necessarily translate into higher voter turnout.

Research Questions
This research study sought to find out to :

- Extent to which social media have aided in the dissemination of politically related information with regards to the 2019 elections?
- Has social media platforms induced positive political culture in Nigeria encouraging public participation in 2019 election?
- Have social media platforms influenced political narratives amongst citizens of Nigeria?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

Empirical Review
In a study entitled "The role of online social networks for social movements mobilization, the rationale", conducted by Schwarz (2011). This was because recent revolutions in the Middle East had played a vital role in showcasing the power of online social networks, especially for mobilisations. The study, which was a comparison of the level of mobilisation from online social networks with mobilisation from face-to-face and mediated channels, tried to see if online social networks would translate to offline protests and diversity of organisational members. The findings revealed that online social network mobilisation resulted in an increase in attendance of offline protest activities and a slightly significant change in the diversity of members. The author concludes by recommending the use of such online social networks by all and sundry for effective mobilisation. Theocharis and García-albacete (2011) conducted a comparative study on social media and political participation by comparing the occupation movements in three countries; Spain, Greece and the United States of America. This was because in all three of the movement, a reoccurring feature was the pertinent role digital media played in mobilisation and organisation which brought to light and garnered a lot of debate and assumption on the democratising potential of the internet as well as serving as a veritable tool for political effectiveness. The authors went ahead to mine one million tweets and Facebook posts from aggrieved citizens of the selected countries to see among others; what content was generate on social media and for what purpose; the rationale behind using Twitter as a means of communication, and to deduce from the messages, the content, the participant and even the mobilisation techniques of the various protest movements. From the results, the dominant use of social media was to disseminate information and express political statement, leaving organisation and coordination at lower levels. Most users were also individual citizens and not necessarily affiliated with news agencies or political parties, with a handful of news agencies and politicians participating as well. Finally, for actions that were promoted online, the majority were street protests such as demonstration and rallies, followed by calls for practical action especially in Spain and the United States and then a few others relating to assemblies, voting and abstention, donations and petitions among others.

Storck (2011) on a study, "The role of social media in political mobilisation using the Egyptian uprising in January 2011 as a case study, was concerned with how activists in Egypt patronised Facebook, Twitter and weblogs for the sole purpose of coordinating and creating awareness of political mobilisation for the 2011 uprising. The author was able to identify from her findings through the application of content analysis, three major uses of social media from the uprising; it was used as an alternative to press, as an organisation tool and finally for generating awareness. To conclude, the author recommends that despite the aptness of social media for political mobilisation and creating awareness, in the case of the Egyptian uprisings all of this did not amount to political realities especially around transformation the need and demands of the protesters. The end note of this work was the fact that the various social media outlets on their own could not generate protests and actions as they must be backed by the will and decision of an aggrieved individual to make use of them.

In another work titled, "The Role of the New Media in the Electioneering Process of Developing Nations, A Case Study of Nigeria 2015". By bandipo (2016) examined the roles new media technologies play in the electioneering process of developing nations. The chosen case study was the Nigeria 2015 presidential elections. For this study, the electioneering period was accepted to commence with from the campaign period and to conclude a year after swearing in. This allowed for the study of critical milestones of the electoral cycle. The main argument of this study was that the new media played critical roles during the Nigeria 2015 presidential election. This study sought to identify these roles and contextualize their impact with a view to improving and institutionalizing positive trends. It was discovered that practically all stakeholders that participated in one way or the other relied on the new media to improve their operational capability and judgment. It was also discovered that the new media and its ability to disseminate information in geometric proportions is one of the critical factors responsible for the avoidance of post-election crisis in Nigeria. Based on these findings, this study concluded that the new media impacted positively on the Nigeria 2015 presidential elections. It therefore recommended the continued encouragement of the use of new media technologies by all stakeholders participating in future African elections.

Theoretorical Framework: this study is anchored on the Information Seeking Behavior theory which was coined by Thomas Wilson (1981), this theory is of the belief that the currnt "information needs" was unhelpful as a basis for a research agenda as need cant be directly observed, while how people behaved in seeking information could be observed and investigated. It also believed that information seeking behavior as totality of human behavior in relation to the totality of human behavior in relation to sources and channels of information including both active and passive information seeking and information use.
This theory is relevant to the study because the study sought to find out the influence of social media politically related information affect the people/users who source for diverse information form them over a period of time.

METHODOLOGY
The researchers in the course of this study adopted the Survey Research Method using the tool of Questionnaires to gather relevant data which are vital to the study.The questionnaires were distributed to residents of Owerri Metropolis in Imo State based on the nature of the research. According to World population Review, Owerri Metropolis has a population of 215,038 currently(2019).

Using the Taro Yamaen Formula, a sample of 399 was taken from the population.
Therefore, the sample size for this study is 399. The researchers distributed a total of 399 questionnaires, out of which 350 was returned and out the 350 questionnaires, 300 was filled correctly and valid for the research work.

Data Analysis
   1)   Bio data of respondents

Content Categories		Frequency	Percentage
Sex:	Male	180	60
	Female	120	40
	Total	300	100
Age:	18-28	96	32
	29-39	112	37.3

	40 and above	92	30.7
	Total	300	
			100
Marital Status:	Single	114	38
	Married	117	39
	Divorced	69	23
Total			
		300	100
Working Status:	Student	101	36.7
	Worker	199	66.3
		300	100
Academic Qualification;	SSCE	65	21.7
	BSC	198	66
	MSc	21	7
Ph.D		16	3
Total		300	100

 In above table, the bio-data of respondents were analysed by researchers, majority of respondents was male (60%), the majority of respondents fell within the age bracket of 29-31 (37.3%), also majority of respondents were married (39%), workers (36.75) took a front row in the working status analysis while majority of respondents were Bsc holders in the academic realm.

Research Question 1:
- **What extent have social media aided in the dissemination of politically related with regards to the 2019 elections?**
Table 1)   **How often do you visit social media platforms like facebook, twitter, etc?**

Respondents responses on how often do you visit social media platforms like facebook, twitter, etc	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	196	65.3
Often	87	29
Rarely	12	4
Never	5	1.7
Total	300	100

Analysis of table 1 revealed that majority of respondents(65.3%) regularly visit these social media platforms sometimes on an hourly or daily bases depending of the schedule of activities engaged in by the respondents. This means that visit to Social Media platforms is very high amongst respondents.

Table 2) Do you participate in political related discussions in these platforms?

Respondents responses on level of participation in political related discussions in these platforms	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	118	39.3
No	101	33.7
Can't say	81	27
Total	300	100

Analysis of table 2 revealed that majority of respondents(39.3%) often times engage in or participate in politically related discussions either as proconsumers (Developers and consumers of contents) or as participatiants in political discussion made public by parties, news agencies or even corporate bodies the respondents. This means that respondents on their regularly visit to these platforms engage in one form of political discussions or debates which is directly related to 2019 election or not.

Table 3) Do you think that these platforms have been effective in dissemination of correct and current political information especially stories of election?

Respondents responses on level of effectiveness of these platforms in dissemination of correct and current political information especially stories of election	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	121	40.3
No	157	52.3
Can't say	22	7.3
Total	300	100

Analysis of table 3 revealed that majority of respondents (40.3%) said that these social media these platforms have been effective in dissemination of correct and current political information especially stories of election giving these platforms a degree of credibility and objective analysis of events in society especially the 2019 elections in Nigeria.

Research Question2:

- Has social media platforms induced positive political culture in Nigeria encouraging public participation in 2019 election?

Table 4)   How has social media platform affected your views about politics in Nigeria especially?

Respondents responses if social media platforms induced positive political culture in Nigeria encouraging public participation in 2019 election	Frequency	Percentage
Positively	129	43

Negatively	120	40
Cant say	51	17
Total	300	100

Analysis of table 4 revealed that majority of respondents (43%) said social media platforms induced positive political culture in Nigeria amongst citizens both at home and Diaspora encouraging public participation in 2019 election to a large extent.

Table 5) **Do you think news stories about politics in these platforms prompt political ingenuity amongst people with regards to the election**

Respondents responses if news stories about politics in these platforms prompt political ingenuity amongst people with regards to the election	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	79	26.3
No	182	60.7
Can't say	39	13
Total	300	100

Analysis of table 5 revealed that majority of respondents (60.7%) said no that news stories about politics in these platforms do not prompt political ingenuity amongst people with regards to the election due to the peoples and candidates inability to be open and frank with the citizenry in other media platforms.

Table 6) **How effective have these platforms been in inducing positive political behaviour and culture amongst Nigerians?**

Respondents responses on degree of effectiveness of these platforms in inducing positive political behaviour and culture amongst Nigerians	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	27	9
Effective	181	60.3
Not effective	69	23
Can't say	23	7.7
Total	300	100

Analysis of table 6 revealed that majority of respondents (60.3%) said these platforms been effective in inducing positive political behaviour and culture amongst Nigerians thereby raising the level of political participation amongst citizenry of the country.

Research Question 3)

Have social media platforms influenced political narratives amongst citizens of Nigeria?

Table 7) Do you think that political news stories in these platforms affects people's views and opinion regarding political issues with regards to the 2019 general elections?

Respondents responses on how political news stories in these platforms affects people's views and opinion regarding political issues with regards to the 2019 general elections	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	174	58
No	61	20.3
Can't say	65	21.9
Total	300	100

Analysis of table 7 revealed that majority of respondents (58%) said yes that political news stories in these platforms affects people's views and opinion regarding political issues with regards to the 2019 general elections emphasizing the power of the media in setting agenda for public discussion.

Table 8) Do political news stories debated on these platforms influence political narratives amongst citizens especially users of these platforms?

Respondents responses on if political news stories debated on these platforms influence political narratives amongst citizens especially users of these platforms	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	169	56.3
No	72	24
Can't say	59	19.7
Total	300	100

Analysis of table 8 revealed that majority of respondents (56.3%) said yes that political news stories debated on these platforms influence political narratives amongst citizens especially users of these platforms which are often the youths formally known as the leaders of tomorrow.

Table 9)Do you think that political news stories presented in these platforms has the credibility to influence political narrative amongst people?

Respondents responses on if political news stories presented in these platforms has the credibility to influence political narrative amongst people	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	154	51.3
No	129	43
Can't say	17	5.7
Total	300	100

Analysis of table 9 revealed that majority of respondents (51.3%) said yes that political news stories presented in these platforms has the credibility to influence political narrative amongst people which means the values and ethics of journalism should be upheld and maintained irrespective of the media outlets either print, electronic or new media(Social Media).

Table 10)Do you think that social media platforms have provided room for campaign and political debates with regards to 2019 election?

Respondents responses on if social media platforms have provided room for	Frequency	Percentage

campaign and political debates with regards to 2019 election		
Yes	192	64
No	67	22.3
Can't say	41	13.7
Total	300	100

Analysis of table 10 revealed that majority of respondents (51.3%) said yes that social media platforms have provided room for campaign and political debates with regards to 2019 election giving the populace a chance to air their views about the political processes in the country and gather information relevant to their choice making during the election proper.

Table 11) How effective have these platform serves as a tool of orientation with regards to 2019 election in Nigeria?

Respondents responses on the degree of effectiveness of these platform in serving as a tool of orientation with regards to 2019 elections in Nigeria.	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	29	9.7
Effective	185	55
Not effective	69	23
Can't say	37	12.3
Total	300	100

Analysis of table 11 revealed that majority of respondents (55%) said that these platform have been effective in serving as a tool of orientation with regards to 2019 election in Nigeria providing information about the election processes, educating the people on their civic rights and duties with regards to ensuring vast public participation in the general elections

Discussion of finding

- **Extent to which social media platforms have aided in the dissemination of politically related information**

The study, revealed how variables in the study are interrelated though independent. The researchers with the aid of past research works related to the study and current data collected during the period of the research tries to establish a fundamental truth about the relevance of social media platforms in the political drama across the globe with Nigerian's general election 2019 as the main focus of discussion. From data collected and analyzed by the researchers, it revealed that majority of respondents and society at large are uses of one social media app or the other, and as they surf the internet, interact, chat and so on, they come across one or two politically related information to democracy for relevance to this study, the on going 2019 general election in Nigeria. During the course of the study, it was revealed that majority of respondents are well vast in the usage of social media app, majority of these respondents revealed that over period come across politically related stories and this is on the increase based on the fact that election is on going in the country. It also revealed that the rate of high political stories both real and fake are released into social media platforms is on the increase questioning the existence of media gate keepers.

Also, majority of respondents are actively engaged in political discussion on these platforms arising their views about political issues in the country and valuating their choices with regards to political parties, candidates, government policies and so on. This was seen in a study entitled social

media, political mobilization and participating politics in Nigeria by Opayemi 2018 which revealed that social media plays an active role in the dissemination of political information in Nigeria increasing and influencing political knowledge and behaviour of people towards the forth coming election in Nigeria across the country.

-        **Social media platforms role in inducing positive political culture in Nigeria with regards to public participation in 2019 general election**.

Politics in Nigeria started way back even before the colonial era when the country was still operated as separate regions, each region recognized hierarchy that ensured that the laws and norms of the society are being followed and people are held accountable for their actions. The era of colonialization subsequently led to the amalgation of these regions giving rise to the entity called Nigeria. From 1914 till date, Nigeria has operated different forms of government, each with its merits and different boiling down to the fact that Nigerian's across the globe are politically oriented people but how oriented the people are is the gap in knowledge. From the data analyzed by the researchers, it revealed that politics in social media is one source of information gathering by the public, though majority of respondents believed that these information about politics been released in these platforms with control of gate keepers leave less to be imagined as these stories tends to cloud how people view politics in Nigeria as individuals, parties and even government tends to shape stories as them seem fit encouraging positing political behavior and culture amongst people giving the people an avenue to be agenda settles. This was seen also in study "Role of the new media in the electioneering process of developing nations, a case study of Nigeria 2015 by Bandipo 2016 which revealed that the new media and its ability to disseminate information in geometric proportions is one of the critical factors responsible for avoidance of post election crisis in Nigeria. It also revealed that election the new media impacted positively in the Nigeria 2015 presidential election

3)   **Social media platforms influence on political narratives amongst citizens of Nigeria**.

From the era of independence of Nigeria in 1960 under NnamdiAzikiwe till date, Nigerians have always been regarded as politically minded people who participate actively in the political sphere of the country ensuring the principle of rule of law and democracy is not a metaphorical assumption but a realistic facts. The study social media, tool for politic campaign; study of the Nigeria 2019 general elections sought to discover the relationship between social media platforms and Nigerians with regards to the 2019 general elections in the country. It was revealed in the course of this study, that these media platforms and information passed across to the audience especially politically related information influences the way people view an understand political issues. It is also revealed that political news stories debated on these platforms influence how people understands and interprets politically related issues in Nigeria, through these platforms have been criticized about the lack of credibility, the study revealed that these platforms have a degree if credibility to influence political narratives amongst people. It also revealed that these platforms provides room for an informal kind of campaign and debates giving room for feedbacks and opinions of the people about candidates, parties and other issues alike, also providing orientation for the people about politics in the society. This is also seen in a study entitled social media and gubernatorial elections in Nigeria: a critical discourse by Dunu 2018 which revealed that social media platforms have not only become tools for speeches and misinformation and /or fake news but with the General Elections coming up in 2019 it has become important for political active to begin to come to terms with the increasing citizens power to monitor election and hold Candidates accountable for previous mandate via different posts and chats. Therefore, it can be said that social media gives people room to follow actions of elections from beginning to end without manipulation of the powers that be.

Recommendations

In this paper, we examined the multifaceted complex ways social media has been used in Nigerian election. These discourses align with global literature in terms of the impact of social media in enhancing political participation and deliberations. There is need to acknowledge as submitted by

different authors that while the social media platforms are seriously and positively impacting the democratic process in Nigeria and elsewhere, there is need for caution in its use because these platforms have demonstrated capacity of increasing the articulation and spread of hate speeches/disparaging of personality of candidates Dunu, (2018). This study therefore recommends that:

-        Though information are been passed across these social media platforms on a daily /hourly/ minutely and even secondly bases, there is a need to check mate the information about the politics and political activities in order to keep in check he rate of civic unrest amongst people based on the news stories passed across as people source these social media platforms to obtain neutral and unbiased news stories posted about candidates and parties in the election.

-        Also, it is recommended that the users of social media platforms both posters and consumers should be mindful of information passed across as it was discovered during the course of the research that these social media platforms affects the way people view politics in Nigeria and political behaviour/culture can be shaped positively or negatively based on the information accumulated and digested by the people.

-        It is also proposed that as the findings suggested that social media platforms affects political narratives amongst citizens influencing the way people view politically related issues, it is therefore recommended that though gatekeepers do not exist in social media, people and posters should take a conscience effort to limit the rate of falsify claims and ensure that a high degree of credibility is maintained to issues that people's views are not clouded by false reality

Conclusion

This study was prompted out of the desires of the researchers to gauge the influence of news stories which are politically related influence the citizenry level of participation in political issues and programmes in the country using the different social media platforms as yardsticks to represent the media bodies existing in the country. during the course o the research study, it amazed the researchers that the social media platforms have more potential of providing the citizenry a platform and leveled ground to give voices to their different opinions and thoughts with regards to the 2019 general elections with their thoughts about parties, information, candidates and even the electorate bodies been expressed while trying to maintain a degree of objectivity and accuracy in accordance to the journalistic codes of ethics and conducts governing the practice of journalism across the globe. It can be said that the misconception of social media as just a tool for fun and meeting people is long overdue and different parties should explore the potential of social media in suggestive occurrences in the country and even globally.

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