

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE MOBILIZATION OF ELECTORATES DURING THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN LAGOS AND KANO STATES NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of social media messages on the electorates of Lagos and Kano States in Nigeria during the 2019 general elections. Three research questions were used for the investigation. The survey method was used for the research. The Comrey and Lee (J 962) formula was adopted to determine sample size. The formula states that where the population runs into millions and were infinite, that 250 is good, 300 is very good and 500 is excellent. The sample size of 500 respondents was the population of the research. Copies of 500 questionnaires were distributed but 480 of them were filled and returned. The results show that: first, there was significant exposure to social media messages by the electorates of the two states during the elections; second, the electorates of the two states were significantly influenced by social media messages in their choice of candidates; third, social media messages significantly reduced political problems in Nigeria during the elections.

Key words: Social media, mobilization, electorates, 2019, general elections in Nigeria

Introduction

The social media have powerful and influential effects on their users as other forms of the media. They are popular modes of social interactions used to create and share user generated contents. Social media are news forms of the media that enable their users to carry out online social interaction using all

sorts of social networking sites and platforms. No wonder, in their reference to social media, Nwafor, Nnanyelugo and Aligwe (2013. P.5) assert that:

When we talk of the social media, we mean those internet-based tools, services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute and research for information online. In other words, the social media are interactive web based media platforms that offer citizens opportunity and place to connect, share opinions, experiences, views, contacts, knowledge as well as other things like job and career tips.

Having said this, one can trace the history of social media to a research conducted by a British physicist called Tim Berners in the 1980'. According to Hanson (2005.p.275), Berners Lee was never asked to create the web, he simply thought it would be a good idea to find documents they needed regardless of which computer those documents resided on.

In 1989, he started writing the software for what he called the World Wide Web, defined as a system that allows users to view and link documents located anywhere in the world using standard software. This discovery by Berners-Lee made it possible for people all over the world to have direct access to online information anywhere they are as a result of inter-connectivity of the computers which they are linked to. This technological revolution has resulted in a situation where people use the social media for different gratification.

Amongst these uses are in the political structure, economic, social, religious, educational technological, and other areas of human existence.

According to Adum, Ekwugla and Chukwutele, (2013, p.31)

We are now in an era where anyone can be a reporter or commentator on the web, the society has now moved to a two way Journalism.

In the past, the politicking process has been dominated by the use of traditional mass media which are radio/television, newspaper and magazine.

This is regardless of obvious disadvantages of providing, one-way men-interactive messages to a large audience. The latest resort to the use of "old" and "new" media for political communication has added impetus to the electorate/candidate relationships due to the interactive nature of the new media. It could be said that social media have brought relief to political parties, the electoral political umpires and other stakeholders in the field of politics because, they can use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and others to crate online contents which can help them to discuss political related issues in Nigeria.

Also, social media can offer the masses the opportunity to interact freely, have direct access to online contents that discuss political issues as well as mobilized the electorate in the 2019 general elections in the country.

Voter education on voting process can be realized through social media, the use of voting sensitive materials such as the card-reader, Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) and server which can be used to protect result to avoid hacking or falsifying and can be guaranteed through the use of social media. Irrespective of the gains and advantages of the use of social media during the 2019 general elections, some challenges were encountered in the use of social media as a means of electoral mobilization in the general elections in Nigeria. These problems range from hate speech among different political parties, their supporters and candidates, cyber bullying, distortion of election results online, and other forms of political instability using social media. These challenges if not properly addressed, could constitute political instability and incredibility of the outcome of elections.

Every political party in the country used social media to campaign and advance plans, messages and manifestoes to supporters including advertising, mobilizing and organizing in all the states of the federation and even fundraising. Facebook, YouTube and especially Twitter were used to let voters know how each party or particular candidate felt about important national issues ranging from security to power. Hence, social media became powerful enough to influence voters decisions and choices as few voters who were not sure of whom to vote for began to change their minds and conscience on voting a particular party or candidate based on certain information or idea they got online about the party or candidate.

Statement of the Problem

Realizing what may have been perceived as the relevance of social media, it becomes necessary to understand the level of success or extent in which Nigeria electorates were involved in creating and sharing political information using, social media platforms in 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Also, there is the need to know whether social media was used to reduce or increase political problems in Nigeria as they relate to the general elections in the country. This remains an important factor which must be verified through this study. It is as a result of these identified problems that prompted this study.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

- I. Determine whether the people in Lagos and Kano States were exposed to political message(s) in the run-up of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria;
- II. Examine the level of influence of political message(s) through social media had on users' choice of candidate in the elections;

- III. Find out whether social media was used to reduce or increase political problems in Nigeria as they relate to the general elections.

Research questions

1. Were social media users in Lagos and Kano States exposed to political messages in the run-up to the 2019 general elections in Nigeria?
2. What level of influence did the exposure to political messages on the social media have on user's choice of candidates in the elections?
3. Were social media used to reduce or increase political problems in Nigeria as they relate to the elections?

Significance of the study

The study is significant to the electorates for it will encourage the electorates to use social media more than other forms of the media in political related issues in Nigeria. It will give the Nigeria electorates greater opportunity to be involved in political activities in the country. The research is also important to the political parties and their candidates as to the best approach to adopt so as to win elections.

Scope of the study

The scope of this work were all the social media platforms which were used in Lagos and Kano States for all sorts of political information. Such social media are the Internet, Facebook, Twitter and others that are relevant to political mobilization. There was the need for the researchers to study social media users in Lagos and Kano States where political information and mobilization of the electorates can be achieved because of their ability to use social media as part of their creation of messages during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

Literature Review

a. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Public Sphere Theory. It was first coined by a Germany philosopher Jurgan Habermans (1961) when he wrote that "the study of public sphere centers on the idea of participatory democracy and how public opinion becomes political action. It centers on the ideology. According to the theorist:

That government's law and polices should be steered by the public and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public. Democratic government rests on the capacity of opportunity for citizens to engage in enlightened debate. Much of the debate over public sphere is the basic theoretical structure, and what influence the public sphere has over the society.

To understand this theory more as well as its relevance to this study, public sphere can be linked to the social media which constitute political events and occasions which are open to all social media users to discuss how they were mobilized for political participation during elections. It helped the electorates to connect, interact, create and share user-generated political information during and after elections. It is also a theory that supported how social media influence the political actions of the electorates, how such social media users were exposed to political messages more than other forms of the media as well as helped to determine the extent they create and share political information using social media. These are some of the reasons that made this work to be anchored on the public sphere theory.

b. The concept of social media in politics

The use of social media in politics dates back to the time the World Wide Web was invented by a British physicist. Tim Berners-Lee in the 1990s.

During this period of change in the pattern of information gathering and dissemination using on- line messages, the masses, especially social media users were swayed by the amount of information generated online on politics and political related activities. Through priming - a theory that states that media images stimulate, relate thoughts in the minds of audience members. This led to the spread of information without relying only on the conventional media which can restrict audience members from sharing or receiving political information the time, way and manner they want to receive or disseminate such political information. As a result of the evolution of World Wide Web, messages relating to politics are created and shared by social media users and this gives them greater opportunity to be involved in political related activities anywhere they are. Through a process known as "political media priming" so social media helps to alter the standards by which people evaluate political parties, their candidates and other stakeholders involved in the politics of a state or country.

The evolution of the use of the social media in politics can be traced to the Work conducted by Iyengar, Peters and Kinder (1992) when they found out that:

"People do not have elaborate Knowledge about political matters and do not take into account all of what they do know when making political decisions. They must consider what more readily comes to mind. Through drawing attention to some aspects of politics at the expense of others, the media might help to set the terms by which political judgments are reached, including evaluation of political figures".

Through the use of priming which has semblance with the agenda - setting theory which according to Mc Combs and Shaw (1976) as cited by Ndolo (2006 . p. 32)

"Audience not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from emphasis the mass media place upon it".

By the use of the Internet to access political information online, that is why such social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, the Internet and others have contributed to the use of social media in politics all over the world. It has also led to a situation where both the electorates on one side and political parties, their candidates, political electoral umpires and other stakeholders, on the other side, can share all sorts of political information in an interactive and accessible manner.

Bond, Fariss, Jones, Kramer, Marlow, Settler and Fowler (2012) carried out an experiment titled "61- million person experiment on social influence and political mobilization" and concluded that social media messages do influence people. They estimated that tens of thousands of voters eventually during US congressional election, were generated by a single Facebook message. Similarly, Ekwenchi and Chiacha (2016) in their study set in Enugu reveal that a substantial number of respondents were influenced to a large extent by exposure to social media in the way they participated in the 2015 general elections.

The role of social media in shaping public opinion of Nigerians in the 2015 electioneering was the study undertaken by Nwaolikpe and Mbaka (2015) and they concluded that "the social media are influencing the public on issues that are important to them especially politically".

Methodology

This study utilized the survey method using questionnaires to solicit responses of the residents of Lagos and Kano States who have Facebook and

Twitter accounts on the influence social media have on them via political action(s). As a result of the nature of the research topic, copies of questionnaires were distributed to social media users in both states. The copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the electorates between the voting ages of 18 and above that have Facebook or Twitter account(s)

Population of the study

The population of this study was drawn from the users of social media in the two selected states of Nigeria Lagos and Kano respectively. According to the 2006 census, Lagos state has a population of 16 million while Kano state is 11million.

Sample size Determination

The Comrey and Lee (1962) formular was used to determine the sample size. The formular states that where the population runs into millions and were infinite, that 250 is good, 300 is very good and 500 is excellent. Applying the purposive method' of sampling, a sample size of 500 was selected. A size of 500 was chosen to give enough representation to the research.

Instrument of Data Collection

The method of collecting primary data used is questionnaires. The questionnaires were used as the instrument for data collection in this study. The instrument had closed and open ended questions. A total of 500 copies of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents who are social media users in Lagos and Kano States. However, 480 of the questionnaires were filled and returned. That represent 96% response. The questionnaires not returned were 20 representing 4%. A sample size of 500 was chosen because it is adjudged by the Comrey and Lee formular to be excellent in a huge investigation requiring millions of people. The researchers in this case analysed data generated from the study through the use of statistical

instrument of simple percentages. They were used to find answers to the research questions.

Data Analysis

Table one

Respondents exposure to political messages on the social media during the 2019 general elections campaigns.

Variable	No	Percentage
Yes	450	93.8%
No	30	6.2%
Not sure	0	0%
Total	480	100%

Source: field survey, 2020

Going by the data obtained in this table, it shows that 450 respondents representing 93.8% affirmed being exposed to political messages in the social media during the 2019 general elections campaigns, while 30 respondents representing 6.2% answered no to the question.

Table two

Responses from the respondents on if their choice of candidates were affected by social media political messages.

Variable	No	Percentage
Yes	460	95.8%
No	20	4.2%
Not sure	0	0%
Total	480	100%

Source: field survey, 2020

According to the data in this table, majority of the respondents 460 representing 95.8% reported "yes" while 20 respondents representing 4.2% reported no. there was zero response for "Not sure"

Table three

Distribution of respondents' responses on whether social media were used to reduce or increase political problems in Nigeria during the 2019 general elections.

Variable	No	Percentage
Reduced the problems	450	93.8%
Increased the problems	20	4.2%
Not sure	10	2.0%
Total	480	100%

Source: field survey, 2020

Responses on if social media were used to reduce or increase political problems during the 2019 general elections. It was gathered that 450 respondents representing 93.8% indicated that social media reduced political problems, while 20 respondents showing 4.2% stated that social media increased political problems. The other 10 respondents of 2.0% were not sure.

Results

The study recorded the following results after the investigations on the impact of social media messages on the electorate of Lagos and Kano States during the 2019 general elections.

First, the electorates experienced significant exposure to social media messages during the 2019 general election campaigns. The analysis of data revealed that 93.8% of the respondents accepted that they were exposed to social media messages during the electoral campaigns. On the other hand, an insignificant 6.2% of the respondents indicated that they were not exposed to social media messages during the elections.

Second, the respondents were significantly influenced by social media messages in their choice of candidates during the 2019 election. The analysis of data indicated that 95.3% of the respondents were affected by social media messages in their choice of candidates. Conversely, an insignificant 4.2% of the respondents expressed that they were not affected by social media

messages in their choice of candidates during the elections because they have already made up their minds on whom to vote.

Third, social media messages significantly reduced political problems in Nigeria during the 2019 general elections. Data analysis during the investigation showed that 93.8% of the respondents agreed that social media messages reduced political problems during the elections. However, 4.2 % of the respondents insisted that social media messages increased political problems during the elections. The respondents not sure were 2.0%.

Conclusion

The paper concluded that Nigerian electorates who are the residents of Lagos and Kano states were exposed and active on social media platforms which they used almost on a daily basis. Twitter or Facebook were the most popular platform. Social media political message(s) to some extent dictated their choice of candidate in the 2019 general elections as many later changed their minds on particular candidate(s) whom to vote based on primordial sentiments such as religion, past records, ethnic affiliation etc. Nigerian electorates especially those in Lagos and Kano states created and shared /disseminated political messages using their social media platforms as they regard social media as a credible medium.

Finally, we foresee social media becoming more influential in the future as more and more teenagers grow into adulthood and jump on the social media bandwagon. Although, social media is being used primarily for social entertainment purposes, now things have changed radically as more political parties and candidates have realized the power of social media. Adaptation to the use of social media by government orientation agencies, electoral bodies

and political parties could be a panacea to the current voters' apathy syndrome amongst the electorates.

Recommendations

The paper recommends that the Federal government should intensify its ICT drive in the education and other sector of the country. The more people have easy access to the information super highway the more enlightened and powered they become. The reach of the social media surpasses that of any of the conventional media and is quite popular among the Nigeria electorates. Another recommendation is that government should increase their media publicity budget to accommodate placement of information on the internet via social media sites which have proved to be popular among Nigerians. Moreover, political parties should be encouraged by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to have a noticeable presence on the internet. A situation where only one or two political parties have a near monopoly of online presence does not augur well for the country's democracy.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should make its sever publicly known especially to the presiding officers in the polling units to enable them send their results electronically direct to the server immediately after vote counting to avoid falsification of result(s) and make haste for the commencement of electronic voting before and during the 2023 general elections in the country.

The Independent National Electoral Commission should finally take the responsibility of guarding and guiding the electorates in their voter education programme(s) in order not to vote for candidates based on political parties, ethnicity, religions rather on individual(s) merit.

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