THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NORTH CENTRAL

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ABSTRACT
Internet is painstakingly an enormous expansion to human development. Literally, it is considered a useful key or essential to human development and social advancement causing massive revolution in the world. Over the years, the advent of Social media has pervaded, especially that of the young generation. It is against this background that this paper aims to study the influence of Social media and human right activism by Nigerian to gauge their usage in relation to political participation. For sampling purposes, the region is divided into six States. A survey research using questionnaire as instrument was used to obtain data, with 1182 respondents aged between 18 and 25 were randomly sampled from the six States of the region. The data were analysed descriptively and inferentially using SPSS 20.0. From the results, majority of the respondents, 89% are social media users having a social media account. A discouraging trend with regard to participation is the very low level of comments on general societal issues ranging from social issues, the environment to politics. The youth are more inclined to using the new media for entertainment and social networking. The paper recommends that Nigerian youth are exposed to political participation online, thus, they should be active in there doing. Also, it is time to shift to more empowered usage such as using the new media to engage with community leaders and politicians and comment on issues related to political development.

Introduction

The Social Media is considered a huge development in human civilization. It has become the main sharing tool around the world and enables people to create massive developments for many countries that are interconnected. Furthermore, it creates very large, heavy and solid interconnectivity. It is literally considered as a practical key or essential to human development and social advancement causing massive innovation in the world (David, 2011). Internet is viewed as an environmental element with potential for developmental impact (Johnson, 2012).

Over the years, the advent of new media has permeated most aspects of our lives, especially that of the young generation. New media, especially the Internet has gained popularity among young people wherever they might be and in spite of significant differences among the developed and developing world, the use of computers and the Internet is rising steadily, fastest among young men (Cozic, 2014). It is a household name coupled with its ubiquitous nature. The youth which includes the generation Y or the millennial are associated with the new media (Gasser, 2018). As leaders of tomorrow they are supposed to use the new media to get involved in political participation.

Youth are said to be 46 percent of the total global population and can be defined as a person who is still in their formative years, undergoing character modeling, personality development and sometimes receiving training that has to do with human capital development. Youth is an important human capital development in the process of national building due to the great potential they have (Kayode 2015).

New media play an important role of transformative social change. It has an overall impact on youth physically, socially, and intellectually (Gadner, 2019). The rise of new media has already brought several main changes in life.

They are digitalization and convergence of all features of media, increasing interactivity and network connectivity, mobility and relocation of sending and receiving, adaptation of publication and audience roles, appearance of diverse new forms of media 'gateway' and fragmentation and blurring of the media institution (McQuail 2010).

Like the conventional media, the power and facilities of the new media can also be harnessed for online political participation. Waller (2013) found that youth participation is now turning into online political debate in the United States, Europe and the Middle East. Social media play an important role in shaping the political debate with increasing discussions about democracy and civil rights on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or Democracy Street (Wokni 2013). In West Asia, the people share their anger through new technology due to the inability of Arab leaders to meet their basic expectations. Public outrage prompted millions of Arab youth to unite to demand change in leadership and the government, whether in the form of online or offline (Goff, 2013).

Based on quantitative data, this paper aims to analyse the present use of the new media by youth to gauge their usage in relation to online socio-political participation. Hence, their online and offline participation will be analysed.

Review of Related Literature

Political participation is an activity carried out in order to influence decisions made by the government. This participation can be done through formal or informal association, individually, group, legally or illegally (Mathew and Lydon, 2011).

(Miller and Goeld, 2017) argue that many forms of political participation only focus on voting behavior. Actually, many activities can be considered as political participation. These include campaign, contacting public officials, reading and distributing political pamphlets, joining political organizations, donating money, working with local government, and engaging in community activities. In addition, demonstrations, protest, riots are also other types of political participation.

Expanding the concept further, one can include online participation and the difference being a matter of platform in the sense that online involves a virtual space, whereas offline has to do with physical space.

Three fundamental technical changes in ICTs are responsible for the explosion in their use to promote economic development. They are plummeting cost that allowed many people and applications that could not afford to communicate in the past to link, expanding

access to the network, and more powerful human to machine interfaces which allow new users to understand how to use the services without manuals, instruction, or translation (Katie 2012).

Although the Internet has consistent positive impacts on modern society, a recent study by Joseph and Dominick (2011) on determinants of Internet use in Iraq indicates that while Iraqis are eager or full of excitement to adopt this technology in order to reach out to the world, a number of factors are not allowing it to become a public domain. Factors include lack of adequate resources, insufficient incentives and encouragement from the government, and social inhibitions. Hence, for the Internet to be adopted fully for development and nation building purposes, encouragement and support must come from the government.

Several studies in regard to relationship between new media practices by youth and nation building has been done. Wallis (2011) studies on new media practices in China through four broad themes: networked community and identity, gaming, networked public sphere and civic engagement, and new media consumption. The findings showed that diverse new media practices emerge in China within the tensions and contradictions of the government's desire to simultaneously expand new media technologies and control what are perceived as "harmful" influences. Within a highly commercialized and more liberalized socio-cultural environment, new media technologies have opened up new spaces for multiple modes of expression, and as such, they are constitutive of complex processes of social change.

New media like Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, live blogs, podcasts, webcams, smartphones, or tablets play in the post-modern, on-demand, interactive, and open societies of today. Changes in access to technology have facilitated new conditions for young people to shoot, cut, and mix multimodal texts, and the emergence of the Internet as a convergent multimedia vehicle and a hangout for a global audience has enabled youth to communicate across borders and across the street (Hofner, 2018).

New media has power, for example using social media to mobilise political participation initially gained prominence during the 2008 US presidential election, when then-Senator Barak Obama successfully employed a social media platform that incorporated Web 2.0 applications such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to make a range of self-organising tools available to young users. The recent events in Tunisia, Egypt, the UK and the USA leave little doubt that the role of new technology in youth political mobilisation extends beyond the Obama paradigm (Nicholas, 2011).

In Nigeria, the 2019 General Elections showed the keyboard warriors play an important role during the election campaign. According to INEC Chairman Professor AtahiruJega, the ruling party (PDP) failure to understand the impact and influence of new media caused several states to fall to the opposition. During the 2015 General Elections, blog had become a major source for information in political developments. Nowadays, Facebook, twitter and instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp are also playing important role for political participation.

Social interaction occurring through social networks has provided opportunities for individuals to be exposed to different sources of information (McClurg, 2013). Political participation has greatly been influenced by social interactions.

Steve(2011) have identified whether social sites like Facebook and video games are related to political participation. They found that Facebook and video game have relevance to political participation, either online or in traditional form. Therefore, (Benjamin, 2015) argue that the involvement of young people in politics is no longer as before. They are now engaged in political debate and show interest in politics through different ways, including social media. The same opinion was obtained from survey by Vromen (2007) in Australia. He found that a digital usage divide exists between those aged 18 to 34 years and those who are 35 and above. Young candidates who contested elections tend to use the internet as a medium for campaigning.

Theoretical framework

The media evolution theory marked the theoretical framework to this study; Focusing on a variety of compelling examples in media history, ranging from the telephone to the television, the radio to the Internet, the theory collectively addresses a series of notoriously

vexing questions about the nature of technological change. Is it possible to make general claims about the conditions that enable or inhibit innovation? Does government regulation tend to protect or thwart incumbent interests? What kinds of concepts are needed to address the relationship between technology and society in a non-productive and nondeterministic manner? To what extent can media history help us to understand and to influence the future of media in constructive ways? The contributors' historically grounded responses to these questions will be relevant to numerous fields, including history, media/communication studies, sociology, and information studies.

So far we have reviewed a variety of conceptual lessens for understanding the dynamics of innovations and structural change broadly used in the fields of science and technology history. They represent relatively well-developed models that are applicable over a wide range of historical circumstance of special interest here are institutions of mass communication, which draws our attention to several communication-specific theoretical traditions.

The principle of relative constancy is drawn from the observation that American consumers appeared to have kept their spending on communication media as a relatively constant percentage of total income in the latter half of the twentieth century (McCombs 1972 and Nolan 2002). As the theory was refined in the literature, analysis drew attention to the notion of functional equivalence, the mechanisms predicting that as new media come along that better serve a particular function, the use of the previously dominant medium that served that function declines. Thus television replaced radio as a primary home family entertainment medium in the evening and radio move to the bedroom, kitchen, and car. The cellular phone displaces the wire line phone, especially among the young's (Lessard and Bill, 2010).

Following the expansion of communication flows through increasingly broadband digital networks, we confront the communication flow paradox, observed by Motor Vehicles Database and associates in the 1997: although the flow of information may continue swiftly with Moore's law of computer computational capacity. The twenty-four-hour day and physiological limits of multitasking must put a practical limit on media consumption (Pool, 2006). The flow paradox may be seen as a distant theoretical cousin of the relative constancy finding, because both draw attention to gating functions and fundamental limits to media use-a temporal constraint in flow and a financial one in relative constancy.

Methodology

This study is a capital based survey covering the North-Central region of the nation (Nigeria). For sampling purposes, the region is divided into six states to include: Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau and the Federal Capital Territory-Abuja.

A survey research using questionnaire as instrument was used to obtain data. Respondents for this study were randomly sampled from the six states and selection was based on age and gender ratio using an already prepared sampling frame table. The age of respondents ranges from 18 to 25 and there was fairly equal number of males and females. Some 1182 respondents were sampled from the six states. Out of the 1182 questionnaire distributed, 1178 were successfully completed and returned, while 4 were not. The data was analysed using SPSS 20.2 and analysed descriptively.

Findings

Table 1, A. Internet subscription

Response option	***Total frequency***	***%***
Yes	*705*	*60*
No	*473*	*40*
Total	***1178***	***100***

Source: Author's field survey (October, 2023)

Table 1, B. Social Media Account

Response option	***Total frequency***	***%***
Yes	*1048*	*89*
No	*130*	*11*
Total	***1178***	***100***

Source: Author's field survey (October, 2023)

From the table 1 A&B, above, the total number of respondents who were surveyed, 60% have Internet subscription. Moreover, there is a significant difference between the total numbers of respondents who have social media account. Majority of respondents were social media users (89%) and only 11% did not sign up for an online social media account.

Table 2. Internet/Social Media Activities

Response option	***Total frequency***	***%***
a. Chatting with friends	*362*	*31*
b. Surfing the web	*201*	*17*
c. Sending and receiving email	*76*	*6*
d. Information search	*301*	*26*
e. Download music/pictures/video	*121*	*10*
f. Interaction with new and old friends	*117*	*10*
Total	***1178***	***100***

Source: Author's field survey (October, 2023)

Table 2 indicated the means for the Internet and social media activities of the respondents. The results showed that Chatting with Friends is the most common activities among the respondents 362(31%), followed by Information Search 301(26%), Surfing the web 201(17%), downloading activities such as music, pictures and videos 121(10%), interacting and communicating with new and old friends 117(105), and sending and receiving email 76(6%). This showed that e-mail which was the main usage of the Internet has now been overshadowed by other usage.

Table 3. Offline Political Participation

Response option	***Total frequency***	***%***
a. Involve in Welfare work	*265*	*22*
b. Helping the poor and the needy	*140*	*12*
c. Giving opinion for policy formation at workplace or area of resident	*163*	*14*
d. Volunteer in teaching less fortunate teens	*154*	*13*
e. Discussing current political issues in the media	*456*	*39*
Total	***1178***	***100***

Source: *Author's field survey (October, 2023)*

Table 3 presents the offline participation by the respondents. Among the offline activities, the most common activities are discussing current issues featured in the media 456(39%). This is followed by involvement in welfare work 265(22%), giving opinion for policy formulation 163(145), volunteering in teaching the less fortunate teens 154(13%) and helping the poor and the needy 140(12%), Thus, except for discussing current issues featured in the media, the respondents' offline participation is below average.

Table 4. Online Political Participation

Response option	Total frequency	%
a. *Comments to the editor through email*	**161**	**14**
b. *Comments on online newspaper*	**207**	**18**
c. comments on blog post/articles	221	19
d. Involve in online political discussion group	326	28
e. Uploading and downloading video as a protest	263	22
Total	**1178**	**100**

Source: Author's field survey (October, 2023)

Data in Table 4 indicate that majority of the respondents are interested in online political discussion group 326(28%). This is followed by uploading and downloading video as a protest 263(22%), comments on blog post or articles 221(19%), comments on online Newspapers 207(187%) and sending comments to the editor through e-mail 161(14%). Similar to offline political participation, the means for online political participation are also below average.

Discussions

Internet, especially Social Media (SM), is often associated with the youth who are seen to be more attached to the SM. Youth who belong to the generation Y are said to be natives of the new media. For them the new media is part and parcel of their lives. As this study shows 89 percent of the youth interviewed have SM account. However, only about two thirds (59.8 percent) of the youth interviewed have internet subscription. This might be due to the fact that some of the youth interviewed were still studying coupled with the fact that for some of these youth Internet subscription is still expensive. Also internet is now available free at universities, working place, restaurants and cafes. The young generation is familiar with surfing, reading, reacting and creating political messages on the Internet (Sleven, 2014).

With most of the youth having SM account, SM has the potential to serve as a platform to galvanise the youth for a meaningful political participation. Thus the public sector can take advantage of this development to engage the youth in a meaningful participation which may translate to political participation. WhatsApp is a new media app that is frequently used by youth and this is different from the findings by (Rose-Liang, 2013) who found that youth are surfing more Facebook, Twitter and multimedia sites such as YouTube. The youth are more active in new media for social interactions.

They prefer to use online media to express their opinion with group discussions that explore contemporary issues through social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Blog (Albarren 2013).

As distinct from the generation X who are the older generation, the youth who are considered generation Y tend to use the new media more for their activities. This study showed that the common activities in order of importance include information search, chatting with friends, and sending and receiving email. This shows that e-mail, which was the main usage of

the Internet, has now been overshadowed by other functions. For the youth, especially those who were not working, email use was not a priority for using the Internet. Youth navigate the new media through two ways. First, join social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and multimedia sites such as YouTube. Second, youth surf websites like wikis and blogs. Many influential friends influence them in the selection of their participation in new media, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Tumblr. Therefore, the new media can bring online relationship to an offline reality.

When it comes to online participation, the findings indicate that the youth more in online discussion groups, which is very low, participation in other aspects is much lower. Likewise, in terms of offline participation, except for discussing current issues featured in the media, the youth's offline participation is below average. Hence, not encouraging and this could be due to the lack of interest in politics by Nigerian youth who are by and large comfortable with their lives and therefore not bothered with issues related to politics.

From the foregoing, one may ask where lies the empowerment? This is because literature shows the capability of the Internet in political participation, especially by youth; hence not using it as such is a waste of resource. Does it mean that our youth use the Internet for diversion and not for empowerment which may lead to political participation? These questions and others need answers from which lasting solutions can be derived to make the youth more involved in political participation by way of participating online through commenting on national and social issues. This is due to the fact that most of the offline activities are the continuation of online activities (Moris and Clinton, 2003).

As distinct from the youth in Malaysia, studies have shown that youth in other third world countries are actively using the internet for political participation and activism (Squangin, 2020). The 2014 gathering TURUN (movement to express the anger of the people against price increases and cost of living) mostly involved youth. The emergence of youth in political movements and active participation in the democratic process occurred because these people have different political ideas. (Porter, 2007) described the youth as "Internet generation", and (Armstrong, 2017) claimed that they have the right to have their voices heard and form online communities that allow for voicing their movements.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper is to analyse the present use of the new media by youth to gauge their usage in relation to political participation and awareness. The findings have shown that the youth in Nigeria are exposed to political participation online.

Recently online political participation has mobilized opposition to the government's decision related to the implementation of GST (Goods and Services Tax), price increases and religious issue. However, the youth are more inclined to using the new media, social media to be precise, for entertainment and social networking. It is time to shift to more empowered usage such as using the new media to engage with community leaders and politicians and comment on issues related to political development. Failing this, will be a waste of resource made available by the new media for citizen participation and decision making. Based on the finding, further studies can be conducted in the context of online political marketing among youth in Nigeria especially how youth can play their role in promoting a party's strategy in election.

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