

Digital Media and Political Socialization: Implications for Nigeria's Democracy

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Abstract

Media are an important pillar of political socialization; that is the way a person learns about the functions of democratic principles and institutions in their formative years and beyond. Changes in the social and media environments affect the way citizens become politically socialized. With the emergence of digital media, communication has continued to change towards a socially networked, algorithmic and highly personalized environment. This new, networked communication logic, in which information is shared ubiquitously, accessible and aligned to personal interest, reshapes the mechanism through which media use can impact political socialization outcomes. While cultivation of universal perceptions in the population through mass media becomes less likely, political role models, previously found mostly in mass media can now be met in citizen's own online communities. This entry shed light on the interplay of digital media use and socialization outcomes and explains how a networked communication logic enhance good governance in Nigerian.

Keywords: Digital Media, Political Socialization, Nigeria's Democracy



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INTRODUCTION

Digital media have assumed an important position in electioneering campaign activities of political parties and candidates in most societies in the world including Nigeria. These online media have rapidly grown in importance as for political activism in their different forms (Tenhunen, & Karveltye, 2015). General Elections in Nigeria in contemporary times have been remarkable for using social media as a political socialization tool., The use of social media in election reflects a global trend towards the internet or e-electioneering (Macna – Mara, 2008).

There has been a rapid expansion in internet access around the world which is as a result of increased availability of service providers, smart phones and verbal communication as well as the evolution of web-based new media –personal websites, social-networking sites ,blogs ,e-newsletters. These have helped to redefine methods of political socialization. Some Nigerian politicians utilize the opportunities offered by the digital media for online campaigning. This is evident in the use of Facebook, Twitter and other media platforms for soliciting for votes from eligible voters.

The Nigerian civil society and the voters utilize social media as a tool for improved monitoring of the electoral process. This is because previous elections in Nigeria were largely adjudged to have been flawed by rigging of votes and other electoral malpractices culminating in dissatisfaction by candidates, voters, observers and all-well meaning Nigerians. The end result of this situation were mass complaints of irregularities triggered off by disenfranchisement of prospective voters, snatching of ballot boxes and stuffing of the boxes with ballot papers and allegation of collusion between election officials and politicians to manipulate results, subvert popular mandate (Ibrahim & Ibeanu, 2009). The use of digital media in contemporary Nigerian election helps to address these electoral flaws. In Nigeria over 3 million people had Facebook accounts and about 60,000 persons were on Twitter in

2010 (Asuni & Farris 2011, p.4). However, Nigeria recorded a two hundred percent increase in internet usage between 2009 and 2013 and it has been observed that the growing penetration of mobile telephony in Nigeria, especially the rise of smart phones has made social media unique for political socialization. As at today, there are 28 million people in Nigeria using Facebook and over 83% of digital media users in the country. Twitter, the micro blogging website has about 20 million Nigerian users.

These digital platforms help citizens to monitor electoral process and report electoral malpractices to the appropriate authorities by the use of mobile phones computers and other electronic gadgets in order to influence good governance, and digital media makes it possible for a large number of videos, photos, tweets, and comments to be shared. Most of these election monitoring activities are carried out by people who are not only more proficient in the use of the internet but also spend ample time on daily basis on digital media platforms. However, with the constant shift in technology, one cannot deny the influence that digital media has over our way of life. It has changed the way we educate, entertain, publish and interact with people.

RESEARCH METHOD

The methodology adopted for this study is the library research method. Here, the researcher made use of secondary research material relevant to this paper such as: books chapters, journals articles, newspapers, magazines to gather facts in discussing the subject matter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Media: Towards a Definition

Digital media are any form of media that uses electronic devices for distribution. This form of media can be created, viewed, modified and distributed via electronic devices. Digital media are commonly used software, video games, videos, websites, social media, and online advertising.

According to Jones (2012) the term digital media refers to web base tools services that allow users to share and communicate with one another. Digital media are media for social interaction using highly associable and scalable publishing techniques, social media use web-based technology to transform and broadcast media monologues into social dialogues. The rapid growth of social media activities especially over the past 10 years is indicative of its entry with mainstream culture and its integration into the daily lives of many people.

Explaining this, Westerman, Spence and Heide (2012) noted that the digital media have gained increased usage rapidly for a variety of reasons. News and information are one of such reasons. The digital media landscape might seem like foreign ground and is comprehensive to those accustomed to reading mainstream media alone. The intensity and spread of news posted online can be a cause of stress for publication which is forced to respond almost immediately in today's political climate. Due to the effectiveness of digital media in the sharing of entertaining, informative and educative messages, the relatively new media is handy for political socialization of the people especially the youths who access digital media channels.

Concept of Political Socialization

Political socialization is the process by which a person integrates with political culture of society, gains knowledge of the political values, ideals, beliefs of the society and acquires a social and political nature. Through political socialization, the individual acquires knowledge

of his political system, unites with his society, determines the political choice of the individual, and plays the role of a citizen of his or her state. There some features of political socialization. These are:

1. Political socialization is the pinnacle of a society's political values or culture. Any education, therefore, is not political socialization
2. The purpose of political socialization is to educate and enhance the members of the society politically, to see them become effective members of the political society, and to preserve the continuity of the political values of the society.
3. Early childhood is an important time for political socialization. But this is not limited to a few years of childhood. Political socialization continues throughout the life of the individual.
4. Political socialization occurs mainly in three ways – imitation, instruction, and motivation. Imitation tendency is more prevalent in children, whereas adolescents and adults have a combination of imitation, instruction, and motivation.
5. Through the process of political socialization, the increase in support, support for the prevailing political system, the values in favor of conventional institutions, the legitimacy of the government are increased.
6. All persons belonging to a political society are subject to political socialization and are effective throughout their lives.
7. Few organizations play an important role in the context of political socialization. These are called as agents of political socialization. They are also identified as the means of political socialization. These are: Family; Intimate Friend's Group; Educational Institution; Political Parties; Mass Media; Professional Organization; and Religious Organization as well as.

Challenges Facing Digital Media Utilization in Nigeria

Cyber bullying has been an issue of concern with online networking sites. An online survey based on 9-19 years old and above discovered that students received bullying comments online. Online networking often include a lot of personal information posted publicly and many believe that sharing personal information opens the door to sexual predators. In recent times, the social media have been used for political parties cum Nigeria Politicians to propagate their political ideologies and manifestos to members of society with the sole aim of winning their votes and support. These politicians institute instrumentalized educational value to sway the thoughts of the electorate to their sides, thus, during political campaigns the social media become a veritable tool for proliferation of aims and ideologies.

Digital media could also be detrimental to democracy. According to Ronald Deibert, The world of social media is more conducive to extreme emotional charge and decisive type of content than it is to calm, principled considerations of competing or complex narratives. On the other hand, Mark K. Eder points of failure of the fourth estate that has allowed outrage to be disguised as news, contributing to citizen apathy when confronting falsehoods and further distrust in democratic institutions.

Different Channels of Digital Media Suitable For Political Socialization

The different channels of digital media suitable for political socialization:

1. Websites
2. Video
3. Social Media
4. Electronic Mails (E-mail)
5. Organic Search (Search Engine Optimization – SEO)
6. Paid Search

Digital Media and Political Socialization for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria

The digital media have become the engine for social movements in the world today. In many countries, citizens are being mobilized through their platforms either for sharing new ideas, the desire to establish new orders or to improve current ones. Through the media citizens have either become informed or are informing others. They have also been able to construct new social and political relations with a view to growing planetary citizenry with democratic ideals (Ovey & Ekharefo, 2013).

The idea of democracy here is suggestive of an environment characterized by freedom, openness and connectedness of members. That is a media system where inclusion and or usage is not determined by a few, but, one with a free market orientation that provides the platform for people to freely interact and share views without inhibitions. Mayfield (2008) quips, that “a good way to think about digital media is that all of this is actually just about being human beings. Sharing ideas, cooperating and collaborating to create art, thinking and commerce, vigorous debate and discourse, finding people who might be good friends, allies and lovers.

The digital media are all about people connecting people. This connection can be made by teachers connecting their students (virtual learning) online chats by interest groups and politicians can also use the medium to reach the electorate. It creates a homophilic virtual community of people with shared interests, values and aspirations and bridges the institutional bottlenecks experienced in the mainstream media. In politics, the digital media hold the greatest because it is cheaper, faster, duplicable and retrievable (storable), flexible, and has a wider reach compared to other media. Everyday, more than 90 percent of college students visit social networking sites canvassing for votes through platforms like these, therefore providing one with a global audience and gauging their pulse is immediate.

Words have powers. Analysts believe that carefully chosen words can have a predetermined impact. The aim of politicians therefore is to use every means possible verbal and nonverbal cues – to attract attention and win support, to ensure a far reaching impact therefore, politicians package political contents which are transmitted to the audience through the media (the digital media inclusive)

The social media under the digital media is a new media phenomenon whose capacity to be used in political campaigns was given impetus by president Barack Obama who made extensive use of Facebook for campaigns in 2008. Nwafor and Nweze (2013) note that ever since Obama “various political actors across Africa and beyond have continued to embrace the social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and blogs for campaigns and other political activities.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the public sphere theory. Public sphere theory is fundamentally situated at the center of participatory approaches to democracy. The public sphere is the arena where citizens come together exchange opinions regarding public affairs, discuss, deliberate, and eventually form public opinion. This arena can be a specific place where citizens gather, but it can also be a communication infrastructure through which citizens send and receive information and opinions, the public sphere is a central aspect of good governance. Without a functioning and democratic public sphere, government officials cannot be held accountable for their action, and citizens will not be able to assert any influence over political decisions.

The idea of the public sphere is normative. It is an ideal of good and accountable governance. The requisites are free flows of information, free expression, and free debate. The ideal public sphere is truly participatory and the best protection against abuse of power.

Today, the public is even more strongly tied to the media. The public sphere theory also gained new province with the spread of new communication technologies in the 1990s. The internet in particular is considered to provide unprecedented opportunities for exchanging information and for deliberation among a large number of people of different backgrounds. Thus, this fits into the circle of public sphere theory.

Discussion

The study made some interesting revolutions. First and foremost, the study found that the extent of political socialization via the digital media is appreciably high. The study also indicated that the most popular social medium platform for political socialization is Facebook. For instance, the essential media poll 2012, a study done in Australia, reported that Google was the most popular site followed by Facebook, news websites, Blogs, social and Political campaign websites, Twitter. The study further reveal that the kind of political activities people socialize in during elections in Nigeria through digital media are monitoring of campaigns of the candidates of their choices, presidential debates, voter education activities, monitoring of election of party standard bearers and participation in activities relating to PVC.

On the ways through which people in Nigeria access digital media or political socialization, the easiest, commonest and readily available way is the smart phones cell phones. Many people connect to and conduct their internet activities using their smart phones for obvious reasons of convenience and many more. The study as well reveals that opinions can be made to enhance good governance.

CONCLUSION

This study examined digital media and political revelations. Specifically, the study investigated the extent of political socialization among people in Nigeria, the kind of activities done, the implications and the ways through which citizens of Nigeria access digital media platforms for political socialization. Citizens of Nigeria make use of their smart phones mainly and by using PC/Laptop computer devices for political socialization. Digital media provide an enviable forum for citizens of Nigeria to socialize in political activities of their fatherland because the technology of the digital media offers unique opportunities for mobilization of citizens for political discussions and socialization in the political process.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations: Political parties and their candidates should embrace the digital media and utilize same in conducting political activities. Citizens get online information faster than any other media. There is the need for the government to empower citizens economically so that they can buy and own the most basic technology required for large scale social interaction such as smart phones and personal computer/laptops. Citizens should politically socialize in order to examine and assess the performance of government and leaders and to engender good governance.

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