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🔓 **Research Article**

EFFECTIVENESS OF NEW MEDIA ON ELECTORATES POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE, PARTICIPATION AND CHOICE OF CANDIDATE DURING 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In recent time, there has been a growing recognition, acceptability and utilization of new media of any forms by the current Nigerian political parties, politicians , electorates and other stakeholders in electioneering processes. This is a sharp contrast to what has been obtained in the build up to the past general elections from first republic to the tail end of third republic, where the traditional media was dominant and means of communications during electioneering process. However the dependence on the traditional media for political campaigns will certainly be noticeable and cannot be completely discarded because it compliments each other, the modern trends of the new media seem to be eroding the gains of the traditional media. The application of the new media into presidential election campaign of President Good Ebele Jonathan was the turnaround in Nigeria electioneering process and it has changed the rules of political communication, and since then electoral campaigns have been more propagated on social networking sites; using the existing and emerging new media platforms than the conventional media approach which emphasized more of one-way communication with its shortcoming to generate feedbacks. These new media connect politicians with electorates and sell to them the transparency associated with their manifestoes.

However, every academic discourse requires an input from what is already in existence. This is usually in the form of citations, where particular emphasis has been on how relevant this is with what is currently being studied. Therefore,

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it becomes imperative to say that human knowledge is undoubtedly an elevation of the construction of previous findings in which case the later acts as a foundational framework of the former.

KEYWORDS

Media, Effectiveness, Electorates, Knowledge, Participate, Election, Candidate, Choice.

INTRODUCTION

Before the advent of the new media, mass media have been used as a communication medium for information dissemination during elections. It has been a veritable tools used to promote, propagates and disseminate political information, campaigns and ideas as an instrument of political mobilization. The information projected by different forms of new media communication alongside other societal factors tend to influence voter's choice(s), enhance electorate political knowledge, and participation and choice of electorates' candidate during electioneering campaign.

The usage of new media technologies and other forms of social platform as an instrument of conveying political information during elections in Nigeria has continued to grow immensely in line with global trends despite strong infrastructural challenges. However, a basic element of the democratic political culture is the participation of electorates in the political process and the factor that determines competent political participation is political knowledge which is directly related to citizen's participation as a key element of the democratic political culture. The congruence between political system and political culture leads to

political stability and the latter contributes to economic growth

In a study "Contextual Dynamics and Political Knowledge: The Role of Institutional Quality in an Informed Citizenry" it was posited that political knowledge refers to 'facts about a political system that an individual can recall from their memory to interpret and understand happenings and developments within that system". The definition is broader because, besides the static knowledge of the individual, it emphasize on the practical implementation of this knowledge. The author of this study believes that this definition most comprehensively describes the concept of political knowledge

Political knowledge, is "the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory". interpersonal discussion about politics, and traditional news media consumption, such as newspaper reading, television, radio and Social media etc.

Political knowledge is clearly an important face of public opinion; without an informed public, opinion

polls may lose their importance to decision makers Political knowledge is an essential ingredient of democratic civic competence. In fact the latter requires acquisition of knowledge about politics, without an education which leads to knowledge of politics, citizens' attempts to participate can't be defined as competent

Furthermore, some citizens refuse to participate in politics because they don't understand it. Due to political knowledge citizens can understand the content of the public debate and perform an informed political participation.

The Concept of New Media

New media is a generic term for many different forms of electronic communication that are made possible through the use of computer technology. The term is in relation to "old" media forms, such as print newspapers and graphics. New media includes: Web communities, Web advertising integration of digital data with the telephone, such as computing. Moreover, new media is a term that will in general refer to those digital that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication, and involve some form of computing as opposed to old media such as the telephone, radio, and TV. The internet described as the second division of mass media and the prototypical new medium, the internet is used by people all over the world to communicate and socialize to find information, learn new things, and be entertained; and to do work generate income and run a business.

However, the rise of new Media has increased communication between people all over the globe.

People can interact through websites, facebook , blogs e.t.c. The evolution of these new media

technologies has brought about globalization. New media are web- based /digital computer technologies which can be interactive and networkable such as; the internet, website

new media, radically break the connection between physical place and social place, making

physical location much less significant for our social relationships.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt today, that we are witnessing a huge shift in media. There is massive in shift from the old media as people are migrating to the use of smart phones and social media. New media became popular after the advent of web 2.0, a web based technology which enhances great interaction. This has been fueled by the growing use of mobile devices such as smart phones commonly used to access these social media services. As new media continues to evolve its uses change and expand as well, so is the definition of social media. Today, social media is the most engaging and interactive form of communication or public relations.

News media differ from traditional/industrial media in many ways, including quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence. New media refers to interaction among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. It is also regarded as 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.

Interpreting the New Media

The term New Media is a contemporary word that has become central to the political arena In the technical sense, it refers to all digital platforms communication.

Some of its distinguishable features include global reach, real-time access, on-demand access and interactivity. Its applications is not limited only to business. It is widely used to even in other areas of endeavor like sports and creative arts. A major determinant for the delivery of new media content is the availability of network infrastructure. Although this remains a challenge in Africa, significant progress has been made continent-wide and there are on-going efforts by global stakeholders to keep improving mobile penetration and internet access in Africa.

Electorates, the Internet and the New Media

The onslaught of political information online, scholars have put forward several hypotheses about the effectiveness of the media and these important political variables. Effectiveness of the new media on electorates political knowledge, participation and choice of candidate during presidential election in Nigeria have developed along two main schools of thought those contending that the Internet has a negative or null effect and those arguing that new media exposure increases political knowledge, and participation of the electorates. Optimistically, the new media might have the potential to increase electorates knowledge and participation. The new media could enhance external political knowledge, participation of the electorates because it enables citizens to interact with public officials and to hold them accountable. The Internet also gives individuals easy access to information about politics as many web sites are designed with the objective of informing citizens about candidates, issues, and politics in general. In this regard, the Internet might have the tendency to increases political knowledge and participation by providing accessible information to the electorates.

The Internet also provides new and less costly ways in which an individual can participate in politics, for example, through e-mailing a candidate or donating to a campaign. In terms of political knowledge, the Internet provides volumes of information to citizens with several benefits over other media. The Internet not only allows for information seeking at any time, it allows users to dig deeper into issues through the use of hyperlinks and search engines.

Further, there are many complications to finding accurate and accessible political information online. The sheer volume of political information online (e.g., try typing presidential candidates into a Google search) may be overwhelming and thus lead to lower levels of personal confidence in ones ability to understand the political world. These difficulties may be particularly pronounced for individuals already feeling less efficacious because these individuals tend to be less educated and less familiar with the Internet.

Another important concern is that the Internet will only exacerbate the divide between the tuned-in and the tuned-out, the activists and the disengaged some individuals who access political information on the Internet might likely be those who are already interested in politics; the Internet thus does not increase political involvement, because the Internet is a medium in which individuals largely determine their exposure to content, individuals not interested in politics will not seek out politics online, and therefore, current levels of political knowledge and participation are likely to be maintained. In this sense, the Internet may replicate current knowledge gaps if those more able and likely to find political information are

Consistent with the variety of theoretical views, empirical findings about the influence of the Internet on political, knowledge, and participation have been mixed. Prior studies have also found that the Internet contributes to increases in political participation ,the Internet supplements political activities but does not

change peoples level of involvement. Further, studies have suggested that the Internet may expand the number of participating individuals and that it may erase well-known participation divides (e.g., those with lower incomes participate less) as access increases. It is difficult to know, therefore, whether the Internet caused these changes or if individuals already involved in politics were attracted to the Internet. To ward against spurious interpretations of the relationship between the Internet and political knowledge, and participation, a diverse range of controls is necessary in survey studies of the Internets impact on political variables.

New Media in Election Campaigns

The use and importance of new media in election campaigns has grown steadily over time. Starting with the 1992 Clinton campaign, campaign-related information was placed on the Internet although the medium at the time was accessible to only a fraction of the electorate. By the time of the 2000 presidential election, candidate web sites had become a common campaign tool, which led some to proclaim 2000 as the first Internet election.

In 2004, political candidates moved beyond perceiving the web as an electronic brochure to viewing it as electronic headquarters In 2008, newer online tools such as social networking and microblogging gained popularity and were effectively used by the Obama campaign to mobilize and organize supporters .Today no candidate or party can enter an election cycle without having an online presence, and there is little doubt that the effects of Internet and Internet tools on political campaigns at all levels will grow exponentially.

Despite general agreement about the critical importance of new media in todays political world, their definition has been somewhat elusive. It has been

suggested that new media technologies should encompass both new forms of media technology as well as new applications of existing media technology. The Encyclopedia of Political Communication includes the following online tools as critical in the political communication process: blogging, podcasting, political web sites with mechanisms for online feedback and participation, social networking, and online video sharing .Although these new media tools are generally seen as playing a complementary role to traditional media , there are several characteristics that distinguish new media from traditional mass media. First, the Internet offers multiple and diverse opportunities for political engagementfor example, participating in online polls, debates, blogging, or social networks. Second, online technologies significantly lower the cost of participation for electorates both in terms of time and effort. It is certainly easier to access multiple online news sources via the Internet at any time and place, compared with traditional media. In addition, the Internet offers a wealth of information about politics and civic life, which has the potential to contribute to a more informed electorate. Finally, a unique feature of online media is their interactivity: they allow direct (albeit mediated) contact with politicians and instant feedback from campaign headquarters. Another important feature of online media is that they make the campaign and the political system as a whole appear more accessible to the average citizen and as such provide a new public space to discuss politics. .

There are several levels of effects on citizens one might expect from new media use within a political communication context. These effects, follow a schematic hierarchy, ranging from simply motivating more online visits to motivating political action. At the first and basic level, using Internet sites should encourage citizens to come back for return visits to

those new media sites. The next level of effects includes changes in peoples knowledge or attitudes. The third and final level, which is sometimes deemed most important, is motivating some kind of political action by the citizens .

Even if using new media does not result in direct behavioral changes, however, these media represent an important part of the political communication process from the standpoint of democratic participation. According to media participation approaches, new media not only make a highly professionalized and sometimes exclusionary political system more accessible but they also play a symbolically empowering role for the average citizen. Rather than being proscribed a passive role in the political process, the electorate is symbolically or materially empowered. .through the two-way communication architecture to interact directly with the candidates. Even if such interactivity is only perceived and not truly realized, the very perception of opportunities to participate may contribute to choice of candidate of the electorate. In this sense, new media use may be highly empowering and psychologically rewarding, making the public feel more engaged in the political process.

Politicalparticipation

Political Participation can be seen within the two broad concepts, The first concept is participation as interaction, focusing on the way the individual identifies and engages with the interests of the community and works with others to achieve a common goal. The second concept is participation as instrumental action, which is related to the idea of influence and power and advancing individual interests while attempting to influence the distribution of power. Political participation could be regarded as a

process of political communication between citizens and groups especially those organized around interests or issues that are general to the community. This communication is carried out through speech, through political argument and persuasion . Considering the potential contribution of new media to this kind of participation, it is possible to see how using social networking sites, such as Facebook, as an example, could allow for the expansion of this kind of communication into the online arena. Users are able to create Facebook, whatapp and other new media platforms groups based on specific interests and carry out discussion and debate and organise themselves to then bring their ideas out into the wider political arena.

The second concept of participation, instrumental action, concerns itself with gaining influence with elites and exercising citizenship through the deployment of power and this kind of participation is linked to self-interest and the need for legitimacy , therefore, voting can be seen as an example of this kind of participation, as citizens exercise their right to determine the distribution of power, selecting a party or candidate on the basis of their own interests .

This kind of instrumental power is particularly relevant for this study as the focus is on electoral campaigns and how the new media is used to try and influence the way people vote for their choice of candidate. Voting is seen as the most important form of participation around election time, and not only are parties and politicians encouraging people to get registered and to go out on polling day, they are also trying to convince voters that their policies would best suit their individual interests.

The resource model of participation, listing the main resources that determine participation as time to take part in political activity, money to make contributions, and civic skills (i.e., the communications and

organisational skills that facilitate effective participation). Time and money are seen as the two prime resources - time can be used through volunteering with a campaign or attending a meeting, while money refers to donating to political campaigns, candidates, parties or organisations . In terms of civic skills, citizens who can speak or write well or who are comfortable organising and taking part in meetings are likely to be more to learn these civic skills are those arenas of early political socialisation - the home and Later in life, adults can develop civic skills further in work, by volunteering, or through religious associations like the church.

social media as an integral part of the new media can help to develop civic skills through the use of Facebook, whatapps and other social platforms for political activity that allows young people to practice their civic skills, which may lead to more political participation, with a minimal commitment of time and effort

Electoral Campaigns

Electoral campaigns could be seen from two approaches to either as institutional/quasi-institutional conditions or campaigns as periods of uncommon intensity in the political order which determines how long the campaign will last. Institutional conditions include knowing the date of the election, who the candidates are, and candidates dedicating all their time to the campaign, with rules around what they can and cannot do while campaigning. Knowing a date for an election determines both when a campaign should have started, and when the campaign will end . The intensity approach, however, suggests that a campaign starts when candidates and parties start to put more effort into the campaign, begin to engage more with the media and become involved in political

discussion. It can also be determined by how much attention the mass media affords to the campaign.

The difference between these two approaches is that the institutional definition suggests a campaign only exists when an election date exists. Otherwise, there is no campaign. However, the intensity approach suggests that campaigns can fluctuate in terms of intensity and will move from ones that barely exist to those that consume voters, parties, and the media. With the rise in new media use for electoral campaigning, it is possible that the intensity approach will be more common as politicians can carry out a continuous campaign without needing to know the date of the next election, and depending on external factors such as what is being talked about in the media, the level of campaigning that goes on online can vary. Therefore, social media lends itself more to the intensity approach.

The European Parliamentary Research Service posited a briefing on new media usage in election campaigning. The potential uses of new media in election campaigning would be of particular interest to the European Union considering decreasing voter turnout, declining party membershipand a lack of interest in the European Union. The report argues that new media use could be of particular importance to new parties who may find they are bypassed by traditional media outlets and can use new media as a way of communicating with the electorate 311.

In term of campaign strategy, new media can be useful for targeting young voters, for arranging and promoting offline events, or for the personalization of the candidate, placing emphasis on the individual politician and their personality . However, the report also warns about the capacity of new media to undermine serious deliberation . If new media is only being used as a means of broadcasting messages to a

wider audience with little room for interaction, then debate cannot flourish online.

Presidential Election in Nigeria

Presidential Election in Nigeria started during the Second Republic (1979-1984) when the country dropped the parliamentary system of government after the bloody coup in 1966. From 1979 to date, Presidential Election took place nine (9) times in the history of the country. The first two elections occurred in the Second Republic in 1979 and 1983. Another took place in 1991 during the Aborted Third Republic which was eventually annulled. In the Fourth Republic, six (6) Presidential Elections took place during 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019.

An analysis of the Presidential Election in Nigeria will reveal a pattern of voting behaviour where the electorates are voting according to ethnic, religious and regional belongings. For instance, the 1979 Presidential Election disclosed that the three major contenders; Alhaji Shehu Shagari of National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Obafemi Awolowo of Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe of the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) gained their votes from their respective political regions. The same phenomenon replicated itself in the 1983 Presidential Election .

In the Fourth Republic, the Presidential Election was contested six times in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 and all the contests present ethnic and religious influence among the voters either directly or indirectly.

In 2011, President Jonathan from the South contested under the platform of PDP while Muhammadu Buhari under the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC). The votes were shared regionally with Buhari winning in the North and Jonathan in the South. Jonathan won

the contest and the same contestants resurfaced in 2015 but, this time around, Buhari won.

The 2019 Presidential Election saw another dimension where the two major strong contenders; President Muhammadu Buhari of the APC and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the PDP emerged both from the North and both of them are from the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group and are also Muslims by religion. However, the voting pattern indicates a surprising result where the Hausa/Fulani Muslims voted massively for President Muhammadu Buhari while the Northern Christians and the Southsouth and Southeast voted for Atiku with the votes spoilt between the two in the Southwest.

The summary of the history of Presidential Elections in Nigeria is presented below in a tabular form.The results of the Presidential Elections in the history of Nigeria are clearly pointing towards ethnic, religious and regional voting for instance, the 1979 Presidential election was between a northerner Alhaji Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari and a southerner Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the same phenomenon resurfaced itself in the 1983 Presidential Election. A detailed analysis of the result disclosed that voters cast their votes based on the candidates ethnic, religious and regional background. The same can be said of the 1999, 2003, 2011 and 2015 General Election. The only exceptions are that of the 1991, 2007 and 2019 General Elections where the winners and runners-up emerged from either the same region or the same religious group. Furthermore, the 2019 Presidential Election as usual in Nigeria was heralded with tension, blame games, anticipated violence, campaign of calumny, threats and the desire to win at all cost. It was another presentation of the litmus test for Nigerian democratization. In the first place, over 70 political parties were registered and about seventy-three (73) parties fielded candidates for the Presidential Election.

The history being made where for the first time in the electoral history of Presidential Election in Nigeria a number of 73 parties contested with the two major contenders in APC and PDP. The large number of parties made the 2019 Presidential Election a unique affair in comparison with the previous Presidential Elections in the country.

The result of the 2019 Presidential Election recorded the lowest voter turnout in comparison with that of the 2011 and 2015. In 2011, a turnout of 56.4% was recorded, in 2015, a 46.8% voters turnout was recorded while in the 2019 Presidential Election, only 39.09% turnout was recorded. Some of the reasons for this low turnout is political apathy, postponement of the Election from 14th February 2019 to 23rd March 2019. The result indicates a voting pattern of the normal Nigerian political culture as observed

The Presidential Election in 2019 set another dimension in Nigerian political history because despite the fact that the two major contenders are Muslims, a new scenario emerged in which the APC candidate was identified by religious clerics and other manipulators of religion as pure and moral while the PDP candidate was identified as corrupt and amoral. Furthermore, the main issue hinged on the allegations that the PDP candidate was corrupt. This allegation was supported by the elite class in the country while the APC candidate was portrayed as incorruptible and pro-masses despite the tacit overlooked of corrupt practices by his closest officials in his last four years in office.

The 2019 Presidential Election has many impacts on the socioeconomic and sociopolitical aspects of the Nigerian state. The incumbent President who won in the Election was pursuing aggressive infrastructural construction in the country which is believed to have future socioeconomic benefits to the people. He also embarked on economic diversification especially in agriculture, social investments programmes which all have economic and social benefits. Hadnt it been the PDP candidate win, he may stop the policies and initiate his own because of the usual culture of discontinuity in policies in Nigeria. politically, the power sharing is balanced because there was a gentleman agreement and understanding that after the two-term tenure, the power will shift to the southern part of the country but, if the PDP is assumed to have win, this arrangement will be reversed because the winner may have another fresh two-term tenure to spend and that will translate into straight 12 years Presidential tenure for the North.

CONCLUSION

In a study Contextual Dynamics and Political Knowledge: The Role of Institutional Quality in an Informed Citizenry it was posited that political knowledge refers to facts about a political system that an individual can recall from their memory to interpret and understand happenings and developments within that system.

Political knowledge is clearly an important facet of public opinion; without an informed public, opinion polls may lose their importance to decision makers .

Political knowledge is an essential ingredient of democratic civic competence. In fact the latter requires acquisition of knowledge about politics, without an education which leads to knowledge of politics, citizens attempts to participate cant be defined as competent .Furthermore, some citizens refuse to participate in politics because they dont understand it. Due to political knowledge citizens can understand the content of the public debate and perform an informed political participation.

Almost every citizen has expectation toward life, society and politicians. Nevertheless, very often individuals dont find connection between their personal expectations and politics. Through political knowledge, citizens can rationalize and understand their own interests It affects the content of beliefs, opinions, preferences and attitudes and in this sense impacts the political and electoral preferences. When political values of the citizens are rationalized it is a prerequisite which can increase the stability of political attitudes and ideological consistency later leads to stability in the political behavior and particularly in voting.

Political knowledge differs from incorrect cognitions or ones that cant be tested for correctness; and information distinguishes political knowledge from attitudes, values, beliefs, and opinions.

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