

SOCIAL MEDIA AS CIVIC SPACE FOR POLITICAL LITERACY AMONG OLDER ADULT CITIZENS IN PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *While ubiquitous in everyday use, in reality social media usage by the older adult is not very common and in particular in the teaching of civic duties and electioneering campaign. The purpose of this study was to find out what social media platform older adults commonly use to acquire political literacy in urban indigenous communities in Nigeria; what political literacies do older adults acquire through the various social media. The study was conducted during the 2019 general election in Nigeria using the questionnaire survey. The study shows that facebook and WhatsApp are the most used social media for political literacy during electioneering period; that greater number of older adults uses the social media to know party symbols; names of political parties, read party manifestos, that social media provides the civic space for older adults to acquire, update and retool their skills for the performance of their civic duties and obligation as senior citizens and that intercultural and interreligious dialogue is not mostly accessed by the older adults as part of their political literacy education. It was concluded that literate older adults are virtually visible in the social media and that in respect of gender gap, that men are more visible in social media in accessing and acquiring political literacy through the social media than women.*

KEYWORDS: political literacy, social media, older adults, learning.

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty first century there are two discernable significant social trends: the increasing explosion in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and increasing aging population. According to the United Nation, the populations of all countries are aging as a result of decreasing mortality resulting from improved health care and declining fertility. It was predicted that the world population of the older adult will increase by 56% by 2030 and 2050 (Zhang, Kaufman, Schell, Salgado, Seah, & Jeremic, 2017). In Nigeria, whether the older adult population is also increasing by this percentage is not certain as there is no correct demographic data of the older adults. In Nigeria the older adults are regarded as elders and because of their level of maturity and experience are expected to play important role in the political arena. Until the passage of the 'Not too young to run bill' in 2018 the political space is said to be dominated by older adults often referred to as 'old breed'. That the political space is dominated by older adult with most elective positions and appointments given to them is a subject of debate. Deciding who is or might be an older adult is problematic. A simple assertion based on chronological age of 60 years and above is not sufficient (Phillipson, 1998). In most cases scholars emphasize physiological decline associated with getting older. Critical educational gerontology rejects such functionalist notions of

ageing and asserts a more nuanced, holistic understanding of the ageing process (Findsen, 2005; Phillipson, 2000). However, it must be noted that within and across cultural groups that is in different societies ageing is likely to be differentially experienced. However, Eurostat cited in Thalhammer (2014) regard older media users as people between the age of 55 and 74.

In defining older adult, the different experiences and problems they encounter often come to the fore. In this perspective, it has been observed that the most common social problem of the older adult is social alienation. Vitman-Schar (2018) observed that the marginalization of older adults is prevalent in many countries and this is as a result of negative attitudes and stereotypes against them which may hinder their social integration in the society. The result of their social integration problem is the likelihood of their low political participation and this may be as result of their level of political literacy. Political literacy is a predictor of the level of political participation. It can be argued that the lower the level of political literacy the lower the enthusiasm and level of political participation. Also when older adults as elders obtain adequate political literacy skill, they can think critically, interpret information and make informed political decision and so play the elders role effectively in the political arena. Political literacy is different from education as one may be well educated and at the same time have no knowledge of the political system or make poor and uninformed political decision. Political literacy here implies the understanding, knowledge and information the people have about their political system. One who is knowledgeable and well informed of his or her political system and governance process is politically literate. Political literacy thus is a key to political participation. Shizha and Abdi (2013) assert that political literacy gained through conscientization is critical to engaging political elites and empowering the masses. And so for the older adult citizens to participate in the political process they must have the necessary information, knowledge and understanding of why, when and how to participate. But the question is where they get these information, knowledge and understanding.

In the era of globalization and ICT, social media tends to play an important role in the dissemination of information of all kinds ranging from education, health, business, technology, fashion, agriculture and politics. Social media involves the use of various technological tools and methods for sharing and discussing information. Social media is a way to transmit or distribute information to a broad audience where users have an opportunity to create and distribute content. Lachapelle (2011) observed that the use of social media has become a significant force in political organizing. For instance the Arab spring which spread through the Mediterranean was ignited and sustained by social media. According to Shizha et al (2013) well developed media that reaches the masses can be a very important vehicle for adult political education and development. A growing body of literature now describes the use of social media as a tool in promoting political action and democracy (Coleman, 2009; Davis, 2005 and Hais, & Morley 2009). In spite of the ubiquity of ICT in all facets of life, there have been amazingly little that have been written in the use of social media for political literacy among older adults in urban indigenous communities in Africa and Nigeria in particular. The older adults are not considered to be of digital age and internet compliance, yet most of the older adults use various ICT related facilities like cell phone and computer particularly those in urban indigenous communities. This category of people is called 'digital immigrants'. In the urban indigenous communities political literacy programmes have proliferated as a means of promoting democracy and deepening the culture of democracy in

Nigeria particularly as the country tries to deepen its democracy and conduct a free and fair election. The questions is what are the various social media which the older adults use through which they can gain political literacy and what are the kinds of political literacy they acquire through the various social media. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the various social media through which the older adults access political literacy.
2. Examine what political literacy the older adults gain through the social media.

On the basis of these objectives the key questions explored in this study are:

1. What are the various social media which the older adults in the urban indigenous communities access political literacy?
2. What political literacy do older adults gain through the social media?

To achieve these objectives the study was carried out in three urban indigenous settlements in Port Harcourt South-South Nigeria. The study hope to provide insight on how the older adults learn political values and skills for their effective participation as senior citizens and consequently hope to fill the gap in literature on the use of social media for political literacy among senior citizens in a state.

Social Media as Civic Space

Social Media have been conceptualized in different ways and has various appellations such as Web 2.0. Web 2.0, refers to a myriad of web applications that provide interactive information sharing and collaboration via the internet using a variety of means such as text, images, audio, and video. It uses internet technologies that make it possible for people to create material and to share it with others whenever they want (Williamson, 2013). With the use of Social Media, individuals by themselves or with others can create, organize, change and edit material and information and pass it on via the media (NARA, cited in Gunnlaugsdottir, 2017). The media play a major role in every democracy, either informing people about the issues that impact their lives and the activities the government, or anesthetizing them by reframing or making up news to support the status quo or special interest groups and elites.

There are various Social Media platforms some of which includes Facebook, messenger, Twitter, LinkedIn, You Tub, WhatsApp, Flickr, Instagram, Google+, reddit, and so on. The popularity of these social media depends on the country. However, Facebook, on the other hand, is the most popular Social Media from an international point of view according to Gunnlaugsdottir, (2017). The users of Social Media are many and the expansion has been rapid. Already by the end of 2006 Facebook had 12 million users (Scott & Jacka, 2011) and by the end of 2013 they were over 1.2 billion users (Sedghi, 2014). Nigeria is one of the largerst user of the Facebook. This was acknowledge when the Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg visited Nigeria.

The social media which currently drive the new media have provided a new public sphere which Habermas (1996) characterized as the civic space where the citizens come together to debate, decide, express and shared concerns on issues. This is why Matthew (2016) sees the social media as new online spaces where people have opportunities for discourse and civic activity of communities. The growth of social media over the last decade, through blogs and sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter has helped to increase and accentuate ICT as a tool for promoting

political literacy. Most political organizations post their profiles and activities online, while political parties put forth their programmes and manifestos and make issues based debate online which are shared to the electorates or can be accessed freely by the electorates. International campaigns on Twitter and other Social media have increased the ability of modern ICTs to develop transnational networks around specific issues and bring such issues into the public domain in nation states. According to Yerbury (2012) the Facebook and other social media have created a network of citizens who engaged in social movement and are capable of creating new communities around issues. This means that the public domain is changing, with new ways for people to share information and make it public, engaging a selected or broader audience altering the basis of political participation in a democracy. With the social media the level of moderate, widespread publicness is unprecedented. There are more layers of publicness available to those using networked media than ever before. As a result, there is a paradigm shift in people's relationship to public life.

This new unprecedented publicness provides opportunities for a wide range of engagement at different levels: from the sharing of political campaign photos and videos on Instagram; to sharing political party documentaries and profiles of candidates on Facebook; to sharing hyperlocal news and campaigning through a Facebook page and developing community leadership (Williams et al., 2014). It can also be added that the electoral body transit information on the procedure of voting and the electoral guideline through their Facebook account and other social media. Most political elites and political institutions all have Facebook, Instagram and Twitter account. These accounts provide the platform in which developing and trending news are made known to the public. These accounts also provide the avenue for the public to reach these institutions and political gladiators. For many, new technologies are offering new opportunities for local activism. The emergence of the Twitter service enables users to send and read other users' messages of text-based posts made up of up to 140 characters called tweets. Users may subscribe or "follow" other author's tweets. This service is increasingly available and integrated in Smartphone technology. Twitter has gained popularity rapidly to the extent that nearly all political elites and public office holders have this account. They have people who often follow their account. video and image sharing sites including YouTube (youtube.com) and Flickr (flickr.com), virtual world applications including Second Life (secondlife.com) and on-line mapping resources such as Google Earth (earth.google.com) and Google Maps (maps.google.com). Each of these applications can provide political literacy in myriad ways such as providing political messages containing important and necessary political norms, skills, values and information.

There are several issues with the use of social Media for political literacy. One major problem is the issues of accessibility. Women continue to have less connectivity. Although women are often seen as the users of the latest cell phone, however, most of them can hardly access or make use of the social media for the political literacy. This perhaps may be related to the fact that women are more prone to other uses of these media such health, fashion business and catering. Another major issue on accessibility is the cost of data and the lack of steady supply of electricity. It has also been observed that the social media can also fuel hatred, atrocities falsehood in a multi-party system. The social media can politicize information.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional survey was conducted in three urban indigenous settlements in Port Harcourt within the period when ban on the political campaign was lifted for the 2019 general election in Nigeria. Specifically, we conducted the survey in the month of November 2018 to February 2019 which was the epicenter of campaign activity for the 2019 State and National elections. The study was conducted in three communities. These are Rumuolumeni, Abuloma and Ogunabali. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire designed by the researchers tagged 'Social Media for Political Literacy among Older Adult Citizens' (SMPLOAC). The instrument contained two sections; Section A entails the personal data of the respondents, while Section B focuses on the two research questions addressed in the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured question. The instrument was administered randomly to three hundred 900 older adults that own mobile phone with internet facilities in the three communities where the study was conducted. Note in Nigeria estimated active mobile phone users as at 2018 was 146 million people out of which 25 to 40 million people are smart phone users (Holst, 2019). Prior to the administration of the instrument, the instrument was validated by two experts on political sociology and adult education respectively using face and content validity. A pretest was conducted using ten older adults in Rumuola community within the Port Harcourt Metropolis as a pilot study. The test retest method was adopted to determine the reliability of the instrument and we used the Pearson product moment correlation statistics. The reliability index obtained in the calculation of the two raw scores obtained in the test retest was 0.73. The data collected were analyzed using percentage and ranking order.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The instrument for data collection was administered to mobile phone owners in the three urban indigenous communities in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The analysis of respondents demographic characteristics showed that 62% of the respondents are within the age range of 60-65 years, 30% of the respondents are within the age range of 66-69 years and 8% of the respondents are from 70 years and above. 64% of the respondents are female while 46% are male. In respect of the educational qualification, 18% of the respondents are school certificate holders, 35% of the respondents hold either OND or NCE, 36% holds HND or B.Sc, while 11% of the respondents hold a post-graduate degree. In respect of the occupation of the respondents, 57% of the respondents are retired from either public service or the private sector, 38% are retired but self-employed, while 15% of the respondents are unemployed. The educational demographic characteristics is perhaps the reason why behind the massive usage of social media for political literacy among the study cohort of the older adults. Furthermore, the study shows that retired people sources for political education through the social media platform. The further shows that fewer women than men use the social media for political literacy. This finding is contrary to findings of Thalhammer (2014) that gender gap increases with age with women at old age having more usage of ICT.

Analysis of the Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the various social media which the older adults in the urban indigenous communities access political literacy?

Table 1. The percentage of Older Adults that uses the various social media for Political Education

Social Media	No. of Respondents	%	Rank
Facebook	897	99.66	1 st
Messenger	312	34.66	4 th
Twitter	195	21.66	6 th
LinkedIn	156	17.33	7 th
You Tube	273	30.33	5 th
WhatsApp	702	78.0	2 nd
Flicker	117	13.0	9 th
Instagram	143	15.88	8 th
Google+/Hangout	387	43.0	3 rd
Reddit	Nile	0	10

Table shows percentage of the older adults sample in the three urban communities that uses the various the most common social media. The table shows that Facebook and WhatsApp ranked the highest media with Facebook having 897 respondents representing 99.66% of the respondents ranking as their major social media for obtaining and sharing political information. WhatsApp ranked second with 702 respondents representing 78.0% of the respondents. Google+ ranked third having 387 respondents representing 43.0% followed by Messenger as the fourth with 312 respondents representing 34.66. You Tube ranked fifth with 273 respondents representing 30.33% of the respondents; Twitter ranked sixth with 195 respondents representing 21.66% of the respondents followed by LinkedIn with 156 respondents' usage representing 17.33% of the respondents. Instagram is ranked eight with 143 respondents' usage representing 15.88%, while Flicker and Reddit ranked ninth and tenth respectively. No one uses Redidit among the respondents. The study shows that facebook is the most used social media for political literacy.

This perhaps was due to the primary purpose for which it was created. Facebook was created primarily to link individuals and organizations into various networks of common interests and association (Lachapelle, (2011). During the electioneering period political parties and campaign organizations as well as the electoral body do use the facebook as the strategy or medium to share information, building relationship and partnership, educate the people and create political linkages. Older adults with facebook account do regularly catch a fun of campaign footage, political update, and trending debates. The finding of this study further affirm the popularity of facebook as the most and widely used social media not only among the young digital natives but among the digital migrants like the older adults. The study also shows that WhatsApp ranked the second most commonly used social media for political literacy among the older adults. This perhaps is because WhatsApp share similar features with facebook where there is possibility of group chat, sharing of information, videos, footage, and online calls. The WhatsApp social media brings together didactic content, participation, debate, and dialogue through internal and external social network. With the active participation of the older adults in the WhatsApp platform the finding of this study affirm the assertion of Habermas (1996) that the new media driven by the social media provides

civic space where the citizens come together to debate, decide, express and shared concerns on issues of *political concern* (emphasis my). The study further corroborates the assertion of Matthew (2016) that the social media is a new online space where people have opportunities to discourse and engage in civic activity of their community and nation state.

The study shows that google+/hangout ranked third. Google+ carries a wide range of information that people can sort for at anytime for collaborative studies and hangout provides live communication. YouTube ranked fifth, followed by Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Flickr and Reddit. These social media are plausible space for political literacy among older adults who could not attained community education programmes on political education organized by electoral body, political parties and other agencies and Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) on political advocacy. These social media space educate and entertain as well as democratize political literacy process to ensure active and enthusiastic participation of people in the democratic space. Most political elites, political parties, the electoral commission NGOs on election, democracy and good governance advocacy all have Twitter handle, Instagram and most likely Flickr and Reddit. These social media accounts provide the platform in which developing and trending political news are made known to the public. The electoral commission, political parties and their candidates post vital information for the public consumption through their Twitter handle and Instagram. The older adults as electorates follow the Tweets of the electoral commissions, political parties and their candidates. Videos clips and photographs of political rallies and campaign jingles are posted on the YouTube and Instagram. Consequently older adults as electorates could view these videos, photographs and campaign jingles.

Research Question 2: What political literacy do older adults gain through the social media?

Table 2: The percentage of Older Adults that learn about various forms of political literacy through the social media

Forms/Issues	Response Options			
	Yes	%	No	%
Names of Political Parties	819	91.0	78	8.66
Programmes and Manifestos of political parties	705	78.33	195	21.66
Campaigns events of political parties	588	65.33	312	34.66
Electoral Act	542	60.22	358	39.77
Electoral Guideline	482	53.55	418	46.44
Political party symbols	649	72.11	251	27.88
National news of major political activities	329	36.55	571	63.44
State news of major political activities	413	45.88	487	54.11
Processes of excising franchise	358	39.77	542	60.22
The structure of government in the country	432	48.00	468	52.00
Duties and responsibilities of the citizens	367	40.77	533	59.22
Intercultural dialogue	391	43.44	509	59.55
Interreligious dialogue	245	27.22	655	72.77

Table 2 shows the various political information and skills that older adults can acquire through the social media. Table 2 shows that 91% of the respondents get to know the names of political parties through the social media space. Nigeria has over 50 registered political parties out of which only three or four are popular among which are the All People Congress (APC), People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Social Democratic Party (SDP). With the number of registered political parties it would have been impossible for people to know all the political parties. But with a click of the button on the tablet, phone one will be able to see the names of all the political parties registered and perhaps their symbols, manifestos and programmes. The table shows that 78.33% of the respondents read party programmes and manifestos through the social media platform; and 72.11% of the respondents know political parties' symbols through the social media platform. Programmes and manifestos are important instruments of political campaign to solicit for vote and tell the electorate what if voted into power a party and its candidate will do and its guiding principles of governance. This provides the basis for the electorate to make their choice and to hold parties and their candidate accountable when voted into power. The older adults constitute an important segment of the voting population; they may not be as active as the young adult voting population and so may not participate actively in all electoral campaign activities. So the social media provide an important platform to reach out to them. The study reveals that greater number of the study population use the social media to know party symbols. By this the exercise of franchise is made easy for them as the ballot papers used for voting are based on party symbols not pictures of the candidates.

Table 2 shows that 65.33% of the respondents view campaign activities through the social media. Most political parties do post their videos clips and photographs of campaign rallies and campaign jingles on the YouTube and Instagram. These platforms provide the civic space for the older adults to participate in the electioneering process. It is also worth of note that political debate among aspirants mostly the presidential, governorship and senatorial candidates where transmitted live on facebook, and YouTube and some issues arising from the debates were tweeted in their Twitter handles. The study shows that the older adults follows the tweets, watch some of the debates online through the social media and also participated in the electioneering process as virtual participants. The electoral commission and political parties all have various social media accounts like the facebook, Twitter handle, and Instagram. These platforms serve as the medium of transmitting information to the public and it provides a two way communication between these institutions and the public. The electoral commission uploads the electoral guideline and electoral act online for public to access. Table 2 study shows that 60.22% of the respondents access the electoral act online while 53.55% access the electoral guideline online. The implication of this is that most of the older adults become well informed electorates through the social media platform.

The study also reveals that on the governance structure, most of the older adults do not know it through the social media. Table 2 shows that 48% of the respondents only read about the structure of government through the social media. Similarly, only 40.77% of the respondents read about their duties and responsibilities of the citizens. Such duties include among others payment of taxes and levies, obedience to law, voting at election, assisting in the prevention of crime, loyalty to the county. These are values and skills taught in the secondary school in government and civic education. The older adults can only update and retool their knowledge through the non-formal

and informal learning. The social media provides the civic space for them to acquire, update and retool their skills for the performance of their civic duties and obligation as senior citizens.

Surprisingly, the study shows that most of older adults do not access national news of major political activities. Table 2 shows that 329 respondents representing 36.55% do access national news through the social media while 571 respondents representing 63.44% do not access it through the social media. The table also shows that 413 respondents representing 45.88% access state news of major political activities through the social media. The implantation of this is that most elderly people get political news as it breaks. News is always trending in the social media and they are more prompt and timely as the news break as compared to the traditional media like the newspaper and radio. The implication of this finding is that the older adults are not often current and abreast of political news.

Also the study reveals that there is low knowledge of intercultural and interreligious dialogue through the social media among the older adults. 391 respondents representing 43.44% of the respondents have intercultural dialogue through the social media while 509 respondents representing 59.55% of the respondents do not engage in intercultural dialogue through the social media. In respect of interreligious dialogue, the study shows that 245 respondents representing 27.22% engage in interreligious dialogue through the social media, while 655 respondents representing 72.77% of the respondents do not engage in interreligious dialogue through the social media. The implication of these findings is that older adults are not actively involved resolving interreligious and intercultural conflicts in the political arena. The study also shows that intercultural and interreligious dialogue is not mostly accessed by the older adults as part of their political literacy education. By extension with the low knowledge of intercultural and interreligious dialogue the older adults may not be able to educate the young adult electorates the culture of dialogue, religious and political tolerance. Older adults teaching young adults and the reverse are what is called intergenerational learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The study shows that older adults though not digital natives own and use various social media accounts. Prominent among them are the Facebook and WhatsApp. It can be concluded that literate older adults are virtually visible in the social media and that in respect of gender gap, that men are more visible in social media in accessing and acquiring political literacy through the social media. The study also shows that social media is a civic space for political literacy among older adults, that through the social media the older adults are virtual participants in the electioneering process. From the findings it can also be concluded that older adults are more interested in accessing information on political and electioneering issues through the social media than issues on governance structure, duties and responsibilities of citizens, intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Based on the findings the following recommendations are made, that political parties employ more social media platforms for electioneering activities to reach out to the political unreached but

educated; that electoral bodies should promote free and faire election through the social media; that older adults be taught more ICT skills through intergenerational learning.

A limitation of this study is that the number of older adults surveyed is not large. However, it should be noted that those surveyed in each of the communities where those believed to be in the best position to provide information. It is expected that the result of this research will clarify the use of social media as civic space for political education among older adults during an electioneering period. The result of this study will help political parties, electoral agency, NGOs involved in advocacy for good governance and free and faire election in planning campaign activities, advocacy, conducting political debates and informing the electorates. In this regard agencies can use this study to determine what social media to use to reach the older adult electorates. The research adds valuable information to a better understanding of the use of social media for electioneering campaign, general political education (civic education) and older adults learning sites for political literacy. It is hoped that further studies on older adults learning through the social media will focus on health, Vocational and life skills for retirees and religious education.

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