

Voter Education through Social Media: An Analytical Study of Independent Electoral Commission's Twitter and Facebook Platforms

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Abstract

Social media platforms have become potent channels for engendering voter education in Nigeria. The study set out with the aim of assessing Facebook and Twitter platforms of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to ascertain the use of these platforms for voter education by the electoral body. The study was premised on the actor-network theory. Content analysis was used to achieve specific objectives of the study. The coding sheet served as an instrument for data collection. Systematic sampling technique was used by the study. Findings showed a preponderance of press releases and activities of INEC on these platforms. The various sub-themes of voter education were hardly found. INEC, unfortunately, had not utilized any of the platforms for engaging citizens before the 2019 general elections. The study recommended that INEC alter its one-way approach to communication on social media and also dedicate Facebook and Twitter to voter education given how much citizens use the two platforms for political discussions.

Keywords: Facebook, Social media, Twitter, Voter Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Voter education is enlightening the electorate about the duties and obligations of all stakeholders involved in the successful conduct and result of a credible, free, and fair election. Many of the electorates know they ought to cast their votes on Election Day, but few know the provisions of the law surrounding the successful conduct of that election, and what is expected of them as an electorate when they go to cast their votes at the polling unit.

The role of voter education in any electoral process cannot be underestimated. It is very crucial that voter education commences on time for an election to be successful. An election in a democratic system offers a unique opportunity to the electorate to exercise their franchise by voting in candidates of their choice into office. Since the attainment of independence, electoral fraud has remained a difficult issue.

Voter education is very essential in any democratic system as the proper orientation of the electorate on the essence of casting one's vote and involvement in a democratic system of our country, will not only bring about the high level of motivation but higher participation level.

Successful voters' education ensures that voters are ready, willing, and able to participate fully in the election process. Voters' education is essential in ensuring voters are well-informed and can effectively exercise their voting rights and express their political will on election day.

Part of the problem facing the electoral process in Nigeria is voter apathy which, to a large extent, is traceable to paucity or absence of voter education. It is for this reason that social media is good enlightenment and educational platform with over five (5) billion active users every day. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as a matter of necessity ought to explore social media and disseminate information to every Nigerian voter using the internet as a medium. It is imperative that every Nigerian voter hears directly from the source, i.e. INEC, on issues about the forthcoming elections, confirming or denouncing any rumours circulating in the media on the elections through posts on their official website, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook handles. (Size 10 & Normal) This document is a template. An electronic copy can be downloaded from the conference website. For questions on paper guidelines, please contact the conference publications committee as indicated on the conference website. Information about final paper submission is available from the conference website.

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Thriving democracies have improved the level of citizen participation in the electoral process through intensive voter education. This has been achieved through the use of social media in reaching out to teeming users of these platforms. Election monitoring bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have their profiles on social media. However, more than presence is recommended in [1] and [2] who propose the use of social media for open communication and interaction,

audience engagement and prompt response to inquiries from the electorate, which can eventually build trust between the electorate and the INEC and engender greater confidence in the electoral process. No known study has established the aforementioned on INEC Nigeria social media platforms. This is the rationale for undertaking this inquiry.

A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research question 1: What is the frequency of posts on Facebook and Twitter by INEC Nigeria?

Research question 2: What are the voter education themes on INEC Nigeria Facebook and Twitter Platforms?

Research question 3: What is the level of two-way interaction on Facebook and Twitter by INEC Nigeria?

B. SCOPE OF STUDY

The study investigated Facebook and Twitter platforms of INEC Nigeria between August 2018 and January (Size 10 & Normal). An easy way to comply with the conference paper formatting requirements is to use this document as a template and simply type your text into it.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

ACTOR NETWORK THEORY

The actor-network theory was developed in the mid-1980s primarily with the work of Bruno Latour, Michael Callon and John Law. The theory strives to account for the hybrid or plural nature of scientific work. [3] Observes that the actor-network theory proposes a thematic shift in emphasis away from the centrality of the human subject and simply regards the human subject as another actor in a network. Essentially, what the actor-network theory proposes is that everything that surrounds humans in the natural and social world is in existence in a network of relationships. In this network, humans and non-humans alike are accorded the same or equal statuses as actors. The proponents of this theory have reemphasized the importance or inevitability of non-humans in a network. The place of non-humans especially technology is unquestionable in shaping social processes. Social media can be used by INEC Nigeria for shaping social process and promoting voter education.

IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A. Voter Education

In democracies, it is imperative to educate, enlighten and sensitize electorates to stem the tide of voter apathy which is inimical to contemporary democratic practice. Voter education can be said to be the bedrock of political stabilization in Nigerian democracy because the level of knowledge of electorates matters a lot as it makes the electorate

understand the consequences of voting. In [4] and [5] aver that among the different mechanisms that link citizens to the governing process in contemporary democracies, elections are the most prominent and most extensive in impact... modern elections play an important role in establishing and maintaining representative democracy" (p.162). Succinctly, [6] points out that the question of citizens and citizenship and the roles, relationships and responsibilities amongst and between citizen and their government is relevant in contemporary democracy.

As such [7] posit that:

"The role of voter education in any developed and developing nation with the electoral process cannot be underestimated. It is very important that voter education commences on time for an election to be successful. Voter education is designed to ensure that voters are ready, willing, and able to participate in the electoral process in any nation. This involves election literacy, educational campaign and confidence that the electoral process is appropriate and effective in selecting their representatives through the electoral process. It thus becomes imperative to state that voters have confidence in the electoral process when they are properly educated about the procedures" (p.241).

[8] Describes voter education as the dissemination of information, materials and programmes designed to inform electorates about the specifics and mechanics of the voting process for a particular election. It is seen by [4] as the combination of activities to help voter make rational choices about candidates and ballot measures and then carry out those choices accurately, effectively and orderly when voting. It involves informing voters about the candidates, what a ballot looks like, how to use voting machines, where polling booths are located, how to register and how to cast their votes properly. [8] argues that voter education is a prerequisite for sustaining democracy because, through voter education, voter apathy can be eroded.

B. SOCIAL MEDIA

[9] notes that "the term social media refers to the wide range of Internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities" (p.1) [10] are thought to have one of the most accepted definitions of social media. To them, it is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation

and exchange of user-generated content" (p.61). This definition implies that social media "is a vital tool of different kinds of communication which is equipped with the ability to share information, mould opinion, connect individuals and communities and a tool of active participation" [11] The capacity of social media in comparison to mainstream media is summarized in [12]

Unlike traditional media, which offers a one-way experience (in which media outlets broadcast information for public consumption), social media offers a two-way interactive experience. Consumers of social media, unlike consumers of traditional media, can interact instantly and directly with either the originators of the authors of the proffered information. They can interact with each other too. The interaction and cross communication that social media makes possible is precisely what makes social media so world changing (p.1).

[13] add that social media in comparison to traditional media differs in that it allows users to actively engage in a communication process not only as information receivers but also as message creators because the online applications are designed to facilitate information sharing, knowledge distribution and opinion exchanges. A lot of organisations have adopted social media for their communication programmes. [14] aver that the use of social media has opened an additional channel of communication and its effectiveness in the organisation. It has improved collaboration between team members in the organisation resulting in a better outcome.

C. SOCIAL MEDIA AND VOTER EDUCATION

Mainstream media of communication have always been deployed for voter education. With the exponential growth of social media platforms, it has become inevitable that these platforms become channels for voter education. [1] Observes that the increasing popularity and availability of online social platforms clearly show that how people communicated and shared information have changed rapidly. Active social media platforms transcend national borders, span continents and allow users to access first-hand information from around the world. The public increasingly expects official electoral bodies and institutions to have an active presence and expects that information is presented and distributed through social media platforms. [2] advances that in modern democratic societies; social media is used by governments to involve citizens in decision making and by civil society to engage people on specific issues.

The rationale for social media usage in voter education is established in [1] who observes that

electoral management bodies need to reach voters wherever they are and young voters are particularly active on social platforms. Therefore, social media is also an effective tool in voter education efforts designed to ensure voters are all well-informed and can effectively exercise their voting rights. Social media has the potential to become a hugely valuable and effective voter education tool. [15] Posit that the participatory and interactive nature of social media makes it the medium of the moment as far as political participation is concerned.

[1] Avers that social media platforms are dominated by youth and youth play an active role in politics. Youths actively mobilize support for candidates and do the actual voting. Youths also get actively involved in election violence. This makes imperative to disseminate useful information to forestall incidences of electoral violence and manipulations. [1] goes on to suggest that methods used on social media platforms that are helpful include:

- Online quizzes
- Online polls
- Keeping pages open to allow followers to post or 'tweet' questions and comments
- Allowing users to create and comment on blog posts or articles
- Posting questions that encourage online debates
- Hosting information sharing or question/answer sessions
- Allowing users to post videos
- Using analysis software to identify keywords being used
- Monitoring social media platforms and developing immediate responses to issues of concern

One of the major characteristics of social media is conversationality. Conversationality is in stark contrast to the one-directional pattern of transmitting information offered by mainstream media. [16] is of the view that conversationality is the ideal feature of interactivity which inevitably means it is an important virtue of social media. Social Networking Sites like Facebook offer newsrooms communication components for conversations between users, microblogging tools like twitter and content communities like YouTube have comparatively more limited conversationality or two-way communication because of the core utilities and structures inherent in these social media. The measurement of conversationality is done through a thorough analysis of feedback between users.

D. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted content analysis as a research design. This was necessitated by the objectives of the study and the nature of the study which examined User Generated Content.

The population of the study comprised nonhuman subjects in the form of Tweets and Facebook posts.

For the six months studied, Facebook posts and Tweets from INEC Nigeria verified accounts totaling. The population of the study, therefore, was 859 Facebook Posts and Tweets.

The sample size for the study was 265. The figure was derived using Krejcie and Morgan predetermined sample size table which takes into account a given population and prescribes a suitable sample size. The systematic sampling technique was used. Interval skip of 3 aided in arriving at the sample size from the population.

The instrument for data collection was the coding sheet. Coding was emergent and a priori. Content categories were derived through a preliminary study and existing literature.

Units of analysis were Facebook Posts, Tweets and replies.

Content Categories

Category to determine voter education themes

1. Voter information: PVC collection, polling booths, how to ink and thumbprint.
2. Electoral system education: Nullification of votes, malpractices, violence, legal perspectives.
3. Offline voter education activities: All activities of INEC done offline but excerpts and reports posted on Facebook and Twitter.

E. CATEGORY TO DETERMINE INTERACTION

1. **Non-interactive** This was captured through messages that produced declarative communication, essentially one-way messages between

2. **Reactive.** This considered messages which produced responsive (reactive) communication. The messages were two-way directional and the receiver becomes a sender and reacts to the previous message. The message here focused only on the requested information and not beyond it.

3. Conversationality/interactivity

This covered posts that produced interactive communication. This is a two-way flow of messages between INEC and stakeholders with both taking turns to be sender and receiver. The messages here refer not only to the last thread but also to previous comments and encouraged the continuation of interaction and are not about any requested information.

Inter coder reliability

In calculating inter-coder reliability, [17] Kappa was used. The formula, which has the advantage of accounting for chance agreement between coders, is stated thus:

$$K = \frac{P_o - P_e}{1 - P_e} = 1 - \frac{1 - P_o}{1 - P_e}$$

Where:

P_o = The relative observed agreement between coders.

P_e = The hypothetical probability of chance agreement

The reliability co-efficient was 0.69 (See appendix)

The kappa coefficient was rated using [18] outline where the strength of the kappa coefficients is as follows:

0.01-0.20 slight

0.21-0.40 fair

0.41-0.60 moderate

0.61-0.80 substantial

0.81-1.00 almost perfect

Therefore, a co-efficient of 0.79 was deemed substantial

Data were analyzed using quantitative methods of analysis. Frequency and simple percentages were used.

F. Results: Table 1 Frequency of posts on INEC Nigeria Twitter and Facebook Accounts.

Data in Table shows Facebook and Twitter platforms of INEC Nigeria which were examined revealed an average of 4.3% messages on a daily basis.

Months	Tweets	Facebook posts	Total (daily average)
August 2018	63	54	117 (4)
September 2018	71	60	131 (4)
October 2018	88	41	129 (4)
November 2018	65	44	109 (3)
December 2018	93	80	173 (5)
January 2019	119	81	200 (6)
Total	499	360	360 (4.3)

G. Table 2 Voter education themes on INE Nigeria Facebook and Twitter platforms

Themes	Facebook	Twitter	Total (percentage)
Voter information	14	18	32 (12)
Electoral system education	59	26	65 (24)
Offline voter education reports	53	48	101 (38)
Other electoral matters	26	41	67 (26)
Total	132	133	265

As found in table 2, the dominant theme on Facebook and Twitter platform of INEC Nigeria were offline voter education reports. Voter information theme was low. Electoral system education was fair.

H. Table 3 Level of interaction by INEC Nigeria on Facebook and Twitter

Level of Interactivity	Facebook	Twitter	Total (Percentage)
Non-interactive	112	96	208 (78)
Reactive	20	37	57 (22)
Interactive	13	0	0
Total	132	133	265

In table 3, data presented shows that a significant percentage of posts on Facebook and Twitter platforms of INEC Nigeria were non-interactive. The table also reveals that there was reactive exchange of information though minimal.

I. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS:

A. Research question 1: What is the frequency of posts on Facebook and Twitter by INEC Nigeria?

Data obtained and presented in table 1 shows the INEC Nigeria posted an average of 4.3 messages daily on its Facebook and Twitter Platforms. The figure can be adjudged to be considerably good enough and boasts of adequate information for the electoral period. INEC Nigeria can be said to have fared well in terms of the frequency of its posts on Facebook and Twitter. The actor network theory is relevant here. As observed by [3] observes that the actor-network theory proposes a thematic shift in emphasis away from the centrality of the human subject and simply regards the human subject as

another actor in a network. INEC using social media for voter education validates this theory.

B. Research question 2: What are the voter education themes on INEC Nigeria Facebook and Twitter Platforms?

Data in table 2 shows that INEC Nigeria's Facebook and Twitter platforms were dominated by offline voter education activities. Following closely was other electoral matters and electoral system education. The least theme was voter information.

This shows that INEC Nigeria mostly used Facebook and Twitter to inform online followers of its voter education programmes. Voter education in itself was fair.

[2] advances that in modern democratic societies; social media is used by governments to involve citizens in decision making and by civil society to engage people on specific issues.

The rationale for social media usage in voter education is established by [1] who observes that electoral management bodies need to reach voters wherever they are and young voters are particularly active on social platforms. Therefore, social media is also an effective tool in voter education efforts designed to ensure voters are all well-informed and can effectively exercise their voting rights.

C. Research question 3: What is the level of two-way interaction on Facebook and Twitter by INEC Nigeria?

Regarding the level of interaction on Facebook and Twitter by INEC Nigeria, data obtained and presented in table 3 shows a preponderance of non-interactive communication in which posts by INEC Nigeria mainly used these platforms for dissemination of information. These posts hardly initiated extensive information exchange. Data also points to reactive communication where messages are responded on the basis of the requested information and not beyond it. There is complete absence of interactivity which forms the main thrust of this study. Interactivity here implies an exchange of messages by INEC Nigeria and its followers to the extent where there engagement leading to understanding of voting and critical electoral matters.

V. CONCLUSION

The study has established the presence of INEC Nigeria on social media platforms specifically on Facebook, a social networking site and on Twitter a micro blogging medium. These tools are used for voter education. The study concludes that INEC Nigeria has failed in utilizing these platforms as channels for engaging its audiences.

RECOMMENDATION

INEC Nigeria must engage its audiences through Facebook and Twitter. This transcends using these platforms as a media for disseminating information. Rather, these platforms should be adopted for open conversations on electoral matters.

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