THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON POLITICAL CULTURE IN NIGERIA: A POLITICAL PERCEPTION OF STATE ASSEMBLY MEMBERS FROM 2015 ELECTIONS TO DATE

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ABSTRACT

This study is therefore aimed at examining the influence of Social Media usage on politics in Nigeria with a specific interest in the perception of State Assembly members from 2015 general election to date. The study will employ a survey and interview method of data collection from the selected state assemblies. It is expected that the outcome of this study will reveal two opposite perceptions of the members. Those whose perception of Social Media is positive believing that Social Media enhance political development and those who believed that Social Media is just an instrument of political blackmailing and dissemination of fake news and lies against political opponent through the use of text, pictures, audios and videos.

INTRODUCTION

Institutionalization of any successful democracy begins with the conceptualization of a distinct and consistent political ideology premised on genuine interest, for the masses, to guide the decisions and actions to be taken in the political sphere as consistently design from the outset of the making of the political party. This implies that political ideology and policy are integral elements of good democracy. Hence, politics without ideology is a politics of no purpose and justification. Adetunji, 2007 in Ibemesi and Duru (2013) says while ideology engagement necessarily produces some divisive effect in political relations, its place in the dialectics of politics remains essential and unassailable. Indeed, ideology is an intrinsic element of politics which once removed strips politics of its essence.

Unfortunately, political parties in Nigeria exist without a distinct ideology. Hence, people often find it difficult to distinguish one political party from another as there is no clear cutline as to what a particular political party believes in that differentiates it from others. This perhaps brings about politicians cross carpeting from one political party to another as they believed in politics as money making venture that requires undue technicality to avoid lost. Consequently, money serve

as the determining factor for aspiring for a position as it also remains the driving force for which position is being aspired and solicited.

However many Nigerians are of the belief that the current trend of the vast use of the Social Media as a socio-political flat form is one important factor that can change the situation with the political perception of many politicians in Nigeria taking into cognizance the crucial role the Social Media play during the 2015 election. It is obvious that in the 2015 election the social media serve as a defensive mechanism through which many planned political illegalities and malpractices such as rigging, thugs, use of money to mention but few, which were formerly, are common practices during elections were tracked and aborted to the disadvantage of the unscrupulous politicians who champion the course of maneuvering and winning elections by whatever means.

Statement of the Research Problem

Legislatures in both national and states assemblies in Nigeria are basically elected into their positions to represent the opinion and interest of the people of their constituencies thereby protecting their right, facilitating their initiatives and fast tracking any move towards harnessing developmental policies and programs. This is consistent to the provision of the Nigerian constitution. However, it is very well known truth that members of assemblies in Nigeria are being commonly accused, through various communication channels particularly the Social Media, of the failure of many of them to bring to their constituencies any dividend of democracy, corruption, total neglect of their constituencies and even exhibiting certain sabotaging attitudes towards some governments' programs and policies that concerned their constituencies. Hence, many of them were not able to retain their seats after the 2015 general elections what many people believed as the power of the Social Media as a strong tool of political mobilization and shaping democratic culture. However, it is not yet established the truth and degree to which the social Media might influenced elections from 2015 to date and redirect the perceptions of the members of the State assemblies politically. It is against this background therefore, this research intended to examine the influence of the social media usage from the 2015 general election to date, on the political perception of members of assembly and the political culture in Nigeria with a specific interest to the State Assemblies in the North West region.

Objectives of the Study
1. To find out the relevance of Social Media in Nigerian politics
2. To find out whether the Social Media shape the political perception of the elected members of states assembly towards elections and electorates in Nigeria.
3. To examine the implication of social media usage on the Nigerian democracy.

Research Questions
1. How relevance is Social Media in enhancing political development in Nigerian?
2. Do Social Media shape the political perception of the elected members of state assemblies towards elections and electorates in Nigeria?

3. What is the implication of Social Media usage on the Nigeria democracy?

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Media and Technology

The advancement in technology has almost completely changed our communication pattern the world over. Communication is going through radical changed. This radical change influences almost all aspects of how we exchange information and the contents of the message we send. The Web and Net are significantly reshaping the operation of the media, and as the media with which we interact change, the role they play in our life the impact they have on us and our culture will also be altered(Baran 2013, p.245) obviously, the content the content that we engage with, are the content to which we contribute. The owners of the mass communication no longer control the content. This become much cleared that the rule of engagement in communication domain has changed and the movement away from difference and from top-down communication is espoused and embedded in the new architecture of the digital media. The creeping loss of control is having an impact on how we perceive message and how message can be managed. (Brown 2013, p. 15) News is no longer exclusive product of journalists. In most cases there will always be individual closer to the action than a journalist and it is possible for those individuals to add comment and had it viewed alongside the work of the professionals and more conventional journalists. The coding of control of sources and means of information perhaps does not only affects but also the business and political sphere of the global society. Consequent upon this the need for politicians to extent their contacts beyond the conventional journalists arises.

Social Media and politics: Nigerian Context

With the emergence of social media politicians access their political supporters, examine their political relevance and acceptance or even heat the politics towards the realization of their political aspiration or ideology. Political supporter and other members of the society make comment, judgment and political conclusion on the various platforms daily. Results of elections a followed up, monitored, shared and viewed before official declaration. Political defenses are solicited, voluntary provided or ethically promulgated. Idiosyncratic, religious and ethical electioneering campaigns are spread all online. With all of these, one could believe that the emergence of Social Media affects our political decision and of course the dynamism and complexity of party politics in Nigeria. Nevertheless, what is not yet is the direction to which the political wagon in Nigeria is being driven. When many people could believe that the new era of Social Media development, the political sphere in Nigeria and the developing Nations could be reshaped whirls others could believe that the Social Media emergence and usage in Nigeria is rather accentuating political divisiveness, hatred and perjury. Whatever the case may be, Nigerian people as in other countries of the world continue to engage the Social Media networking site in their quest to plough or plunder the politics in the country

METHODOLOGY

Three states assemblies were selected as the sample to represent the population of this research. A stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting the three states assemblies. Purposes sampling technique was also used in selecting 24 members from the three state assemblies comprising Katsina, Sokoto and Kebbi State assembly. A copy of the questionnaire of 10 structured questions was given each to the selected members. However, three of the respondents did not return their questionnaires, therefore, the data collection for the research relied on the 21 questionnaires returned.

Population of the Study

The population of the research is the member of states assemblies in the entire North West states of the federation. However, because of time and resources constraint, a sample was selected from the population. This is to make the research easier or even possible.

Data Collection Instrument

Questionnaire was used in collecting data for this research. This would help access to the respondents and relevant data taking into consideration the busy nature of the respondents particularly because at the period of the research the newly elected members are taking over and therefore attending to various meetings and sessions to that regard.

Presentation of Data and Discussion af Findings

1. I was elected into state assembly

One Time	Two Times	Three Times	More than Three Times	Total
9 (43%)	11(52%)	1(5%)	-	201(100%)

The table 1 above shows that the majority of the respondents had long-time experience in politics and elections. Of the 21 respondents, 43%(9 respondents) were elected for the first time into the state assembly, 52% of them (11 respondents) were elected 2 time into the state assembly, whirls the remaining 5% (1 respondent) was elected three times into the state assembly.

2. I frequently go on Social Media website to read, post information or make comments

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Totals
3(14%)	2(10%)		4(19%)	12(57%)	21(100%)

The table 2 above shows that, a greater number of the respondents visit Social Media website on regular basis to either read, post information or make comment. Of the 21 of the respondents, 14% of them (3 respondents) Strongly disagree, 10% (2 respondents) disagree, 19% (4 respondents) agree while the remaining 57% (12 respondents) strongly agree.

3. Social Media is influenced electorates' political decision from 2015 general election to date

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Totals
2(10%)	3(14%)	4(19%)	7(33)	5(24%)	21(100%)

The table 3 above shows that of the 21 of the respondents, 12 of them believed that Social media influenced the electorates' political decision while the remaining 9 of them do not. 10% (2 respondents) strongly disagree, also another 10% (2 respondents) disagree, whirls 19% (4 respondents) were not decide, 35% (7 respondents) agree, the remaining 25% (6 respondents) strongly agree.

4. Social Media bring about political violence and instability in Nigeria.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Totals
3(14%)	2(10%)	6(28%)	10(48%)	-	21(100%)

The table 4 above shows that of the 21 of the respondents, 14% of them (3 respondents) Strongly disagree that Social Media in Nigeria bring about political violence and instability, 10% also (2 respondents) Disagree that social Media bring about political violence and instability, 28% (6 respondents) were undecided, while the remaining 48% (10 respondents) Agree that Social Media bring about violence and political instability.

5. Social Media influence my perception and attitude towards electorates and my constituency as an elected Assembly member

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Totals
=	_	3(14%)	10(48%)	8(38%)	21(100%)

The table 5 above shows that of the 21 respondent, 14% (3respondents) were undecided on the question as to whether or not Social Media influenced their attitudes towards electorates and constituencies as the elected assembly members, 48% (10 respondents) Agree whiles the remaining 38% (8 respondents) Strongly Agree .

6. In which of the following ways do you believe Social Media influence you towards electorates and elections generally

It makes me feel barely open and accessible to the electorates and people of my constituency	2(10%)
It reduces my fear of rigging during election	4(20%)
It makes me feel more politically connected and enhances my sense of believing with politics as a team work	3(14%)
It increases my believe in the electorates ability to mobilize others, take decision and protect their votes	6(28%)
All of the above	6(28%)
Total	20(100%)

Table 6 above shows that 10% of the respondents, (2 respondents) believe that Social Media make them feel barely open and accessible to the electorates and people of their constituencies, 20% of the respondent (4 respondents) believe that Social Media reduce their fear of rigging during election, 14% (3 respondents) believe that Social Media makes them feel more politically connected and enhance their sense of believing in politics as a team work, 28% of them(6 respondents) believe that Social Media increases their believe in the electorates ability to mobilize others, take decision and protect their votes during elections , while the remaining 28% (6 respondents) believe that Social Media influence their perceptions towards the electorates and their constituencies in all the five ways stated in the table 6.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The research is set out to examine the relevance of Social Media to the Nigeria politics with specific interest to how probably Social media influence the political perception of members of state assembly from 2015 general election to date. The findings of the research showed clear evidence of how relevance is still social media the political sphere in Nigeria. a greater number of members of the state assemblies attached importance to Social media website in pursuing their political activities. 76% of the them indicated regular visit to the social media website in their responses. On the believe in the social media influence on electorates political decision on election, majority of the respondents indicate strong believe in the Social media uplifting influence during the 2015 election and the subsequent elections, on the question of whether or not social media bring about political violence and instability in Nigeria, although only 24% of the respondents disagreed whirls 48% agreed, it is interesting to know that the remaining 28% of the respondents remained indecisive, This indicate how difficult it was for these 28% percent of the respondent to simply accept regarding the social media as the tool for instigating political violence. This might be connected to the fact that they so much benefit from the social media politically. On the questions of whether social media influence the respondent political perceptions towards the

electorates and issues concerning their constituencies as elected member, it is revealed that all the respondents responded positively though they differ in the way they believed the social media influence their political perception.

CONCLUSION

In the overall the following conclusion can be drawn from the study

- The emergence trends in the upsurge of Social Media and its usage before, during and after elections has improved on the participation of the electorates in the political discourse, mobilization, monitoring and elections.
- The usual broken connections between the elected and the electorates are technologically and gradually being closed as access to political information through the Social Media is widened.
- Postulation of some politician, scholars and other stockholder that political culture in Nigeria is permanently retrogressing, is not going to stay as finding show positive changes in the political attitudes of members of state assemblies which is a most significant layer in a democratic component of any state.
- Despite its postulated negative effect on politics and political process, social media remain the most accessible and employed means of getting political information

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Political parties, politicians, media outlets and government agencies like NCC (Nigerian communication Commission) and other agencies in Nigeria should come out to support the use of the social media platforms around politics and political issues while they continue to wage extensive campaign against any act of using social media to instigate political violence

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