



SOCIAL MEDIA AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

“Politics; Just like Social Media is a Game of Numbers”

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Introduction.

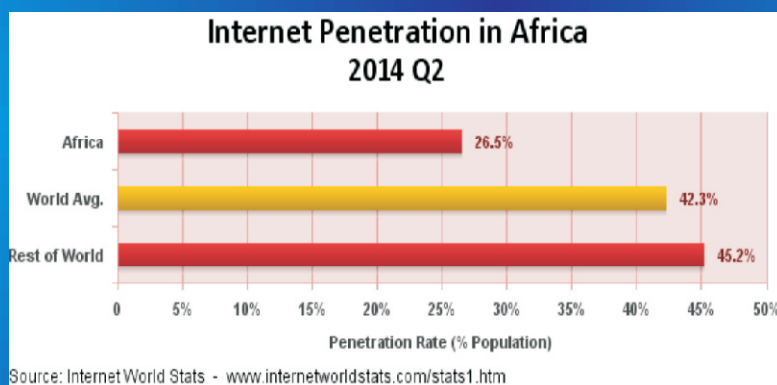
Social Media is an internet-based form of communication which has been reckoned as a veritable tool for information gathering and sharing around the world, where users generate their content and share content through various connections known as social networks. This serves as the fastest means of information dissemination and as such a global trend that cannot be underestimated in Nigeria democratic process. There is a notion that most popular events in the world today do not end up without the influence of the social media. While this assertion may not be absolutely correct, let us have a flash back on some series of events that have unfolded mainly through and on social media platforms across political, health, commercial and development landscape of the continent. The events include the 2014 West African Ebola Outbreak, 2015 Garris University attack in Kenya and Bring Back Our Girls campaign in Nigeria among others. All events mentioned above were widely influenced by social media and were talked about within and outside the country in which



they actually occurred. This proved that social media as a medium for information propagation and dissemination is very effective.

Background

According to 'We Are Social,' a global digital outfit, Africa has over 293 million active Internet users and about 103 million active social media subscribers. Also statistics by Internet World Stats of second quarter

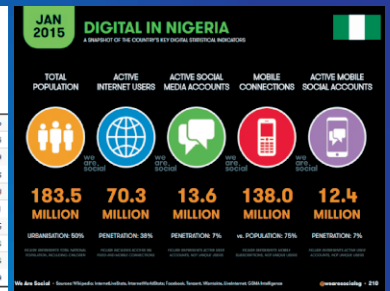


2014, stated that Africa's Internet Penetration has arisen to 26.5% while that of the world stands at 45.2%. These figures are tabulated below.

Nigeria is the most populous African country with over 183 million people according to the 2015 Population Pyramid released by We Are Social, they further stated that Nigeria emerged one of the fastest growing countries in global information technology access, rising above United Kingdom (UK) in ranking. According to statistics released by market research and statistics specialists, digitXplus, the digital Unit of mediaReach OMD Nigeria has recorded a 200% growth in internet users between 2009 and 2013. The country thus is the highest in internet penetration among other African countries and the 8th largest country in the world by number of internet users. Nigeria, which was tied at 55 million internet users in 2012, took a 14% leap garnering over 70 million internet users above UK with paltry increase of just 2 million (57 million)

List of Countries by Internet Usage (2014)

Rank	Country	Internet Users	1 Year Growth %	1 Year New Users	Total Country Population
1	China	611,822,070	7%	28,021,070	1,399,769,899
2	United States	279,834,212	7%	17,751,869	312,583,006
3	India	243,196,927	14%	29,879,790	1,107,491,869
4	Japan	109,252,012	8%	7,668,899	126,551,808
5	Brazil	107,822,651	7%	6,884,239	202,993,670
6	Russia	84,477,713	10%	7,444,530	147,407,671
7	Germany	71,727,051	2%	1,525,829	82,652,250
8	Nigeria	67,021,432	14%	9,360,590	178,546,904
9	United Kingdom	57,075,826	3%	1,574,653	63,489,234
10	France	55,475,167	5%	1,521,569	64,611,279



users in early 2015.

Social media usage also witnessed a rapid increase as Nigerians went to the poll for the 2015 general elections. The role of social media in defining and redefining the concept of politicking and campaigning in a digitalised world became evident, as political parties and aspirants had a good run for their money online. New trends (hash tag) and twitter handles were registered alongside new users and political parties were not left out in this development, as this increased the number of social media users in Nigeria, suddenly and astronomically.

However, increase in Nigeria's internet penetration also reciprocated an increase in social media users, as over 65% of all internet users in Nigeria are social media subscribers. Study reveals that social media, precisely Facebook users, have increased with over 1.4million new user presenting over 83% of the average Nigerian internet penetration. Facebook, being the major social media platform worldwide and currently the most visited website in Nigeria recorded over 7.5 million users in 2015 according to digitXplus analysis. This statistics is increasing even at the time of this report.

In Nigeria, we saw a series of TweetChats and Hangouts, amongst other virtual events as audience engagement strategies. Whether or not the conversations were valid or successful remains an issue that could be explored in the nearest future. Hashtags such as #MeetGEJ, #Febuhari, #BringBackOurGirls, #GEJwinsIt #GMB15, #LagosForYou and #Emekalhedioha were promoted by politicians and their supporters; while #NigeriaDecides, #Nigeria2015, #GoVote #SayNoToViolence and #SupportYourTroops, were promoted by civil society groups to increase citizens' awareness and participation in the electoral process for



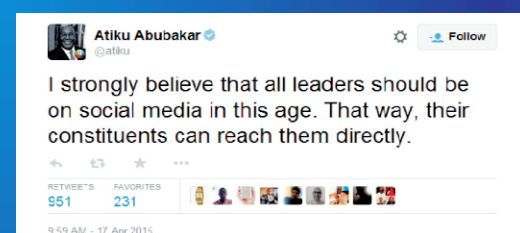
free, fair and violence-free elections.

Prior to the Nigerian 2015 General Elections that produced Gen Mohammadu Buhari as president-elect, group of social media analyst conducted several opinion poll on the two presidential candidates of the two major political parties, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC). With the aid of their official twitter handle @JGoodlucktweets and @ThisIsbuhari the question was posed on who would become next president. The result of the opinion poll came out in favour of the APC candidate as 75% of the poll predicted that Gen Buhari would win the elections. However, the effect and implications of the opinion poll conducted on social media were underestimated by the PDP campaign/ media group. The outcome of the presidential election was credited to the role of social media in governance as Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) declared Gen. Buhari president-elect on 1 April 2015. This is a clear indication that the role of social media cannot be undervalued in any political, religious or social context.

While on twitter, issues of not constantly engaging the public on political ideals were noticed on President Jonathan's twitter handle but the handles of Gen. Buhari President-elect engaged the public as this also affected the number of followers on their official twitter handles. The PDP with @JGoodlucktweets have 97,198 while @ThisIsbuhari presently @MBuhari have 213,623 followers though both handles are still counting. It was also noticed that President Jonathan twitter account was not verified by twitter while that of Gen Buhari was verified. This has to do with their respective media person's skill and commitment on social media usage.



Politics, just like the social media, is a game of numbers. Nigeria has a huge population of young people constituting about 70 per cent of its voting demography. Nigeria's online population is also dominated by young people with varying degrees of interests. This was why politician saw the need to join the global trend of social media, which is perceived to hold an uninhibited communication potential among the youth and people of all walks of life generally. Amongst such politicians is one time Nigerian Vice President, Atiku Abubakar with twitter handle @atiku who advised Nigerian leaders to get involved in social media as it creates direct access for a leader and his constituency.



The social media also creates an atmosphere for politicians to engage voters on real-time communication flow, where as some political parties also use this medium to showcase the digital

copy of their contestant manifestos, engaging on issues base electronic campaign to win voters mind.

Social media has also changed the practice of communications among civilian populace and military institutions with regard to external and internal audiences. Daily relationship with media is one of the most important tasks of the defence and military leadership. In times of austerity, governments in majority of capitals struggle, trying to ensure public support for defence expenditures. Institutions must develop more and more complex methods in order to explain their tasks and duties. The importance of this task is underlined by acknowledging public information as one of strategic functions of leadership. The Nigerian Army was not left out of this, as the 2015 election season coincided with the era of the on-going onslaught of Boko Haram insurgency and

inadequate military equipment for troops in the North East – This must have accounted for the promotion of Hash-Tags like #SayNoToViolence and #SupportYourTroops through its twitter handle @HQnigerianArmy while the Defence Headquarters promoted #NeverAgain, #SupportOurTroops on its official twitter handle @HQdefenceinfo as comments here boosted the morale of Nigerian troops fighting insurgency in the North-eastern Nigeria. Images of the on-going onslaught were also posted to inform the public of the successes being made on daily basis. Pictures, they say, speaks more than a thousand words.

However, acts of propaganda were also noticed in these essences. During the just concluded 2015 elections, instances of incitements and hate speeches, which were not in the best interest of the country were also noticed. In spite of the rapid growth of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Social media in Nigeria, anonymity was exploited and integrity was not always upheld. This gave room for the promotion of hate speeches the type that politicking in the country has never witnessed. In order to promote campaigns, many faceless or anonymous handles were created, littering the cyber space and creating challenges to that could not be underestimated. It became frightening when broadcast stations began to take sides in the dissemination of hate campaigns and their coverage.

Role of Social Media in Government: Social media plays major roles in governance, some of which are discussed here under.

Creates the means to improve governance. Social media provides easy publication and rapid spread of information. By so doing, it creates transparency that can strengthen citizen goodwill towards government. For citizens, embedding government information in social media provides hitherto unimagined access to government and the means to connect in real time. For government, it offers the ability to rapidly poll public opinion and perhaps more importantly, forecast broader, societal trends.

Opens up access to government. The social media creates access to government officials and new possibilities for community driven initiatives. It makes sense for government to enable and facilitate a partnership culture for this to occur.

Saves time and money. Providing information through social media channels offers real efficiencies in creating faster, easier and cheaper access to information, particularly to younger voters who tend to read and operate in social media spaces.

Creates new ways of working. Online collaboration across government departments and with citizens could force change and generally contribute to the way government operates and develops policy. However, the even greater risk to governments is not being involved in social media. Unless government understands the possibilities of social media, educates and allow their officials to use social media in their working environments, opportunities for real engagement, innovation, change and transparency may be lost.

Conclusion

A previous article on *Cyber Warfare and National Security* made some reference on the nature of Nigerian cyber space which controls the social media and other internet based communication. However, commendation should be given to achievements of President Goodluck Jonathan's Transformation Agenda which compared some agencies on data capturing and monitoring mechanism. Some of these agencies include Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) which ensures that all mobile phone users register their SIM cards; Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) ensures all vehicles owners are registered electronically, the e-passport by Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) and Digital Birth and Death Record Systems in health sectors. All these are welcome development that improves the living standard of the people and contribute positively to national development and good governance.

However this was aimed at Nigeria having a Central Data Base System, where all captured data will be integrated for easy access, thereby improving citizen's accountability in governance. Its advantage also include reducing bottlenecks involved in tracking and tracing of every citizen and residents in Nigeria in case of cyber offence and for transparency in governance. For a country eager to enlist with other nations with the quest of national development and improved National Security, ICT and social media is a sector that should not be underestimated in governance. The President-elect and in fact the incoming government should endeavour not to jettison this platform of information dissemination that has worked very well for them, in governance. Nigerians and especial the youth, are watching.