

Social Media and Political Mobilisation in Nigeria

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Abstract:-The media is one of the key agents of political socialization. However, with the intensification of globalisation, and the embrace of culture of social media, political socialization and mobilisation has taken a new form and expression. The reach of social media transcends the traditional reach and form of the old media, with diverse consequences. Using a combination of strategy and functional theories, this study argues that the social media has become a viable and veritable tool of political mobilisation, sensitization, and socialization. The study discovered that government, activists, citizens, politicians, and political parties are able to interact and mobilize the masses, educating them on their grievances, programmes and policies through social media platforms. However, given the uncensored information, and technological manipulations of facts disseminated globally, social media has also become an avenue for broadcasting news and ideas that have mobilized people into violent political activities. This study recommends that while the positive aspects of social media, should be embraced, accepted, and enhanced by nations of the world, there is a need to control its usage in dissemination of violent prone texts and images that may lead to social and political disorders.

Keywords: Information, mobilisation, platforms, social media, violent

I. INTRODUCTION

In every democratized society, the quest for power and the agitation for change have been recurrent decimals. Politicians who seek for control seek to achieve their aims through political parties that support their ideologies, visions, and aspirations. In the same vein, those who seek to change the status and champion the ideas of revolution also form groups to actualize their visions. Both parties however cannot achieve their aims and ambitions without getting the support of the generality of the people. However, the target supporters need convincing information before they could also join the train. This is where the media comes in as a veritable tool of political socialization.

The entrance of globalisation into world politics has changed the socio-political milieu of global politics. Globalisation stands as an Octopus with its tentacles in every aspect of human activities and interactions. However, the strength of globalisation lies in transformations and technological advancements in the nature, timing, and efficacy of the internet. The internet, which supports various social platforms such as the Facebook, twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram, telegram, and many others, are faster and open to quicker response than the orthodox media forums such as the print media, television, radio, and telephony, and therefore has become veritable instrument of information gathering,

dissemination, and evaluation. With social media, one is wont to align with Friedman (2007),

Therefore, the internet in this era of globalisation plays a vital role in shaping political attitudes, promoting political involvements and influences voting behaviour globally. The social media is defined as “the new information network and information technology, using a form of communication utilizing interactive and user- produced content, and interpersonal relationships are created and maintained. (Sanatokeskus TSK: Sosaalisien median sanato. Helsinki 2010). Social media therefore promotes interaction and public participation over various issues of human concerns. Therefore, the unhindered interactive nature of social media has given vast opportunities to the public to engage in interactions over several issues that relates to Nigeria. This study would, reveal that the opportunities created by social media have given the users of social media, largely, the power to affect the political and social aspects of Nigeria.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mobilisation could be seen as the process by which people, organisations, and groups are induced by other to take actions that would achieve specific objectives. Political Mobilization therefore occurs when people are inspired to take actions and participate in political issues. In political mobilisation, people are sensitised, informed, and motivated into taking desirable actions towards a given goal in such a manner to tilt the allocation of political values to the harbingers of such calculated engagement and mobilisation of the people

In traditional political settings, town criers and clandestine meetings were means of mobilizing people for political events. Often times, restrictions are imposed on movements, in order to ensure that people are coerced into attending socio-political gatherings. Views and ideas are discussed, harvested, and disseminated through verbal methods and symbolic letters to get the people mobilized for the agenda. When dastard acts are the end of such mobilisations, clandestine and selective participations are used in mobilizing participants for such political ends. Often times, secrecy of intention are enforced by the elimination of squealers.

However, the discovery of the printing press, radio, televisions and telephones heralded a new dimension in political mobilisation. Thus in Nigeria, many political activists

went into Newspaper publishing for information dissemination, political education, and mobilisation of the masses for political purposes. The views and intents of advocates and political leaders were therefore in the public domain, such that devotees and oppositions to their views are well prepared to prevent the success of such mobilisations. Even then, there is a limitation on broadcast contents, when such could be broadcast, and the manner in which it could be broadcast. The limitations placed on conventional media by censors and low levels of literacy therefore limits the extent to which a spontaneous mobilisation could occur, and the spread of such mobilisation efforts.

The universal application of the internet, which in turn gave rise to the popularity and acceptance of social media, has been perceived as a major instrument of liberation and political development. This perception was emphasized by Wael Ghonim (2011), who reiterated that the liberation of any society begins with the access to the Internet. This perception is hinged on the consideration that the internet has become the sources information of domestic and international occurrences in different political systems, thereby giving the inquisitive minds direct access and freedom to information that socialises their political culture and behaviour.

Studies on social media have identified Facebook, twitter, blogs, instant messengers, emails, Skype, whatsapp, to go, YouTube, and others as the means of communication, interaction, and education. While some of these allow for selective participation, others give room to universal participation through the unrestricted opportunities to share and duplicate received messages thereby making it available to many outside the confines of a group of friends and or followers.

The Exphora statistics stipulated that about 2.7 billion people are active on Facebook monthly while the Internet World Stats also stated that t Facebook had about 17 million Nigerians as subscribers (Timileyin Akindahunsi 2019). To this end, the social media has been seen as a major tool for empowering the public in political participation, given that it is “faster, cheaper, and more pervasive than other forms of communications”, and therefore encourages greater participation, accountability, and transparency amongst the youths. (CPA 2012). This position was also canvassed by Sheedy (2011), who submitted that the social media have become tools that enable connectivity amongst people during crisis as they raise a worldwide awareness on issues and in due course are able to usurp authoritarian governments. Dumitrica 2016 had argued that the obstacles to youth marginalization in political participation have been reduced through the engagement of social media in political mobilisation, sensitization, and socialisation, (Dumitrica, D. 2016)

For Akinaso (2018), the social media provides platforms for information dissemination by politicians with the aim of recruiting supporters and donors. Therefore the

Social media provide an accessible platform for the birth of citizen journalism. However, he also noted that the use of social media platforms sidetracks regulated mainstream media and offers the opportunity of direct communication with the target audience. Ajayi and Adesote (2015) perceive the social media as transforming phenomena in information sharing and communication beyond borders between people all over the world.

The employment of social media platforms in politics among youths has also been observed Rainie et al., (2012) to increase significantly. Thus, the youths employ social media for obtaining political information, and expression of opinions on political issues. In addition, the social media is being used for posting, sharing and liking views that pertain to politics .political videos. Therefore, the social media does not just give opportunities for information, but are also platforms for generation of political views and actions on government policies.

However, Weimann had reported that terrorist groups have used the uncensored freedom of the social media to spread terrorist propaganda, recruitment, and training. The platforms have been used to mobilize people and funds for their nefarious activities. Thus, the social media has been used to radicalize and mobilize youths with passions for change of the old order into different terrorist cells. Thus, the social media makes it increasingly difficult to combat terrorism, as it has helped to recruit mostly youths across the physical boundaries of nations, train, equip, and unleash them on various targets through the social media platforms.

Most terrorists have the suicidal tendencies. Suicide has been traced to acute depression. Davilla in his study had concluded that asocial networking, instant messages, and texting have contributed immensely to the rise in anxiety amongst adolescent. This anxiety, he observes, also lead to depression, thereby making youths susceptible to ideas that promote violent radical mobilisations.

Finally, Orimisan 2012 had also observed that the social media platform have been used to propagate falsehoods for mobilizing citizens against the government. This observation was also in tandem with the CPA (2012) conclusion that uncontrolled social media postings could be misleading, manipulative and deliberate false, especially when such remain uncontrolled.

III. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The literatures emphasizes that the reach of social media transcends the traditional reach and form of the old media, with diverse consequences. Given the increased enlightenment and interests shown in the democratic practices in Nigeria, this study seeks to investigate the extent to which the social media has been engaged in the mobilisation of citizens to participate in politics. Participation in this context includes making demands on the political system, the pursuit of political change and influencing government policies. Therefore, this study identifies certain areas and issues in

which the social media has been employed to mobilize Nigerians to participate in politics and governance. In addition, this study would examine the outcomes of these mobilizations on the political system and the subject of mobilisation.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study engaged the qualitative approach. Inferences were made from extant literatures drawn from relevant information in textbooks, journals, newspapers, and other internet articles on the subject matter. The mode of analytical presentation appears in themes that reveals the areas, nature, and outcomes of political mobilisation in Nigeria through the engagement of the social media. Thus, the scope of the study would be restricted to the political mobilisations on social media against the police brutality of men of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (#EndSars); mobilisations against the increase in fuel pump price (#OccupyNigeria); mobilisations to reduce the age qualifications of contestants to National and State offices (#Nottooyoungtorun) and mobilisations to seek votes during elections (#O to gee), in Nigeria.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is explored within the framework of the theories strategy and functionalism. The strategic theory is premised on the idea that strategy involves the total direction of power at controlling situations and areas in order to achieve a set of objective (Eccles, H.E 1965). Given that Harold Lasswell's definition of politics as who gets what, when and how, the quest to mobilize citizens to make demands on the political system in order to cause a political change informs that mobilisation is an attempt to form a coalition of powers through the instrument of social media as a weapon of warfare. However, given the fact that the strategic mobilisations take place within a society, functionalism, which posits that the society is a set of interconnected parts which work for the overall good of the society (Haralambos, M., Holborn, M. and Heald, R 2004), is also employed. In this vein the social media, (an offshoot of the media); being an agent of political socialization would be interrogated within the context of its contribution to the sustenance of orderliness and transmission of society values and demands in the quest for political change.

VI. SOCIAL MEDIA MOBILISATION IN NIGERIA

The successes of the Tunisia and Egyptian mobilisation in Africa have influenced the entire continent. Given the domino effect of the internet on its users, and the idea that what works in a political system could be replicated in another to get almost the same results, Nigerians have also employed the strategy of mobilisation of people through the social media in order to create awareness, and effect political change in the country. This section presents findings on the cause, nature, and outcomes of the various mobilisations in Nigeria.

#NOT TOO YOUNG TO RUN

Theocharis and Quintelier (2014), observed that there seemed to exist a political apathy amongst the youths, given that in contemporary times, their level of political participation in political party membership and turn out during elections has been significantly low in developed and developing countries. The reduced level of political participation could have its cause enshrined in the 1999 constitution, which places an age limit to the people seeking elective positions in Nigeria. While the constitution had given adult status to an eighteen year old, such a person could still not stand for any election until he is thirty years of age (1999 Constitution)

However, in order to mobilize the youths into participation, the 'Not too young to run' was initiated and executed by a coalition of more than 40 youth based initiatives all over the country. The #Not too young to run was campaign aimed at reducing the age limit for running for elective offices in Nigeria and globally. The campaign began with supports and bills to the National Assembly by Tony Nwulu in the House of Representatives and Abdul-Aziz Nyako in the Senate (www.nottooyoungro.run.org). The argument for the global outlook of the demand was precipitated on the assertion that while about 50% of the global population was under 30 years of age, 73% of the world population restricts young people from running for office, though they can vote. Thus the movement sought to 'raise awareness on the state of youth rights running for elected office around the world; advocate for the rights of young people running for elected office and inspire people everywhere to run for elected office'. Specifically, in Nigeria, the campaign set out to address the candidacy restrictions on age basis in the legislative and executive seats' elections. (www.nottooyoungro.run.org)

The social media was able to propagate and mobilize the youths to think beyond voting as the only means of participation in governance. On social media, the fact cards representing the findings and years of the group were shared on various social media. The Non-too-young was also given support in national legislative houses. The bill to the National Assembly which seeks to alter the Sections 65, 106, 131 and 177 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In section 65, the Bill proposed that 30 years of age and 25 years of should be the benchmark for contestants into the Senate and House of Representative respectively; and section 106 amendment proposed that 25 years should be the qualifying age for the House of Assembly; section 131 proposed that aspirants seeking the position of President should be at least 30 years old, while section 177 should also be amended to allow that those seeking the positions of Governors should be 30 years also. (The Nation 2018).

The mobilization was successful with the Senate passing the Not too young to run Bill, which was later assented to by the President, Muhammadu Buhari. (Punch 2019)

#OCCUPY NIGERIA

In face of hike in the prices of crude oil associated derivatives, in 2012, the Nigeria Labour Congress and associated Unions protested the intended removal of fuel subsidy by the Federal Government. Thus, the protest in Nigeria was a socio-political movement against the hike of fuel pump price by the Federal Government on January 1, 2012. The five days protest, which began on January 2, 2012, took a new dimension.

Over running most cities in the country and involved the participation of many groups, youths and organisations apart from the organized labour. The social media was used to mobilize Nigerians to demonstrate against the hike. While the Nigerian Labour Congress had spear headed the demonstrations, the social media was used to sensitize and mobilize Nigerians, mostly youths to the streets in protest against the planned removal of fuel subsidy. Thus, the various social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and You tube), were employed to educate, sensitize and mobilize many Nigerians to participate in the protest.

Thus, the hash tag, #Occupy Nigeria was created in order to focus the social media users and bloggers on the protest, and information that pertained to the protest. According to Solomon (2014), submitted that social media provided the social space for Nigerians to give voice to their grievance, frustration, and opposition to the hike in price of petroleum products and the economic hardships experienced by all in the country.

At that time in Nigeria, Blackberries were in vogue, thus ping on the protest was viral. In addition, the mobile phones provided access to online newspapers, twitter, blogs, Facebook and to go by the vast majority of Nigerians. The accessibility to the mobiles therefore provided an easier way of disseminating information on negotiations and also mobilizing protesters and organizing several points of protests at the same time, thereby overwhelming the security operatives who were given the tasks of curtailing the protests.

Solomon cited Aghedo (2012) who opined that the social protest was a representation of a spontaneous revival of the consciousness of participation in politics by Nigerians. It therefore awakened the consciousness of the electorates that power belongs to the people, from whence those who govern derive their powers to rule. The sensitization and mobilisation of Nigerians via social media also showed the power of collective action as a tool of truncating and reversing elitist public policies.

Uwalaka, Temple, Rickard, Scott, Watkins, Jerry (2012) in his survey also corroborated that Whatsapp, 2go, Eskimi, Facebook, Badoo and YouTube were mostly used by student protesters to plan, coordinate, and document their participation in the protest. However, they observed that the Facebook was mostly used for the protest purposes. Hence, from their observation, the social media platforms were used via phone mobile devices for interaction, socialization,

collective and connective engagement needed for mobilisation for the protest.

The Federal Government of Nigeria was forced, by the intensity and persistence of Nigerians, the internationalization of the protests by the social media to jettison the proposed increase and adopt a lower price regime.

#END SARS

SARS is the Special Anti Robbery Squad. A group of special trained and equipped police unit to combat violent crimes. However, when reports of their heinous activities seemed to be ignored, Nigerians took to the social media to expose the nefarious activities.

Several videos, pictures, and audio recordings of the brutalities of the officers attached to the Special Anti Robbery Squad were posted online. Nigerians were encouraged to share their stories of brutality under the hash tag #EndSars on Facebook, twitter handles, whatsapp.

For example, Fredrick Sarlors tweeted “The President @NGRPresident received our registered express mail 3 Days ago. We look forward to a response before we commence the class action suit. We thought the public should not this and be carried along #End SARS #Reform the policing @ju

Samlee o “My prayer for you today is that ‘You will not be the next victim to make #EndSars trend more on Twitter.

The #EndSARS got the attention of the legislative arm of government and the Speaker of the House of Representatives reiterated that despite the blackmails by the Force Headquarters, the House would investigate the activities of SARS John Ume (2017). However, the unfortunate killing of Kolade Johnson who fell to the bullets of a SARS officer while watching a Premier League fixture between Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspurs in Lagos reinforced and internationalized the social movement and political mobilisation of the populace against the SARS brutality (Fikayo Olowolagba 2019). The President’s condolences, were replied with angry tweets, as reported in the Daily Post. For example, @Lekanskillz12 tweeted “Oga, what we need is total eradication of these nuisance factions of our police force. Enough avoidable condolences. EndSARS. End Police brutality. In addition, @idjthriller tweeted, “we’re tired of apologies after lives lost. EndSARS now”.

The social media platforms were used to mobilize Nigerians for a protest in April 5, 2019 across the country demanded for the scrapping of SARS, and other specialized units. Segun Awosanya was quoted by Sahara Reporters saying: “When our country is saddled with a Police Force that operates outside the bounds of law, without operational restraints – the culture of impunity, spawned by such inhuman chants of police officers like ‘I will kill you and nothing will happen’ and ‘I must kill someone today’. What we get are not only killer squads that reign supreme but a Police Force that

have gone rogue, killing, and maiming defenseless citizens” (Sahara reporter 2019)

However, using videos, the nefarious activities of the SARS in Nigeria were exposed to many via the platforms of Whatsapp and the Facebook. The tempo mobilisation for the scrapping of SARS was therefore heightened to the extent that it got the attention of the Vice President Yemi Osinbajo. The preliminary action taken was the summary reformation of SARS. However, the mobilisation against the scrapping of the anti-robbery unit did not abate. This mobilisation therefore prompted the issuance of guidelines to the operations of SARS such that they were forbidden from involvement in civil matters, and the search of individuals’ phones and laptops without authorization.

Although the Vice-President has as Acting President ordered that the unit be shut down with immediate effect on August 14 2018 (Pulse 2018) however, the unit was not shut down, but was to be restructured in FSARS under the control of the Inspector General of Police. However, this arrangement did not also tame SARS, nor healed their corrupt tendencies and brutality was only abated, not stopped. President Muhammadu Buhari however approved the recommendations of the Presidential Panel set up for the reformation of SARS, and the establishment of State and local government Police. In this vein, the dismissal of 37 SARS operatives, and prosecution of other 24 police officers, the reform of the squad and renaming it as Anti-Robbery Squad ARS. The payment of compensations to brutalized Nigerians and the arrest and prosecution of two retired senior officers for extra judicial killing of citizens was also approved. (Johnbosco Agbakwuru 2019)

Thus, while the #EndSARS movement continues, the social media has helped in mobilizing Nigerians to get the attention of the Legislative and Executive arm of government and this has culminated in the reforms in the Police squad.

PARTY CAMPAIGNS AND #O TO GEE

Political campaigns are the most prominent means of inducing voters to support parties and candidates during elections. The medium, of campaigns include persuasive adverts through the media, house-to-house visitations, phone calls, and campaign rallies. However, Madueke et al (2017) have argued that many parties, candidates, and vote canvassers have taken a cue from the strategy of social media usage of Barrack Obama for electioneering campaigns.

Marlowe (2009) has opined that the exchange of views, via online message and the strength of social ties that exist amongst the online communicators possess the potential of political mobilisation of youths to engage in political activities (Shamsu D.A, Murtala M.A, Aliyu M and Bello I.H 2018).

The erratic nature of power promoted the use of mobile phones to monitor the political campaigns of parties for 2019 elections. The statements and errors made by politicians were propagated on the internet. (E.g. Osinbajo and

Peter Obi). Words were taken in isolation to either discredit or mop up support for the different flag bearers. Collapsed pavilions became an item while several videos and pictures of supports during campaigns flooded the internet all in a bid to mobilize support for different candidates.

In the 2011 elections, the social media used in political campaigns for sending voice and text messages (Nnanyelugo and Nwafor 2013). Thus, for the 2015 general elections, Buhari and Osinbajo in between them 197000 and 1230 tweets, and also indicated amongst other things that the APC became more livelier and acceptable on social media than their major opponent, the PDP (Omojuwa 2015)).

The social media have been used in intimidating and discrediting political opponents (Olabamiji O.M. 2014). Therefore the Facebook uploads insinuating the intense corrupt nature of Alhaji Abubakar went viral in order to sway support off him to the ‘credible and honest’ political opponent – President Muhammadu Buhari. The corrupt al;legations were supported with excerpts from President Olusegun Obasanjo's - My watch- which was also quoted to have said that Atiku Abubakar could visit the United States of America. In order to prove Pundits wrong, Atiku had to visit United State of America. Interviews with youth leaders and party Chairmen also revealed that mobilisation of supporters from the grassroots were achieved mostly with Whatsapp messages. To them, this was more effective as same messages were sent to various groups, without distortion of the intended information. Besides, it was cheaper, faster, and helped in the monitoring of the various political cells. (Ayeni Toba Paul (2019). However, INEC did not use the social media to mobilize people for the elections. The presence of INEC compared to other politicians and parties were so low. This could have warranted the low turnout for the elections.

The 2019 elections in Nigeria was a battle of wits and methods between the major political parties that is the PDP and APC. However, it was also a battle between the two national leaders of these parties, Bukola Saraki and Bola Tinubu respectively. Both were viewed as godfathers and political bigwigs who held tenaciously on the political grip of their state. While Bukola Saraki inherited the political hegemony over Kwara from his father (who had held sway since 1983), Bola Tinubu is perceived to control to hold the four aces in Lagos, since 1999. The social media was employed by the APC to break Saraki’s hold in Ilorin with the ‘O to ge’ slogan. O to ge is a sentence in Yoruba that literarily means enough is enough.

The idea which began the O to ge movement is premised on democratic revolution. The Saraki family had held political dominance in Kwara state since the 1980s. The patriarch, Olusola Saraki had controlled the State and had been entrenched as the political godfather who determined who becomes what, when and how in Kwara politics. His dominance therefore ensured that his family controlled both the political and economic structures of the State. The emergence of his son, Dr Bukola Saraki as the governor and

Senator was also in continuation of the dynasty of power instituted by the Patriarch. The O to gee movement was therefore instituted by concerned Kwara State electorates who felt that the hegemony of the Saraki dynasty over their State must be broken.

The O to gee movement therefore became a movement that mobilized followership for the candidate of the APC against the candidate of the PDP (who was perceived as the candidate of the Saraki's family) in the 2019 Gubernatorial elections. The movement also sought to sway support from Dr Bukola Saraki who was seeking re-election to the Senate. The O to gee movement engaged primarily the use of whatsapp and Facebook videos to mobilize the Kwarans for the task. Therefore, nollywood actors' (Yinka Quadri and Ronke Oshodi Oke) musical video denouncing the Saraki's stranglehold on Kwara were shared on different platforms. In addition to this, videos of Muslim clerics (who hitherto were perceived to have supported the Saraki's) denouncing the continuation of the families dynasty also went viral. Interviews of Dr. Bukola Saraki's sister insisting that her brother's political hegemony must be pulled down were also added as arsenals in the social media mobilisation.

On various platforms, the videos of children, and adults shouting derogatory names against Bukola Saraki and his entourage in Kwara during the electioneering campaigns were also exploited to mobilize votes against him and his party, People Democratic Party (PDP), in the 2019 elections. The result of this mobilisation was the defeat of Senator Bukola Saraki in the national legislative elections and the defeat of his preferred gubernatorial candidate. Thus, the social media mobilisation against the Saraki continual hegemony in Kwara could be said to be highly successful.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social media has become an effective tool for political mobilisations in the country. These mobilisations were for the purpose of not only canvassing for votes or winning elections. They were also used to demand and mobilize support for social, policy, and political changes. In addition, the study realized that the use of the social media was preferred because it was cheaper, faster, and unrestricted. Furthermore, the social media encouraged immediate interactions and video proofs, which was enough to convince others of the need to be mobilized against perceived injustices and negligence of government. Government had also recognized the efficacy of the social media and had therefore responded to agitations that were not channeled through the traditional bureaucratic channels. This action on the part of government had gone a long way to prevent systemic breakdowns.

This study therefore recommends that there is a need to educate Nigerians on the positive use of the social media for mobilisation against genuine infractions in such a manner that would not threaten the integration of the country. The government should also make its presence on the social media

visible in order to monitor the demands of the people on the political system, and also correct wrong information as well as curtail the usage of the social media for disintegrative purposes.

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