Assessment of Academic Staffs' Political Participation using the Social Media during the 2015 Nigeria General Elections

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Abstract
The rapidly expanding accesses to the internet have redefined methods of mobilising citizens and candidates towards active participation in the political process. Though, it has also ignited 'Social media war' on the various social media platforms. This paper investigates whether the Social Media contributes greatly to political participation during the 2015 general elections among academic staff of Institute of Administration, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. The study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory while the survey research method was used. The sample of the study was the academic staff and the data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings show that the Social media have positive influence on the academic staff thereby affecting their political participation. The study recommends urgent review of the various media laws to address the peculiar technicalities involved in monitoring and moderating the use of the social media, which would enhance political participation and widen the political space.

KEYWORDS: Academic Staff, Assessment, Political Participation, Social Media.

Introduction

The need for enhanced development and good governance in Nigeria entails a look at the

issue of citizenry participation in the political process especially in this era of democratisation and the need for. The cornerstone of participation is communication between the ruler and the ruled. These underscore the necessity and relevance of communication and communication system among and between citizens. Thus, the social media as a source of communication and as a way of getting fast information have become widely recognized by people of all ages and geographical dispensations in contemporary times especially in aftermath of the 'Arab Spring'.

The social media trend has become a veritable tool for mobilizing citizens towards active participation in the democratic process. It has been said that the active engagement of the social media contributed significantly to the success of President Obama presidential election in 2008. This has a great impact on democratic states in the world such that many presidential election aspirants or candidates took to the social media to seek for support and donations and also interact with the people (Adibe, (2012).

The social media was first used in a remarkable way in Nigeria during the 2011 election by President Goodluck Jonathan, who used his Facebook account to declare his intention to run for the election and garner country-wide support (Shehu Musa Yar 'Adua Foundation, 2012).

The political tempo is more heighten during Elections periods which place increasing dependence by the citizens on the various forms of media to provide information on political parties' activities, the candidates, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and related stakeholders in the electoral process. The expectation is that the media would provide credible information to enable citizens make informed choices within the ambit of professional and ethical manner. The media would give equitable access to parties, candidates and underrepresented groups; that the media would abide with extant electoral regulations and institutional codes; that the media would hold the election management body – INEC – accountable to the public and that the media would shun hate speech and inciting comments so as to help promote the desired peaceful atmosphere for the conduct of fair and credible elections.

Democratic institutions have also considered the social media platform as a veritable tool of communicating and engaging the stakeholders on the sustenance, consolidation of democracy and good governance. It is then use as a tool for organizing protests, actions of civil disobedience and political campaigns.

In Nigeria large scale mass protests organized by labour unions and a coalition of civil society organizations almost grounded the country in 2012 during fuel subsidy protest. The protest, which lasted from Monday 9 to Friday 13 January, 2012 witnessed the emergence of #OccupyNigeria protest. While the protest was characterized by mass demonstrations, rallies, strike and sit in, it was also facilitated and driven by social media platforms such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter and blackberry messenger.

Social media has really revolutionized political activism to the extent that Political parties and their candidates now use social media tools to mobilize, interact and communicate with their people and to find out and also show concern about the issues affecting them generally in the society.

More recently, the growing use of social media for self-expression and the sharing of opinions have spurred the government's recognition of social media's potential to change the political landscape. In view of this, many of the democratic states such as Australia, Kenya,

United Kingdom, Ghana, Uganda, Switzerland, Nigeria, Malawi etc. and leaders now have active social media accounts and equally appoint social media consultants as government officials to manage the social media strategy of their government.

Another Interesting additional dimension is the use of mobile telephone for socio-political activism. Most people use their mobile phones to access the internet and thereby generate information and pass it on to friends and relatives, which expand the terrain of political participation.

In a political system, the citizens can be involved in the political process and decision making through by formal political activities such as joining a political party, voting, standing for election, voting during election, participating in electoral campaign, and non-party political activism of advocacy and public debate. The level and pattern of political participation of the citizens determine, to some extent, the success of the political system. Especially in Nigeria where politics is seen by a number of people as a dirty game which must be avoided as a result of the undemocratic tendencies, deception, violence and uncertainties that characterize the political system. With the emerging trend of social media, is citizens' political participation on the increase and have less political apathy?

But as a result of these evolution in strategy of social protest in Nigeria following successes in use of social media in the ―Arab spring that resulted in regime change in some of the most authoritarian regimes, many in the status quo express ―moral panic of the social media raising concerns that the regime may block, censor or regulate the use of the social media platform for such activism. These concerns are not restricted to Nigeria and the developing world but include the developed world (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2012),

For participation to be meaningful, the people must have the guarantee of their voices being heard and choices being respected. Hence, it is germane that ―a functioning democracy requires an informed and active public that understands how to voice its interests, act collectively, and hold government officials accountable (National Democratic Institute, 2011).

Though, much has been written about the impact of social media in organizing and implementing social protests and its success in achieving socio-political revolutions, especially in the Arab world but some scholars have argued that the 'success' of social media campaigns and activism cannot really be verified. And as such the question has been whether social media can indeed achieve a lasting social change (Adibe, (2012)?

Furthermore repressive governments are becoming better users of electronic tools to suppress so called social media dissents, as it actually strengthens the surveillance capabilities of repressive regimes and that 'cyber utopia' (i.e. the assumption that the Internet is liberator of the masses) is erroneous or a 'net delusion' Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015).

Most importantly, it is claimed that Political participation is determined by education as people who have very little schooling are never knowledgeable about politics. Rather, that educated people generally have politically relevant knowledge and skills, they are more conscious and interested in politics and have opinion on issue and public officials, more importantly, they have more confidence in their ability to participate or influence decision making (Daniel, 2015).

It is against this background that this paper assesses the Academic Staffs' Political Participation using the Social Media during the 2015 Nigeria General Elections in Nigeria,

with focus on the presidential election. The paper also assesses the lapses observed in the use of social media for political participation in Nigeria during the 2015 general elections. It also attempts looking for ways of checking the lapses observed in the use of social media for political participation in Nigeria during the 2015 general elections.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to assess the use of social media for political participation in Nigeria during the 2015 general elections among the Academic Staff of Institute of Administration, A.B.U. Zaria. Specifically, the study was meant to:

1. Determine the frequently used social media platforms among Academic Staff of Institute of Administration, A.B.U. Zaria during the 2015 general elections?
2. Ascertain the extent to which the social media platforms influence political participation of Academic Staff of Institute of Administration, A.B.U. Zaria during the 2015 general elections.
3. Examine the lapses were observed in the use of social media for political participation in Nigeria during the 2015 general elections.
4. Find ways of checking the lapses observed in the use of social media for political participation in Nigeria during the 2015 general elections.

Research Methodology

The study used survey research design as it allows for the study of people's opinion on a given issue of public interest. According to Jonker & Pennine (2011), survey research is concerned with the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting a certain condition, practice, beliefs, attitudes, etc. The purpose is usually to describe systematically the facts, qualities or characteristics of a given population, events, or areas of interest concerning the problem under investigation.

The Research Population

This study focused on Academic staff as an informed population that is assumed to constitute the active users of the various social media platforms for their academic purpose and otherwise. Most importantly to use social media, one requires some certain degree of literacy in which the academic staffs not only have but they teach and do research on it. Again, social media is heavily dependent on electricity, in the campuses there is electricity supply though epileptic.

Sample size

The population of the study was 270. The sample size was determine using the Krejcie, & Morgan, (1970) table of determining sample size, which states that at + or – 5% error margin, a population of over 270 would have a sample size of 159. The 170 selected samples were done to make the sample more robust and take care of non-return of questionnaires.

The Sampling Technique

The academic staff of the Institute of Administration comprise of two faculties, that of Administration and Law. The instrument of data collection was then administered to the academic staffs.

Instrument for Data Collection

The questionnaire was divided into some sections with demographic variables of the respondents then followed by other sections relating to the variables of the study. The data

was analysis using the SPSS 1.8 Version with the aid of charts and tables.

Conceptual Notes and Implication

Social Media

The social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. The social media networks are the online tools and utilities that allow communication of information online, participation and collaboration. The social media is

> "An interactive medium that departs from the one-sided communication of existing mass media; an active and creative medium enabling users to transform from viewers, listeners and readers to participants; a direct medium in which individual users are able to determine at a distance what happens in the centre of among others politics and the mass media; a platform on which everybody is equal in principle as assumed expertise has to prove itself before being accepted" (van Dijk, 2013 in Chinonye, 2012).

Some of the features of the social media are decentralisation and democratisation of information resources, enhanced dialogues, and erosion of traditional gate-keeping and agenda setting functions. According to Dewing (2010 in Chinonye, 2012)) persistency, replicable, searchable and accessible is the attributes of the social media. Persistency, according to him relates to making the content posted on the social media sites remain permanently by default, while replicability is copying and sharing of the content. Other attributes are searchability in locating the content very easily using the online search tools as well as accessibility, which is the usage of the social media anywhere at any time, where an internet connection is available.

Social Media usage in Nigeria

There are different social media platforms which are categorized according to the functions they fulfil, though not distinctive. The following are some of the commonly used in Nigeria and they form the focus of this study, viz:

a) Blogs are websites hosted and authored by individuals or groups who regularly publish editorial content. Blogs are characterized by the fact that posts can be commented on and linked, enabling the creation of content networks. Twitter is the most popular micro-blogging service used as a personal news service and over 50 million people publish over 200 million tweets a day.

b) Social networks are platforms that enable the establishment and maintenance of personal contacts include Facebook, which is currently the global leader with around 1 billion users around the world.

c) Content platforms are platforms specialised on the sharing of specific kinds of media such as YouTube for video sharing platforms.

d) SMS-based services platforms act as a two-way interface to online platforms in areas in which end users do not have access to the internet (Institute of Security Studies, 2012).

Political Participation

Political participation can be referred to those voluntary activities by which members of a society have a share in the selection of rulers. According to Daniel, (2015), these activities typically include voting, seeking information, discussing and propelling, attending meeting, contributing financially and communication with representative on the view, that active form

of participation includes formal enrolment in a party, canvassing and registering voters' speed writing and working in campaigns and also competing for public and party offices.

Thus, citizens are critical stakeholders who perform functions classified into ten by Jega (2014). These include mobilisation of citizens; oversight of the electoral process; support for the EMBs; making demands for improvements from the EMBs, other statutory agencies and political parties; as well as spreading supportive values and expectations. Others are information dissemination; gate keeping; rule and norm-setting, conflict management and driving electoral systems (Jega, 2014, p.29).

Social media and Political Process

The electoral process brings together various interest including individuals, groups and institutions that form the stakeholders. These stakeholders include the Election Management Body (EMB), political parties and candidates, the electorates, the conventional and social media and civil society organisations (CSOs). And hardly can elections be successful and credible without these groups and institutions cooperating and performing their roles. As Jega (2014) has noted, wide-ranging citizen involvement in elections, both as individuals and as organisations, defines the role of stakeholders. Thus, stakeholders are the pillars upon which an election is rooted, if any of the pillar's malfunctions, the process may collapse. Hence, one defining characteristic of democratic maturity is the rising involvement of stakeholders in the electoral process.

The roles of social media platforms then include strengthen the capacity of individuals, aid liberated communication and mobilisation, and reinforce civil society. It enables citizens to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom (Diamond, 2010).

Though, there is the problem of identifying and verifying some of the sources and contents either shared or posted on social media accounts. Many Facebook, twitter accounts and blogs have been created without the people whose names where been used knowing about it. For examples, in the United Kingdom, social media accounts (especially blogs) are created to look like official blogs of members of parliament. These bloggers do so either to compel particular members of parliament to start their own legitimate blog or to critique the member of Parliament they are impersonating.

Also, Chinonye (2012) claimed that social media accounts allow terrorist to disseminate propaganda (to international audiences with whom it would otherwise be difficult to communicate) to an impressionable age bracket that have the potential to empathize with their cause. As the Westgate siege unfolded, the Somali militants used a social media account (a twitter handle) to churn out messages goading Kenyan authorities and claiming the responsibilities for the attack.

Yet one is forced to concur with the submission of Omede (2015) that the growing use of the social media as a trend will continue for many centuries to come in spite of its criticism. This is in view of the fact that, the phenomenon has come to stay and the general acceptability and usage by the people clearly indicate thus as it seems to represents people's freedom.

Theoretical foundation of the study

The study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory developed by Elihu

Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. The theory considers the audience as

active, that is, they actively seek out specific media and content to achieve certain results or gratifications that satisfy their personal needs.

Uses and Gratifications analysis shifts attention and focus from media production and transmission to media consumption. The central issue becomes, “who uses which content from which media under which conditions and for what reasons”. The theory seeks to explain the uses of media and the satisfactions derived from them in terms of the motives and self-perceived needs of audience members. It emphases the fact that the audience are not passive receivers of media contents, but that, “they actively influence the message” in that they “selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain the media message on the basis of their needs, beliefs, etc” Media audiences usually derive gratifications from three different sources, namely, media content, media exposure and the social context of exposure (Chinonye, 2012)

The underlying presupposition is that, media users selectively engage media that possess the features or characteristics that can meet or satisfy their needs at that point in time. Thus, it is not the pervasiveness or popularity of the medium or media that matters but the relevance and utility of the medium/media to the user. The theory stresses the consumption utility of media rather than the transmission capability.

Data Presentation and Discussion

In this research One hundred of forty-three (143) set of questionnaires was returned as the instrument used for this study was designed based on the objectives of the study. It was piloted and the Cronbach alpha of the reliability and validity of the instrument was put at 0.861 as can be seen in Table 1Reliability Statistics below. This is acceptable and the instrument has met the reliability requirement for the study. The questions which are easy to understand and answered were divided into five sections to make it clearer.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.861	65

Source: field survey, 2015

The gender profile of the respondents indicates 99 males and 44 females as can be seen in table 2 on gender below.

Table 2 Gender Profile

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	99	69.2	69.2	69.2
	Female	44	30.8	30.8	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0	

Source: field survey, 2015

The age profile of respondents indicate that majority of the academic staffs are within the age bracket of 20yrs-35yrs, follow by 46yr- 55yrs and then 36yrs- 45yrs as can be seen in table 3 on age of respondents below

Table 3 Age of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20yrs-35yrs	60	42.0	42.0	42.0
	36yrs-45yrs	34	23.8	23.8	65.7
	46yrs-55yrs	49	34.3	34.3	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0	

Source: field survey, 2015

In achieving the objective of this study that enquired about the most frequently used social media by the respondents of this study, they respondents indicated their frequent use of Facebook (102), follow by Twitter (83) then Whatsapp (70), while BBM (45) and Blog (45) are the least platforms used by them in the course of political interaction during the 2015 Nigeria general election as can be seen in Table 4 usage of social media below.

Table 4 Usage of Social Media

	SMS	CALLS	FACEBOOK	TWITTER	YOUTUBE	BBM	BLOG	WHA
Usage of Social Media	55.0	59.0	102.0	83.0	45.0	45.0	45.0	

Source: field survey, 2015

In achieving the objective of this study that enquiry about the lapses observed in the use of social media during the elections, the respondents indicate the lapses include: Politicians or their supporters used the platforms to not only attack opponents' falsely but the also spread hate & inciting messages. Others stated that they hack into opponents' sites to manipulate images, messages just to create confusion.

In achieving the objective of this study that enquired about the ways of improving the usage of social media during the elections, most respondents state the need for Public enlightenment on the use of social media platforms for political purpose. The also indicate for more social media discussions and research findings to be utilised for effective democratic governance. While others advocate for more political will to review media laws and implement them accordingly.

In achieving the objective of this study that enquired about the extent to which the social media platforms influence political participation of Academic Staffs of Institute of Administration, A.B.U. Zaria during the 2015 general elections, the responses were subjected to test as can be seen in table 5 on Correlation of variables below.

Table 5 Correlations of Variables

		Social Media	Political Communication	Political Discourse	Election Process	Election Result
Social Media	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
Political Communication	Pearson Correlation	.722**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
Political Discourse	Pearson Correlation	.679**	.560**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.	
Election Process	Pearson Correlation	.327**	.502**	.021		.
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.801		.
Election Result	Pearson Correlation	.850**	.753**	.640**	.451**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between the Social Media interactivity with Political Communication, Political Discourse, Election Result and Election Process were analyzed. The Table 4 shows the Pearson correlation coefficient at 99 % confidence level.

Result of Pearson correlation shows that there is statistically significant positive relationship between Social Media interactivity with Political Communication, Political Discourse, Election Result and Election Process ($r= 0.850$, $P< 0.01$), ($r= 0.753$, $P< 0.01$), ($r= 0.640$, $P< 0.01$), ($r= 0.451$, $P< 0.01$) respectively. These results highlight the political participation relationship in terms of Political Communication, Political Discourse, Election Result and Election Process by the academic staff.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has shown that social media was used for political participation in Nigeria during

the 2015 general elections by the academic staff of Institute of Administration, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. The social media usage differs, whereas many used the technology wisely to campaign for their various candidates, interact with candidates and electorates one-on-one, report happenings in their areas/polling centres during the elections and electioneering period, share personal views and gauge public opinions on the various candidates; others used them to attack opponents, spread false rumours, hate and inciting messages, digitally manipulate images, messages and videos, hack into people's accounts to commit all manner of fraud and launch spam and virus attacks on opponents' information, and make users fall prey to online scams that seemed genuine, resulting in several data and identity thefts.

Social media offer participatory democracy at its best, the technology promotes transparency and greater accuracy in the political process, and they facilitate speedy release of election results, among others.

Recommendations

From the findings, we recommend that efforts should be made towards monitoring, moderating or regulating the various social media platforms in order to minimize the observed weaknesses and maximize the intrinsic values of the technology in the electoral process.

To achieve the above, it is imperative that the various media laws are urgently reviewed to address the technicalities involved in the new media technologies; this we believe would go a long way in making the technology more useful in the electoral process and more beneficial to the society at large.

The academic staff should further use the social media to set the agenda for the political discourse that will enhance good governance in democratic era.

The university should also provide enhanced and expanded telecommunications services to meet the growing needs of academic staff that have now include using the social media for political participation within and outside the university.

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