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ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN MOBILISING YOUTHS FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA: AN ENUMERATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This paper examines the role digital media play in the participation of Nigerian youths in socio-political issues. This is against the backdrop of long standing self-exclusion by youths themselves from issues affecting the polity and governance of this nation, Nigeria. The paper uses secondary data from library literature, which were content-analysed for views and opinions to finally arrive at a decision concerning the subject matter. The paper argues that digital technologies, and especially those that allow online social interaction, may enhance forms of political engagement. There are possibilities that engagement can further lead to citizen mobilisation and participation in some forms of civic life from the local level to the supranational. The paper concludes that, the widespread attraction for the social media may be attributed to the fact that this is the only place where the common man and youths can make their voices heard since the mainstream media may not be predisposed to granting audience to divergent ideas from youths or other people not specially recognised as opinion leaders. Finally, the paper suggests that there should be improved media literacy on the part of avid digital media users and activists, in order to make the best use of the innovation for socio-political participation and reduce incidences of false or, malicious information going viral and affecting the society negatively.

Keywords: Digital media, political participation, governance, youths

Introduction

Plethora of studies have shown that electronic participation (e-participation) of citizens in politics enabled by the invention of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the Internet has transformed representative democracy and forms of political deliberation and government decision making (Sanford & Rose, 2007). This is

incomparable to broadcast media that widely transmits news and information to citizens and therefore produce 'one-way conversation' (Postman, 1986), the Internet enhances interactive political discourses and inclusive citizens' engagement and participation in politics. By initiating peer-to-peer content creation and sharing and creative expression, Web 2.0 and particularly social networking technologies, have the way for new forms of democracy by which citizens can now connect with each other and with their elected representatives and engage in political dialogues and government consultations (Tambouris, Macintosh, et al., 2007). Also, study has indicated that new technological inventions are promoting the idea of electronic public sphere that epitomises the ideal of a free, non-coercive, inclusive and meaningful participation by citizens in politics and civic affairs (Cecez-Kecmanovic, Kennan & Hull, 2010).

A study by Bimber and Copeland (2013) explored online political communication since the early 1990s, and an important attention has been paid to how digital technologies offer pathways to participation. The study has highlighted that digital technologies, and especially those that allow online social interaction, may enhance forms of political engagement. There are possibilities that engagement can further lead to citizen mobilisation and participation in some forms of civic life from the local level to the supranational. However, political participation on social media has been discounted and tagged as clicktivism (Morozov, 2012), and adjudged to be lacking in meaning or significance, others hint that political participation is rather multidimensional but not be understood as one-dimensional, because it encompasses a range of activities (Koc-Michalska, Lilleker, Surowiec, & Baranowski, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

According to Cecez-Kecmanovic, Kennan and Hull (2010), the use of various technologies of ICT, the Internet and Web 2.0 for political participation and engagement has an unimaginable appeal to young citizens. Though disenchanted with traditional politics, but well-versed in ICT and immersed in the Internet in their mundane lives, young people are at the helm and driving force behind online activism. Yet this online activism seems to be separated from traditional modes of political engagement that is centred on political parties and governments. A disengaged youth view emphasises dwindling youth motivation and interest in public affairs, government and voting in elections, escalated by failed trust in official mass media and political institutions. This collapse in democratic participation at a point when the Internet is rendering an unimaginable opportunities for electronic communication and unlimited consultation is deemed as unfathomable dilemma of the information age. The disengaged youth thesis is however questionable because these young people actually engage in political participation in a non-traditional ways through online activities.

For instance, youth-led activism through social networking, via entertainment websites and campaigning against some government policies that they are in disagreement with,

are new and emerging forms of political action that are changing politics in the current era (Cecez-Kecmanovic, Kennan & Hull, 2010). Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this paper aims at arguing for and discussing the role that digital media could play in mobilizing the acclaimed disengaged youth for political participation in Nigeria.

Objectives of the paper

Generally, this paper aims at discussing the role of digital media in mobilizing the youths for political participation in Nigeria. It will provide an enumeration of the inherent concepts of digital media and its roles in mobilizing the youths for political participation. However, specifically, the paper proffers answers to the following questions: What is the level of youth awareness concerning online information for political e-participation? How often do they access information online? What is the level of youth participation in digital media discussions on socio-political affairs? In what ways do the youth seek and get information online? How often do the youth participate in e-demonstrations online?

Literature Review

Digital Media

According to IGI Global (2019), digital media includes any format or device used to convey content using digital signals. Digital media is digitised content that can be transmitted over the Internet or computer networks. This can include text, audio, video, and graphics. This means that news from a TV network, newspaper, magazine, etc. that is presented on a Web site or blog can fall into this category. Most digital media are based on translating analog data into digital data.

Relating from several other studies, Garcia-Ruano, Pacheco and Suazo (2013) mentioned that research in communication and information technologies in the information era has furthered access to and effective use of new digital media that play a crucial role in effectively networking for mobilisation purposes.

According to Burkell, Fortier, Wong and Simpson (2014), the information sharing emanates from the context of online social networks that are far more extensive compared to their offline counterparts, incorporating much more numbers of weak ties. In support of this notion, Cardoso, Lapa and Di Fátima (2016) study found that among the five most used features were sending messages, posting, chatting, and making likes and commentaries on other people's walls. Those uses display a myriad of communication activities aimed at interpersonal communication and one-to-many communication, constituting instances of social media appropriation in order to enhance larger social networks, which comprised both strong and weak ties (Cardoso, Lapa & Di Fátima, 2016).

Social network sites are ambivalent tools, given that their appropriation allows a "building space of collective dissent" (Di Fátima, 2013, p. 13). This happens especially when traditional media do not perform their role according to journalistic criteria. This

leads to the question of whether the subject who is politically mobilised through social media can be perceived as nonconformist, especially when comparing news consumption through traditional media with news and content sharing on social media. Although for Fuchs (2014), social media can also be regarded as conducive to conformity, his argument relies extensively on the ownership of digital platforms by powerful corporations and in the characteristics of those platforms. Less attention is paid in the novel participatory modes of appropriation of emerging media. Moreover, if we assume that there is an emerging networked communication model (Cardoso, 2007) that is different from mass communication processes, we cannot simply transpose the Frankfurtian critiques of the culture industry and traditional conformity establishing to the new media reality (Cited in Cardoso, Lapa & Di Fátima, 2016).

However, networked communication and ICT usage do not necessarily lead to effective mobilisation. Garcia-Ruano, Pacheco and Suazo (2013) cited the study of Cartier, Castells and Qiu (2005) who reported that mobile phones allowed networks that enhanced economic opportunities for immigrants, however these benefits did not culminate into benefit gain political power because the immigrants were not at all linked to the state's modernisation policies that promotes assertion of shared experiences. Thus, it cannot be concluded that the use of communication technologies may enable empowerment of peripheral rural populations to mobilise power (Garcia-Ruano, Pacheco & Suazo, 2013).

Political Mobilisation

Nojumi (2002) defines mass mobilisation as a method through which a centralised political organisation attempts to implement widespread changes in a society. The aim of this method is to create a state of progress and achievement in the social, economic, and political patterns of a nation. This can be characterized as political intervention in the process of the normal daily life of a society for the sake of a higher standard of living and nation building. The political incentive of mass mobilisation is to create a massive force that speeds up the social development by changing the behavioral environment of people. These changes cause the social, economic, and political systems of a nation to take shape differently. Economic, social, and political mobilisations are three important factors that affect mass mobilisation (Nojumi, 2002).

According to Indian Institute of Legal Studies (2019), political mobilisation has been applied, especially, to the studies of social movements, national movements, rebellion, revolution and electoral politics. It is also applied to the study of "populism" which refers to any political movements which seeks to mobilise people as individuals rather than as member of particular socio-economic groups, against a state which is considered to be controlled either by vested interest or too powerful in itself.

Political mobilisation is purposive; it has a goal. Effective political mobilisation depends on the range of resources that have to be mobilised by groups and the way in which such resources are deployed, and the actions of the state authority to limit such resources.

Politically relevant resources are: education and the access it gives to information; a particular social outlook or ideology which defines a social or a political issue and problem in terms of right and wrong; and offers a guide for action to redress the wrong; leadership; money and the ability it gives to afford time for political activity, communication networks, symbol; commitment of the participant to the cause. All the factors are seen crucial in the success or failure of political mobilisation to achieve its goal (Indian Institute of Legal Studies, 2019).

Political mobilisation is one of the basic elements of a living democracy and may be catalyst of democracy and change in authoritarian regime. It played crucial role in historic revolutions and anti-colonial national movement. It has been a crucial factor in various social movement in modern times. Mass mobilisation was also used by extreme right reactionaries. Fascism in Italy and Germany came to exist by mobilising the masses. It belonged to an era of a democratic and popular politics which traditional reactionaries deplored. Fascism glorified in the mobilisation of masses, and maintained it symbolically in the form of public theatre (Indian Institute of Legal Studies, 2019).

Youths' Political Participation

Cecez-Kecmanovic, Kennan and Hull (2010) reported that, young people (between 9-18) are often perceived as "apprentice" or "incomplete citizens" or "citizens-in-the-making." Their participation in politics and civic affairs is often viewed as a privilege rather than a right. This is usually based on perceptions that young people are not yet capable of participating and on uncertainty about appropriate ways for them to participate. As a result much of the youth participation literature has a narrow definition of participation as involvement in community, cultural, voluntary or educational opportunities. Even in government sponsored "Youth Roundtables" there is no commitment or requirement for government to act upon the recommendations of participants. There is a perception that young people have become disengaged from political processes and other civic affairs (Bennett, 2008). Evidence for this is cited in the reluctance of young people to vote in elections and the rising age of membership of political parties. Recent attitude surveys reveal young people distrust politicians and political processes (Loader, 2007). It is reported that in Canada, the United States, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, that young people are less likely to vote than their older compatriots (Archer & Coletto, 2007, as cited in Cecez-Kecmanovic, Kennan & Hull, 2010).

Youth culture is heterogeneous and contextualised in use of new media which can be seen to both facilitate and inhibit democratic participation (Vromen, 2007). Youth online participation, the use of the Internet and especially new social media technologies raise many issues for practice and research. Among the key issues is the understanding of the nature of online participation and the desired and actual degree of engagement in consultative and deliberative processes, to which we turn next (Cecez-Kecmanovic, Kennan & Hull, 2010):

Theoretical Background

This sub-section discusses the theory of *e-participation* on which the study is anchored.

Theory of e-participation

According to Lourenço and Costa (2007) both proponents of the theory of e-participation. The theory of e-participation is defined as an area of application of ICTs in order to support citizens' engagement in the process of policy-making through deliberation and active decision-making initiatives. In spite of being a rather new area of research, e-participation has already been object of a vast number of scientific studies. They posited that the e-participation enables citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives. Therefore, e-participation meets the needs of both citizens and governments. In one way, it provides citizens with enhanced instruments for the access to information and political issues that are debated, discussed and legislated, and thus satisfies their requirements in being heard and involved in the democratic process. In the other way, it provides governments with mechanisms for development of new forms of promoting and encouraging public consultation. Studies (cite) have indicate that the main focus in this area is concentrated over a citizen and the way to motivate, engage and keep him/her involved in order to achieve strong public participation in the decision making processes, promoting more efficient society and government support. The benefits that the traditional participation gains with the ICTs introduction are unquestionable, as those enable both government and citizens with the necessary tools to promote effective decision making processes (Cited in Fedotova, Teixeira & Alvelosa, 2012).

Participants: The different participants involved in a public participation process can be identified as: the sponsor, the facilitator, associated official entities, contributors and observers. A public participation process begins when someone or some entity decides to promote a citizens' debate on an issue of public interest. Typically, this entity will be an Official Local Authority, a Citizens' Association or NGO, and it will be referred to as the sponsor. It is the sponsor's responsibility to provide the necessary framework for the participation process. It is the facilitator's responsibility to provide extensive technical and task support including, for instance, blocking "inappropriate" contributions and participants. The credibility of both sponsor and facilitator is very important to ensure that the democratic nature of the participation process is maintained and that there is no censorship. Access to relevant information is a pre-requisite for engaging in deliberation. Therefore, as many official entities as possible (or their political representatives) should be assembled, not only to answer any questions that may arise but also to provide the documents and data necessary to support the discussion process. All citizens are potential observers or contributors to the public participation process. However, those that actually want to contribute with their opinions and proposals (contributors) need to register. Nevertheless, to avoid problems such as evaluation apprehension, all contributions are

presented to others strictly anonymously. Contributors are, in fact, the key participants in the deliberation process and therefore the two terms will be used without distinction (Lourenço & Costa, 2007, as cited in Fedotova, Teixeira & Alvelosa, 2012).

Contributions: There are several ways a contributor may intervene in the public participation process. The most usual way is to submit a text item with proposals for policies and actions or comments (viewpoints, arguments, rationales or positions) about a certain issue. Within a text item, every reference to a specific document or to specific data should be accompanied by the relevant support documents (such as scientific articles, research reports, plans and maps, statistics or budget figures), which constitute another type of contribution. Alternatively, it is possible to make a request for a document that any participant may afterwards respond to by submitting the relevant document. Finally, any participant may pose questions directly to other participants and answer those questions addressed to him/her. The text item is the centrepiece of the whole deliberation process. It is composed of a title, one or more chapters (and sub-chapters) and a list of keywords. Each chapter is composed of a title and a number of paragraphs which may include, besides the text itself, a list of references to the support documents. To limit the inclusion of low interest (or even not understandable) text items in the process without compromising its democratic nature, it is required that each text item should be endorsed by a sufficient number of contributors. Each text item has also an author (contributor of the original text item, a list of co-authors (who have enhanced the original text item through collaborative writing) and a list of subscribers. A contributor may have different roles with respect to different text items. The author of a text item is responsible for facilitating collaborative writing processes with other contributors and for answering questions regarding his/her text items (Cited in Lourenço & Costa, 2007).

Methodology

This discursive paper is based on content analysis. According to Asemah, Gubawu, Ekhareafu and Okpanachi (2012) content analysis is an analysis based on the manifest content of the mass media message. Wright (1986) describes content analysis as a research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain, usually predetermined categories (Cited in Asemah, et al., 2012). Ajala (2002) also defines content analysis as the systematic objective and quantitative procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information. Analysis of Library secondary data is a content analysis method, which can be used in research project that seeks to describe and explain the role of digital media in mobilising the youths for political participation.

Therefore, this paper reviewed literature on use of digital media in mobilising the youths for political participation in Nigeria. The main sources of data for the study included a review of existing secondary data on the use of digital media in mobilising the youths for political participation to make deduction on the role of digital media in mobilising the

youths for political participation in Nigeria. This paper focuses on the role of digital media in mobilising youths for political participation in Nigeria

Discussion of Findings

1) Nigerian youths' awareness about the online information use for political e-participation.

Several evidences have emerged to prove the awareness of Nigerian youths in their use of online information and political e-participation. According to Mngusuul (2015), the social media has been used to hasten the speed of activities relating to governance in different spheres. For instance, on 17th of April, 2014, there was a case of crisis in Wukari of Taraba State, with people getting injured and killed. Internet users quickly uploaded the information on Twitter, calling on the Police to come to the community's aid. Shortly afterwards, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) responded via Twitter that officers had been deployed, and the issue addressed. Additionally, a Police officer, who brutalised two women in Lagos was filmed by a bystander and the video uploaded on YouTube. It generated a lot of traffic, and led to the NPF having to hurriedly trace the erring officer and bring him to book. These examples only go to highlight the different ways by which young internet users in Nigeria are harnessing the social media to solve problems.

The emergence of social media has contributed immensely to expand the limits of good governance. From open government data, and citizens reporting on government abuses, it has also provided a medium to connect citizens with one another and empower them to hold government accountable. This awareness and use of electronic media is evident in the statement of Ehidiamen (2013, p.29), who says that:

Social media has a crucial role to play in ensuring Nigerian leaders are held accountable. The technology of social media is relatively cheap, and it has made it very relatively easy to access and disseminate important information. Social media has helped activists organize. And Governments have used its emergence to monitor protest and public opinion on its policies. Citizens now quickly report crime to the law enforcement agencies. With the advent of social media, web developers and tech savvy youths have developed several web and mobile applications to propagate the information and make their findings public knowledge (Cited in Mngusuul, 2015).

The beginning of the use of social media actively in socio-political issues or governance is usually pegged at the 2011 general elections, when there were many strategies taken by both politicians and the mostly young electorate to harness the social media for campaign and information purposes. Those who really took the social media by storm in Nigeria during that time were the youths. Young, IT-savvy internet users congregated online to fully discuss, investigate, inform and share ideas about the issues and personalities concerning the elections, the electoral process and the voting day proper. Organisations

like *Nairaland*, *Enough is Enough Nigeria*, *Reclaim Naija*, and *Wangonet* established platforms enabling citizens to report election-related incidences with pictures, videos, text messages and voicemail. Agboola (2013) adds that the police, who are sometimes complicit in election malpractice, would have had to be on the watch out as any brutality or unfair play would be reported on the social media. At the same time, traditional media houses also used new media to disseminate information and gather feedback from viewers (Mngusuul, 2015).

Based on the evidences adduced above and the supporting instances, it is evident that Nigerian youth are aware of the use of online information for political e-participation in the transformation of political activities in the country, Nigeria.

2) *Nigerian youths' access information online regularly.*

Pew Research Center (2018) reported that, as smartphone access has become more prevalent, a growing share of teens now report using the internet on a near-constant basis. Some 45% of teens say they use the internet "almost constantly," a figure that has nearly doubled from the 24% who said this in the 2014-2015 survey. Another 44% say they go online several times a day, meaning roughly nine-in-ten teens go online at least multiple times per day. There are some differences in teens' frequency of internet use by gender, as well as race and ethnicity. Half of teenage girls (50%) are near-constant online users, compared with 39% of teenage boys. And Hispanic teens are more likely than whites to report using the internet almost constantly (54% vs. 41%).

Until recently, Facebook had dominated the social media landscape among America's youth – but it is no longer the most popular online platform among teens, according to a new Pew Research Center survey. Today, roughly half (51%) of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 say they use Facebook, notably lower than the shares who use YouTube, Instagram or Snapchat. This shift in teens' social media use is just one example of how the technology landscape for young people has evolved since the Center's last survey of teens and technology use in 2014-2015. Most notably, smartphone ownership has become a nearly ubiquitous element of teen life: 95% of teens now report they have a smartphone or access to one. These mobile connections are in turn fueling more-persistent online activities: 45% of teens now say they are online on a near-constant basis. The survey also finds there is no clear consensus among teens about the effect that social media has on the lives of young people today. Minorities of teens describe that effect as mostly positive (31%) or mostly negative (24%), but the largest share (45%) says that effect has been neither positive nor negative (The Pew Research, 2018).

3) *Nigerian youths' participation in digital media discussions on socio-political affairs.*

A statistics report by Turcotte (2015), indicated that in 2013, 47% of youth aged 15 to 19 and 61% of youth aged 20 to 24 indicated that they were very likely to vote in the

next federal election. This compared with 84% of seniors aged 65 to 74. In 2013, just over one-half of youth aged 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 indicated that they were at least somewhat interested in politics, compared with three-quarters of seniors aged 65 to 74. Among youth aged 15 to 19 who reported that they were not very or not at all interested in politics, 25% were very likely to vote in the next election, compared with 63% of seniors aged 65 to 74 who had the same level of interest in politics.

Also, it was reported that younger people were more likely than older people to participate in non-electoral civic and political activities. For example, 26% of youth aged 15 to 19 and 35% of youth aged 20 to 24 signed a petition in the 12 months prior to the survey, compared with 22% of seniors aged 65 to 74. The proportion of "politically inactive" persons, defined as those who did not participate in non-electoral political activities and who were not very likely to vote in the next election, was 32% among youth aged 15 to 19 and 26% among youth aged 20 to 24, compared with 12% among seniors aged 65 to 74 (Turcotte, 2015).

Middaugh, Clark and Ballard (2017) highlight that ethnographic research has found that interest-driven communities provide opportunities for more intensive social interaction as participants give each other advice, collaborate, and share information, similar to the face-to-face recreational associations of the past (such as bowling leagues). Panel studies in 2017 of US youth reveal participation in such communities is associated with exposure to political perspectives and political participation. Such research has also found that youth involvement in media production contributes to self-identification as a citizen, the development of a collective sensibility, and an appreciation for mutual reciprocity.

Another approach to the study of digital media and participatory politics is to examine the role of media in the work of youth who are currently politically active. A recent national survey on US youth aged 15 to 25 revealed that 41% were engaged in some form of participatory politics, a rate similar to that of youth who had voted in the most recent election (Middaugh, Clark & Ballard, 2017). This suggests that rather than serving as an alternative means of engagement, the use of media to find, share, discuss, and mobilize around political issues is a critical part of the repertoire of modern civic and political engagement. Also, they contrast the attention placed on cyber bullying and online harassment, many teenagers also practice online citizenship and responsibility, actively seeking to improve their online communities (Middaugh, Clark & Ballard, 2017).

For teenagers in communities that are often defined by risk (risks related to health, violence, or discrimination), the Internet creates opportunities to seek social support, advocate for themselves, and investigate resources for resilience. Ethnographic studies have documented youth in vulnerable positions by using digital tools and networks to band together to gain access to education, counter negative stereotypes by producing and sharing media, and insert themselves into local governance. Researchers have productively engaged youth-led organisations in the crafting of research questions and measures as well as the framing and dissemination of research findings on a variety of

topics relevant to youth. This kind of collective action and activism is greatly facilitated by the Internet, particularly for youth who find themselves in vulnerable minority positions in their community (Middaugh, Clark & Ballard, 2017).

4) Youths' activity of seeking and getting information online about political participation

According to Middaugh, Clark and Ballard (2017), they mentioned that when considering the impact of digital media on youth civic and political engagement, researchers tend to focus not on whether young people are online, but on what kinds of activities they engage in online. For example, researchers (cite some of them) find that information seeking is positively related to democratic engagement for youth, even after controlling for previous civic engagement, suggesting that online news seeking reinforces and expands engagement. Furthermore, researchers conducting studies of youth find a stronger relationship between online (versus off-line) information seeking for internal political efficacy and political action (online and off-line). Although the motivation for information seeking is likely similar for online and off-line media, the participatory nature of online media facilitates translation of information into action. Those who get their news and information through social media are able to immediately follow-up on the information they receive by forwarding, commenting, or following a link to donate money or sign a petition. The distance between information and action is reduced. However, research also continues to find that involvement in online political and civic activity is strongly correlated with income, pointing to a persistent wealth gap pervading both online and off-line civic and political engagement. Additionally, research has highlighted the disincentives to online political and civic engagement, particularly as youth encounter social pressures to conform to peer norms.

Middaugh, Clark and Ballard (2017) research focused on online activities that are not explicitly political in nature, but build skills or social ties that support civic and political engagement. Although the social side of teenagers' digital media use is often a topic of concern for parents and clinicians who seek to mitigate exposure to risk, when it comes to civic engagement, the social ties fostered through social media can play a more positive role. Youth social network site use has been found to promote civic engagement, and the use of digital media to create and share user-generated content (like videos, poetry, and music) has been found to be associated with political engagement. The explanation for such findings is that producing and sharing media fosters audience (which builds efficacy and confidence), collaboration, and deeper engagement with information (which builds critical media literacy skills) (Middaugh, Clark & Ballard, 2017).

5) Nigerian youths' participation in e-demonstration lead to promotion of good governance.

UNDP (2013) reported that since the Arab Awakening many youth in the region

have remained politically active through “political movements” instead of engaging with and in political parties. Young men and women are traditionally active politically in universities (when allowed) but very often disillusioned with political leadership and political institutions and excluded from policy development. As a result, political activism of youth is not organized according to formal groupings. However, ideally, Amoako stated that:

When our children are assured of survival and health, provided with a good education, protected from war and violence, and when youth participate in the democracy and development of their countries, then Africa will be set to claim the 21st century” –. (Cited in Sigudhla, 2004, p.1).

According to UNDP (2013) report that people under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions. In a third of countries, eligibility for the national parliament starts at 25 years or higher and it is common practice to refer to politicians as ‘young’ if they are below 35-40 years of age.⁶ Youth is not represented adequately in formal political institutions and processes such as Parliaments, political parties, elections, and public administrations. The situation is even more difficult for both young women as well as women at mid-level and decision-making/leadership positions. As reported by the United Nations that the youths are heavily documented across many different goals, linked to different thematic areas that are relevant to their wellbeing and development such as ending hunger, promoting healthy lives, achieving gender equality and promoting equitable growth, among others. Meanwhile, young people have distinct needs in these areas of development. However, while young people are recognised as beneficiaries, they are not currently being explicitly regarded as fundamental actors in achieving development objectives, despite evidence that they can be active promoters of change (UNDP, 2013).

Also, in a survey conducted by the United Nations in August 2012, a majority of 13,000 respondents expressing their voices from 186 countries highlighted that the main challenges for youth were limited opportunities for effective participation in decision-making processes. With limited opportunities and exposure to meaningfully participate in inclusive decision-making processes, young men and women feel excluded and marginalized in their societies and communities. The need for participatory structures and greater trust between youth and institutions and for greater capacity development were also stressed. Efforts should also be made to focus on the most vulnerable of young people, including via specific actions targeting young women. One can not but to agree with the assertion of Action Aid which says: “Youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow but are the drivers of change today.” And remarks of United Nations General Secretary Banki Moon who remarks that “Leaders of tomorrow must be heard today” (Walker, Pereznieto, Bergh & Smith, 2014, p.21).

In Nigeria, UNDP had supported youth-based Civil Society Organisation (CSO) coalition to actively participate in the Constitution review process, including submission

of memorandum to the constitution review committees of the National Assembly. A Nigerian Youth Agenda on Political Participation is now being developed ahead of the 2015 election together with a Nigerian Youth Inter party Forum. The forum will primarily be used by youth members across party lines to come together and deliberate on issues of common interest and challenges among other things one being expanding the frontiers for youth political participation (UNDP, 2013).

Conclusion

In conclusion, researchers have conceptualised three distinct modes of participation that can occur within a political party's digital environment based on engagement intensity. First, citizens can participate as an audience, the largest but most passive group who simply receive party communication without necessarily being a part of any community. Second, citizens can be friends of the party by joining the community and engaging in acts that endorse the organisation (liking and sharing, for example). Finally, there are a minority of digital activists, a highly engaged and active group who perform the role of co-producers of party communication. Interestingly, digital activists are distinct by their dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy, thus constituting a group of critical citizens who retain a high level of self efficacy and trust in politicians.

Likewise, research report has claimed that at a time of political conflict and polarization, digital media may not play the role of facilitating heterogeneous dialogue but rather, through avoiding those with conflicting standpoints, create an out-group identity (with the effect stronger for those within groups who perceive the greater external threat). Such socially prompted action among a like-minded community (especially in the action of unfriending those with a dissonant point of view) is found to be related to participation in offline protest action, in particular in support of non-institutionalized campaign organizations.

Recommendations

In view of the findings in this study, the paper recommends the followings:

- 1) That it is very crucial to develop an understanding of how citizens are politically activated and mobilised through their use of social media and what levels of engagement and participation this can lead to.
- 2) That there is a need to query whether much online engagement is superficial, meaningless to both the citizen performing the action and to wider democratic engagement, or whether it represents an attempt to engage in civic life.
- 3) That it is crucial to test the effectiveness of the various cues that citizens receive, from political parties, the plethora of campaign organisations, and the various other individuals with whom they are networked.

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