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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Pedagogue of the Social Media and the Rise of Political Orphans in Nigeria: An Issue for Political Communication

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Abstract

The use of social media across the globe as a tool for political communication has drawn politicians and voters (old or young) together. It has created room for wider participation in politics particularly in the civilized world, primarily, due to their rooted political culture. In Nigeria unfortunately, the case is not the same. This paper derived data from secondary sources and adopted content analysis. It reveals that the social media orientation acquired by our political office holders (elected representatives) does not promote good relationship between them and the electorate and this disconnect has generated what the paper noted and referred to as 'political orphans.'. The paper found that Politicians go into elections with bloated promises of betterment of the lives of the people, but after the elections embrace the social media rather than the people to defend their shortcomings. Thus, this paper argues that politicians who rely heavily on social media to sustain their "seats" than on the people that enabled them by their support and votes lose, and when they lose, they go into political orphanage. It shows that no politician goes into political orphanage and comes back the same. The paper concluded that politicians should engage the people as much as they engage the social media. Much more, the social media should be used to play its dynamic intervening role as a veritable tool of political communication.

Key Words: Political communication, Social Media, Political Orphan, Pedagogue, Political Representatives

Introduction

One of the latest developments in political communication is the use of social media in conveying political messages to the public through Facebook, Instagram, and other micro blogging sites. This development was made possible by the campaign to make the world a global village following from industrial revolutions and the current massive spread of the use of information technology/information systems, which are widely seen as the fourth revolution.

The result is a new world order of global communication that has truly brought the world into a common and borderless village. The rise of the Social Media has impacted very much on political communication. Notwithstanding this development, it has nonetheless created another world of communication in which no government has power to curtail except by tyrannical censorship.

The euphoria that attended this new revolution came with a new problem which the world must brace itself for. The social media as revolutionary as it is has its grave consequences in the issue of political communication. The new civilization of social media created a new political flow of information which politicians and other political institutions have exploited to reach the public/voters. But the new media orientation had created fundamental problem in the voter/representative relationship. The manner with which most of the political representatives lose office due to frictions between them and their constituents suggests that the social media plays a critical role in generating those frictions.

Men and, to a much lesser extent, women are prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to get power. They will invest substantial sums of their money in campaigning; sacrifice health, comfort, and domestic peace; put up with almost unlimited amounts of public criticism and abuse; and risk the humiliation and disappointment of defeat. The phenomenon is international and quite independent of political systems. Why do they do

that?

The answer is bound to be complicated. Any individual may have several reasons for deciding to embark on political career: some reputable and worth publicizing, some essentially very private. One can only suggest possibilities. But at the centre of the wish to enter politics, whether at the local or the national level, there usually seems to be a strong urge for something which is best called power; although the term is not a satisfactory one, this nonetheless is not our point of argument here. Power, in this sense, includes not only the ability to influence the course of events and to control other people's actions but also the feeling of being at the centre of things, the place where decisions are made and where important discussions take place. The satisfactions provided by power are many and relative (Hudson, 1978). The significance of the satisfaction which power brings is not so much as any measure or definition of that power as the morale- raising knowledge that other people have not got it. It is this – the yearning to be more powerful than one's fellow citizens and in this may stand a better chance of imposing one's ideas on others – that constitutes the central appeal for power and, certainly, political power. And of course, power is a staircase, or can be. If a politician is ambitious – he usually is, at least in early stages of his career – he will want to move steadily up the stairs, acquiring a little more power at each tread. He will fight very hard indeed to make this kind of progress, accepting all the constraints on behaviour and inclination which the party officials demand of him. He will be extremely careful to keep his nose clean at all times.

Some politicians, but not many, are not ambitious at all, being well content to be where they are. Indeed, in studying what politicians say and do, it is wise to know quite a lot about them as a people, in order to be in a position to assess how much the job matters to the men one is observing at the moment. A politician's public language is a screen, a false scent, a safety net – the range of possible metaphors is a wide one – quite as much as it is a form of expression. Given the prime necessity that he and his party shall not lose power or office, almost everything he says and writes is calculated to make that dreadful possibility less likely.

For that reason, he finds great ally in social media rather than his constituency, where he is supposed to be giving annual constituency briefing and engaging in Town hall meetings with his constituents. This is the process in which politicians become political orphans; they become quite alienated from those they represent in government. To this class of politicians, political communication means creating media platforms and mobilizing a team of journalists and placing them on pay roll to defend their awful performances in office as representatives of the people. This alienation from the various constituencies on whose mandate they rode to office was what made them political orphans.

The essence of politics is to talk or interaction that makes authoritative allocation possible on the part of government, and binding on the part of the citizens. In that sense periodic interaction or briefing is necessary to keep the constituents informed about the activities of the government which they have deliberately voted into power. As a rule therefore, political communication is of critical importance in bringing home score cards and conveying political message to the people. Political communication is an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, the mass media, and the public (Norris, 2001). The process operates downward from governing institution toward citizens, horizontally in linkages among political actors, and upward from the public opinion toward authorities. Political communication has been central to the electoral and policy making process. In the early 1990s, certain important developments have fundamentally altered this process in the developed world, and lately in developing world particularly in the mass media moving from the traditional world of newspaper, radio and television broadcasting toward the Internet. It is in this trend of political communication that the social media becomes a new movement or the fourth revolution.

Political communication is a subfield of communication and Political Science that is concerned with how information spreads and influences political and policy makers, the new media and citizens (Norris, 2015). Since the advent of the World Wide Web, the amount of data to analyze has exploded, and researchers are shifting to computation methods to study the dynamics of political communication. In recent years, machine learning has become key tools in the subfield. It deals with the production, dissemination, processing and effects of information, both through mass media and interpersonally, within a political context. This includes the study of media, the analysis of speeches by politicians and those that are trying to influence the political process, and formal and informal conversations among members of the public

Broadly defined, political communication is the role of communication in the political process. It can take place in a variety of ways or forms (formal and informal), in a variety of venues (public and private) and through a variety of medium (mediated or unmediated content). It includes the production and generation of messages by political actors, the transmission of messages through the direct and indirect channels, and the reception of political messages (AAPPA, 2020).

Political communication is a process that includes political institutions and actors, the mass media and, importantly, citizens. Every act of political communication produced by parties, interest groups, or media is geared toward citizens, to inform, and to influence them. These including the government (really) are the actors in political communication. It is the interaction between these groups that matter in political communication. Within politics, communication flows more in many directions: downward from government authorities to citizens; horizontally between political actors, including news media from citizens and groups to the political institutions.

In short, political communication is concerned with being actively engaged with local, regional, state, national and international issues and how the power of information, persuasion and strategic message design can be used to understand and affect outcomes at those levels, particularly in the area of governance, government and social behaviour.

Role of Social Media as a Channel of Political Communication

Among Political Scientists, there is a growing feeling that old modes and methods of political communication – from elites to the masses (top down) and from the masses to the elites (bottom up) – are being rapidly replaced and reconfigured by social media (Bernie & Joshua,2015). Social media is an important source of news and information all over the world today, especially in the United States where it has almost become a political culture. During the US Presidential election, social media platforms emerged as a breeding ground for influencing campaigns, conspiracy, and alternative media. The use of social media as a channel of political communication has continued to grow, ever since Barack Obama broke the world record in the history of social media use for political purposes during the 2008 US Presidential elections. Many nations and politicians across the world now embrace the platform to mobilize their citizens and candidates towards political issues, such as campaigns, voting and other related information.

Social media has dramatically changed the way in which modern political campaigns are runwith more digital native citizens coming into the voting population. It has become the important platform in which politicians establish themselves and engage with voters. In the digital age, evidence across the world showcased the increasing importance of the social media.

In Nigeria like other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, many politicians have continued to use, overuse or abuse these platforms to achieve their selfish interests, especially the under-performing government officials and representatives. Those in this category are those the paper conceptualized as "the political orphans", and their channel of giving the accounts of their stewardship in office is the

social media. The media is about journalism; a journalist is a teacher of nations; remove journalism from politics, and we are back to the Dark Ages.

We are fully aware that those in public office, as arm of the central government, constitute the elite of the country and, for this reason, they have a mission to stimulate and further the general progress and well-being of the people. While we publicly pay homage to those in this group, though there are many whose devotion and disinterested service are without limit, we at the same time strongly regret that a good number of them, scorning a real sense of public office and duty, are only interested in the advantages and privileges of their position, and not for the service of the people as promised during their campaigns. These are called "the Political Orphans" because they are totally delinked from the constituents they represent and not even doing well in their respective political positions and offices; their effective performances are only seen and read on the social media.

This paper is concerned with the social media orientations of the political representatives in the various political offices or positions both elected and appointed, with particular reference to Nigeria. Representatives were used interchangeably with politicians: representative here is not used in a generic sense, but it denotes a person who represents a constituency or community in a legislature – a person chosen by election among a large group to act on behalf of others in government. It shall be explained how the reliance on the social media as a means of communicating political messages to the people has changed the orientation of some politicians, by impacting negatively on the relationship between the governing elite and their constituents. The social media orientation soon alienates the people from those they elected into office as representatives.

We are never going to understand this as a political problem much less contain it if we do not look at it as a real impediment to political development, as found in our appreciation and acknowledgment of democracy (in operation) though its definition has been a problem that goes back to antiquity.

There are two operating principles in the reconciliation of freedom and order in a state or power and politics. To mention is the one that is relevant to this work; the principle is that of competition which will be geared towards ensuring that private interest serves public purposes. One way of doing that is by election and that is why election is regarded as an institution of democracy. The elective principle makes the private interests to produce collective gains. Huntington (1991) was worried about too much participation in government. He said that though participation is very central in government it generates conflicts or problems of disorder. To combat this dilemma, competition by election has to come in. Election allows people to use the auspices of their private interest to serve public purposes.

It is a fact that no one seeks power for the sake of power. People go into elective offices for two main reasons: First, to develop themselves; and secondly, to develop their community. The second reason is very critical in order to achieve the first reason. Therefore, election process is a collective bargaining. To win an election, one must pass the due processes, then finally recruit or mobilize the voters. A lot of stress goes into an election, and the population or voters must be on one's side till success is achieved. Elections in Nigeria have always been a war: a 'war' because of the country's prevailing political culture. It is a game played with deadly seriousness, for a winner wins everything while the loser loses everything including his status.

Given this political culture, political contenders try to avoid the dreaded outcome, losing election that come with deflated ego. Now during campaigns, every political arsenal is on display ready to be deployed. It is at this period that politicians and parties create and raise expectations with the kind of promises they make without minding the availability of resources to fulfill them. When that happens, there is a chasm between the raised expectations and fulfillment in concrete

terms.

Between this period, when victory is foreseen, politicians begin to assemble media teams that will prepare for their rebranding once the elections are won. It is also the time that the social media take over the information space to malign the reputation of perceived opponents. This in turn generates another problem of post-election litigation by the opposition. Keen watchers and perceptive individuals who had observed current Nigeria political culture must affirm this development trend in Nigeria politics.

The Use of Social Media by Political Parties in Nigeria

There are various types of political communication and political media (Thummy, 2015). Among the political media, social media seems to be the most widely used in contemporary political process. The development of social media in putting forth one's or party ideology, propaganda, one's or party agenda, and persuading the voters is widespread as never before. Many scholars including Walter Lippmann doubted the efficacy of media in public enlightenment that democracy requires. For, they thought that media cannot tell the truth objectively. Harold Lasswell too took note of the tendency of media propaganda to dupe and degrade the voters. According to him, they weave reports of factual events into palatable stories. This is where most of social media practitioners in Nigeria have fallen short of.

Ben-Collin Ndinojuo, Sunny Mbazie and Walter Ihejirika (2015) are among the few scholars that carried out research on the use of social media by political parties in Nigeria. The focus was to establish the number of political parties in Nigeria that are registered on the social media, ascertain their followership and how active they are on the social media, as well as to document how they use social media. For it is only when parties make use of the social media that the use of the new media for political message can be appraised. With that appraisal one can state with clarity hypothetically that the more parties and politicians adapt to the use of social media tools or platforms, the more they draw voter or build fan base.

Triangular method was used sequentially where the Internet and content analysis research designs were employed. The research populations consisted of the 25 political parties registered by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), and 118 days of the months of January and February, 2013 and 2014 respectively. Research result conducted on Facebook and Twitter revealed that the level of followership of the Nigerian political parties on the social media networks, Facebook and Twitter, is not at par with the internet usage in Nigeria, which was put at 45.05 million or 32% of the population (Amaefule, 2012; NCC, 2013) though, comparatively, Nigeria was ranked 10th in the world in terms of internet usage (ITU, 2012).

Two factors were responsible for the disparity in followership of social media sites of political parties in Nigeria and other countries: Literacy level and internet penetration. Nigeria has 61.3% literacy rate in ICT (World Stats, 2012). A lower level in ICT driven world can go a long way in determining communication approaches. The research shows that the level of activity recorded for the political parties on social media is not high. The conclusion of the research shows media applications has not been widely incorporated in the publicity and public relations affairs by most of the political parties in Nigeria. Comparative analysis of the Nigerian political parties with other political parties in the Western countries on the usage of the social media showed that Nigeria is still low, but there are prospects. When these reviewed studies are considered in the light of the current work, one can understand where the direction is pointing at.

A number of studies have documented the growing interests in the application of the new media or the social media for political communication or messages (Chadwick, 2006; Rommele, 2003; Davies, 1999; Owen, 1998). Graber (2010) provided useful statistics about President Obama's use of the social media in 2008 Campaign and apparent discrepancies between Obama's use and the use of his opponent, John

McCain. The Statistics shows that Obama had 2 million Facebook friends, while McCain only had 600,000 friends, implying that Obama used social media much more than McCain in the 2008 election. But it could be stated here that the role the new media can play in Nigerian politics is not in doubt if the information technology is well adapted. It is a new movement in political communication; whether we accept that or not, it is so. Yet the low ICT knowledge, and the political economy of Nigeria, including the nature and processes of the Nigerian politics, do not allow the growth or mass literacy in media politics.

American political culture, as beautiful as it is, is a poor guide to Nigeria. Nigeria is battling to feed her citizens; hence there are great expectations and much pressure on the politicians who are the legal representatives of the people to provide development in their various constituencies. The social media messages at this point in time does not reflect these expectations.

Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) provided an insight into the social media habits of young people (adults under the age of 30), a demographic target of Obama in 2008. The study found that young people tend to get political information from the social media more than any other age group. Another study by the Harvard Institute of Politics (2011) found similar results and concluded that 27% of young adults found that Facebook and other social media websites have more impact than other types of advocacy. These facts are undeniable. The targets of Nigerian politicians have always been young people. It is normal across all cultures that it is the young ones that stand under the sun and rain to cast votes; thus, Nigeria is no different. They want immediate returns in the form of betterment of lives - in developing their communities/constituencies. Their representatives in government owe them that duty, but their expectations are higher in Nigeria.

Furthermore, research demonstrates that internet-enabled engagement is attractive to young voters, also compared to their political engagement in the offline world (Pew Research Centre, 2008; Ward et al., 2008). For example, research findings show that 40% of young voters until the age of 30 look for campaign news on the Internet, compared to 16% of voters aged between 30 and 49 years of age, and 7% and 50 years of age and above.

It is worthy to note that electronic politics has become a critical part of the American political culture. Democracy does not end on the Internet, neither does it begin there. All over the world political representative must add value to the betterment of the lives of the people or they are adjudged failure. Nobody old or young would like to put another on a comfort zone and go home hungry in the name of patriotism.

The Pedagogue of the Social Media and Rise of Political Orphans

The pedagogue of the social media and rise of political orphans in Nigeria looks at how social media orientation has contributed in pitching the political representatives against their constituents as a result of which they lost elections and never returned to their previous positions as the people's representatives. It is a social media influenced orientation inculcated by underperforming political representatives which isolates them from their constituents/constituencies thereby making them fall out of favour, power and political grace. Many politicians have apparently lost their positions as a result of strained relationship between them and their electors or constituents, because soon after the elections are won, some of these representatives isolate their people completely and found great allies with the social media team as they are called. They are no longer accountable to the people but form media teams to rebrand themselves. Thus, in the end the representatives become irresponsible to those on whose mandates they rode to office or power.

Political orphan therefore has been conceptualized as politicians who have lost both their constituencies and the trust or confidence of their voters and at such lost their status as leaders of their people. This becomes the case when they fail to fulfill the needs of their various constituencies as

part of their social contract. Political orphanage is when a politician, having lost his office, remains in political limbo. As a spent force, he no longer enjoys the support and loyalty of those who hitherto supported his leadership while in office. This condition was created by the politicians themselves by their failure to carry out periodic constituencies' briefings and Town hall meetings where constituency projects and other programmes of importance are generated and articulated. To be a political orphan is the most dreadful part of a politician. These politicians while in office convinced themselves that all they need to do in order to remain popular is to create "media teams" who will consistently be singing their praises on the social media. They are elated the moment they discover that they have built for themselves a strong fan base on Instagram, Facebook and other social media platforms. To them, that is an achievement. Of course, thus is not so as the lid is blown off their faces once the next elections come forth. The tragedy has always been discovered too late. It does not appear as a problem when the politicians are brandishing their popularity on social media as if it is an achievement.

Elections in Nigeria are very expensive both on the Party and the individual. It takes away contestants' privacy, comfort and every other thing that gives contestants their independence. No one will risk that for nothing, but unfortunately such is the case for many politicians in Nigeria. Social media engagement has its rules and limitations. Political communication makes rooms for face-face interactions between the politicians and the public, the grassroots. This is why the direction is upward and down ward movements - from the political institutions and authorities downward to the public; and from the public upward to political institution and authorities.

Democracy has its bearings on responsiveness because those who hold political offices do that on behalf of the people; it therefore behooves on the political representatives to carry this mentality of responsiveness into their office chambers. To win elections is to first win the public or the electorate. When then one gets to office and chose to reach one's constituency or district through social media, instead of involving them through face-to-face periodic constituency briefing and Town Hall meetings, there is problem. This is the way to get to hear the pulse of the people, to get to familiarize with them and listen to what they need as a people and their knowledge about representation. This is democracy that works.

The difficulty in managing politicians arises less from the quality of men in the profession or the level at which authority is exercised, and more from the nature of political activities. Politics is part of human civilization. It is as old as the foundation of society, essentially for men to escape the brutality that characterizes the state of nature. But politicians are routinely often vilified for failures and inadequacies. The indictment on such institutions have become common place, a profession to which the society gives tasks that cannot be performed to the satisfaction of society which suffers not only certain frustration but certain fundamental representative gap as well. The criticisms directed at politicians are well known and often sound, but the condition giving rise to these criticisms is frequently and in large measure not the direct faults of these politicians.

Let me explain this: at the beginning of political recruitment by political parties, a lot of strategies were put in place, but the central issue is to win power and hold on to it. To do this, a lot of rhetoric was engaged which the electorate cannot differentiate. During the campaigns, the preoccupations were to win at all costs; promises were made that created rising expectations on the part of the electorate. The available resources to fulfill these expectations were not even considered. Soon after the elections were won and power captured, hardly had the politicians settled down for business when the electorate starts bombarding their representatives with requests for the fulfillment of the promises they had made. And because the politicians were in no position to fulfill their promises to their constituents, they look for the escape routes in the engagement of media team

that consistently outlines the performance of their principals in office.

These performances are only on social media but not in concrete terms. But why must the public worry about their representatives? The answer is not a straight jacket one, but one can adduce some possible reasons. Those who hold public offices do so on behalf of others, for everybody cannot be directly involved in government at the same time, and development cannot occur when 'winner takes all" is the prevailing principle. Therefore, the representatives must be responsive to the yearnings of the people; they must show commitment to what they believe to be the dividend of their efforts. But what happens is that the politicians see their fan bases as the true measure of their performances. They are carried away by the make-belief creation of their social media teams as true performance and not what they are doing in real terms.

It is a historical to find a Nigerian politician that won an election and decided to spend only one term in office. It is not part of our political behaviour. Therefore if a political office holder spent only a term in office, it is either as a result of under performance or on health grounds. Most, if not all, go into elective positions and stay there as long as their constituency keeps them there on the basis of good performance. More so, the positions suffer loss of memory if there is inconsistency surrounding it – that is if there is no litigation surrounding the seat – otherwise it must be left vacant. Since the seats are meant for constituencies or districts, it must be occupied by the representatives of those constituencies at all times.

These categories of politicians are not in short supply in Nigeria's 4th Republic, particularly the 8th National Assembly. Studies have shown that most of these politicians were very popular on social media but unpopular with their constituencies. They are the later day urban guerilla politicians. They do not engage with their voters during recess because they do not go home. Politics is about interactions and continuous consultation with the public, the voters from whom the representatives are assessed. Logically, given these arguments, it is safe to say that the issue of whether one will become a political orphan is a choice. There are chances that if an elected office holder relates well with those that elected him, he will be re-elected into the office again. Having said that, let me also state that good relationship is tied to performance. Those who rely on social media defence become political orphans immediately they leave office. Let me give some instances: Senator Ben Murray Bruce, one of the Senators from Bayelsa State, was very popular in the senate chamber, outspoken, a business magnate, and an event resource, but these values did not retain him in the senate. He was a one term Senator, with a strong fan base, but his politics and performance was on social media not with his Senatorial District; Senator Dino Melaye representing Kogi West in the Senate Chamber was equally an event resource person, an eloquent speaker and radical. He was popular on social media but not with his people. He was a one term Senator. Also noteworthy is the former Senate President, Bukola Saraki, two-time Governor of Kwara State, an astute and dynamic politician. He has a strong fan base but became a one term Senator not by choice. Also in this category is Hon Chuma Nzeribe who represented Ihiala Federal Constituency of Anambra State. The list is endless.

There are many more both in the upper chamber and lower chamber of the National Assembly of Nigeria who have become political orphans. The reason for mentioning these popular names is to bring to clarity the concept of political orphan; the orphanage being the period in which one is in a political limbo. Our thesis has been that one who wins election and turns his back on the electorate or constituency and chose to rely on social media to defend this negligence, will lose election, and Nigeria politics is such that one who loses election in that manner is bound to become a political orphan.

However, there are many who have escaped the dilemma of political debacle, even when they lost and spent but one term in office, but have remained popular with the people. Those in this category are those who lost through litigation (legal gymnastics)

after they won. This is the weakest point of Nigerian politics. This class of people do not constitute "the political orphans". Political orphan again does not include all that had spent one term, but those who were made popular by the new media instead of really representing their people with the quality of development and projects they attracted to their constituencies or districts.

Conclusion

The critical role of social media in political communication cannot be overemphasized and it has come to stay. It is a new civilization in communication and politics and has drawn the political mass (the voting public) closer to government as well as politicians. The advanced democracies have taken advantage from this revolution more than the developing ones for reasons that are familiar to us. They had adapted well into the social media which has become part of their political culture, unlike Nigeria and other developing democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa where political representatives are using it to evade their responsibilities to their constituents. Political representation is a call to service, and the social media usage in Nigeria must reflect public opinion and mass participation.

Politicians who play according to the rule of the game are unlikely to find themselves in political orphanage, since democracy has social mobility as one of it tenets. Social media practice as instrument of political communication is still new, but there are great prospect for political parties and voters to develop the culture.

Those who use the social media to measure their popularity in Nigeria, rather than engage the constituents in meetings and briefings should know that once the signal in given, they will head straight to the dreaded political orphanhood, and it is only very few who had experienced it that came out (of it) still relevant.

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