

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE CREATION POLITICAL AWARENESS OF YOUTH IN DELTA STATE

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Abstract

Social media has drastically transformed the way of social interaction among the general population; even illiterate youths may simply access social media tools and applications. Social media has proven to be an excellent medium of knowledge sharing. Social media supports and facilitated the engagement of the general public in political processes. Youth are becoming more interested in politics, and the media is playing a role in raising political knowledge. It is against this knowledge that this study set out to examine the use of social media in the creation political awareness of youths in Delta State. In line with the objectives of this study, three research question were raised to guide the study, the study adopted the cross-sectional design with the survey method with a questionnaire used as instrument for data collection from 500 respondents selected through the multistage sampling technique and derived data was analysed using descriptive statistics. Results from the study revealed that most of the respondents perceive political awareness on social media platforms to be false, unreliable and often times centered on mundane discussions. Findings also showed that although the social media was perceived to have positively influenced Nigeria's democracy by enhancing the flow of political information and awakening public political consciousness, the news and information being disseminated on social media platforms were noted to have increased the spate of hate speech and stoked political unease. The study then recommended that citizen journalists should imbibe online responsibility and be sensitive to public needs and expectations while using any of the social media platforms for political ends.

Keywords: Social Media, Youths, Awareness, Political Awareness, Politics, Media.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The advent of the internet has revolutionized the globe dramatically and made the world a global village. This addition in technology narrowed the communication gaps between individuals, societies, and countries as well. As indicated by Oji and Erubami (2020), social media have become widespread platforms for creating, sharing and accessing diverse information across the globe. The arrival of social media has bridged the social gap among different societies & communities. The history of social media starts in the early 21st century. However, the popularity of social media sites and usage of their application was raised with the arrival of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter in 2005 & 2006 respectively. In 2009 and 2010, WhatsApp, Instagram, telegram was launched. The various social networking sites have grabbed the attention of individuals, societies and captured the social media world to large extent. Numerous social networking applications are also available to facilitate their users (Njegomir, 2016 & O'Morain, 2016).

Social media has drastically transformed the way of social interaction among the general population; even illiterate youth may simply access social media tools and applications. There are more than 14 million active social media users in Delta State (Khan, et al., 2016). In the previous election in Delta State, DPD political parties have used social media to publicize their party manifestos in Delta State has benefited mostly from this evolving technology. Political parties were attempting to gain entry into parliament but were unable to garner sufficient public support. They were able to enter the Delta State political system using social media and achieve a notable position in the parliament. Although they did not achieve the desired result, they did obtain the government in one province and opposition in another. This observation revealed that, when used correctly to educate the public about the country's politics, social media can have a significant positive impact on the election (Butt & Awang, 2017).

Other parties such as PDP, NPP, APC, ADP, and LP, etc. are also using social media to attract their youth and compete with one another on this effective platform. However, DPD is presently dominating in effectively using social media tool for their political gains, and the PDP Chairman Mr. Kingsley Esiso is the topmost favorite leader among the political leadership of the state who have a record number of followers on Facebook and Twitter. Social media tools provide an amazing platform for political workers to communicate with the party and its leadership. (Ghani, et al., 2020). As Oji & Bebenimibo (2020) states, Since all media vary in their carrying capacities to induce communication for sustainable social change and

development, the media richness of a medium used for any campaign should be well evaluated for the proper delivery of intended information to reduce equivocality. There is therefore need to deploy social media for positive and corrective usage in community development, there is the need to fit richness of communication channels to the need and use of the information.

Youth feel free to share their opinions about political parties and leaders on social media since it is a cost-effective mode of communication. Due to the push of social media, many bad government policies have been reversed. An overview of the political arena in the country and the popularity of political leaders indicates that the PDP has the most followers on Facebook and Twitter. On the other side, APC has fewer followers as compared to PDP. Other political parties including NPP, APC, ADP, and LP, etc. are attempting to get into the social media arena. (Khan, et al., 2020). Keeping the view of the importance of social media in politics, this study is being carried out to analyze and evaluate how social media is disseminating political awareness, influencing youth by spreading education and awareness in Uvwie LG.A of Delta State.

Statement of the problem

Despite the abundance of research on politics and social media use, there seems to be limited empirical studies on public perception of the much touted contributions of social media to democracy and political participation. Perception is the cognitive process through which individuals organise, interpret and make appropriate meaning from the information they are exposed to. It does not only create youth's experience of the world around them, but also allows them to act appropriately within a predefined environment. Studies indicate that there is an overlapping relationship between perceptions and technology use (Segard, 2015). Thus, the way a phenomenon is perceived defines how it is assessed, embraced or rejected. In order to bridge this gap in knowledge and extend the frontiers of empirical discussions on the interplay between civic engagement and social media use, the present study was guided by three central objectives which were to: (i) determine the level of public exposure to social media political awareness; (ii) ascertain public perception of the peculiar nature of social media political awareness; and (iii) evaluate public perception of the contributions of social media to political participation processes in Delta State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives are to:

1. ascertain young people exposure to social media in Delta State
2. determine the political interest young people in Delta seek in social media; and
3. determine the extent social media helps young people in Delta State participate in political processes

Research Questions

1. To what extent are young people in Delta State exposed to social media?
2. What political interests do young people in Delta State seek on social media?
3. To what extent do social media help young people in Delta State to participate in political process?

2. LITERATURE UNDERPINNINGS

Conceptual Review

Concept of social media

According to Stieglitz, et al. (2012), social media is proven to be an excellent medium of knowledge sharing. Social media supports and facilitated the engagement of the general public in political processes. Presidential elections held in the USA in 2008 are a big example of the same, wherein various political views were debated with the general public via social media. The researcher also describes the influence of social media usage on political engagement from the standpoint of political groups and also emphasizes the monitoring of social media in a political setting.

Vonderschmitt (2012) describes the effectiveness of using social media in political campaigns. The research also found that social media campaigns are also useful on the ground in general elections e.g. 2012 US presidential elections, in which candidates used social media to promote themselves. Social media also influenced the youth, resulting in a significant boost in young youth's voting intentions.

According to Wani& Alone (2014), social media is an efficient election campaign tool, subsequently widely used by political parties & groups for political purposes. The researcher argued that a large number of the youth population has been influenced by social media and their political conduct has shifted as a result of social media. According to Muntean (2015),

social media is a perfect medium for attracting the attention of the younger generation to politics. The public has proclaimed social media to be an important channel of political communication. It is a valuable source of providing updated information about the political scenario.

Concept of political awareness

Political awareness is referred to as being sensitive about government and its policies and the outline that politicians follow in their affairs. It is also about gaining insight into the existing or secreted plans, in an association, and mainly the power relationship that exist in a society. Political awareness is a very vital element of democratic states as it allows the general masses to examine the political realities of their society and then make their judgment about voting. This awareness can be gained through various sources which include “information shared by family and peers, campaigns of political parties or political leaders, educational institutions as well as religious institutions in some countries”. Moreover, television and newspapers which are two notable forms of media play an important role in providing political awareness all across the globe. However, in the recent years social media has evolved as a new medium for political awareness particularly amongst the youth whose ages range from 15-25 as they are more active on the social networking websites than the older youth. Social media gained prominence as it allows its users to communicate not only with their family and friends but also offer them accessibility to the profiles of well-known political leaders and political parties through which they not only acquire political knowledge but also get the chance to voice their opinions openly.

Ali & Fatima (2016) illustrates the media's role in raising political awareness among Delta State's educated youth. Youth are becoming more interested in politics, and the media is playing a role in raising political knowledge. The research depicts that social media and other online sources have given through the internet were the most popular form of media among the young. The youth expressed faith in the media and saw newspapers and the internet as reliable providers of national and worldwide news. The youth's political knowledge was palpable. According to the researcher, the youth is very well aware of political party manifestos and understood the importance of voting, since the youth is optimistic and interested in politics and this aspect will bring about change in the country.

Importance of Social Media

Social media has evolved as a significant feature of the present world and has changed the thinking pattern and behavior of people to a great extent. In the contemporary world, social media is utilized to keep everyone around the world associated and has transmuted the world into a global village. Engagement and participation of people in the society has also increased due to social media as it enables citizens to voice their ideas and opinions in a free manner and allows them to take initiatives in an easier manner. Before the rise of social networking sites, governments and the traditional media i.e print and electronic media were mainly responsible for transferring information to the general public however this trend has changed with the expanding scope of social media and technology. From the standpoint of development, it is now-adays more convenient for people and groups to generate movements and present their views to the world, either for a good or a bad cause, by means of social network such as “Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs and micro-blogs etc.” Even in countries where social media sites are supervised or controlled by state authorities, civil uprisings and social movements have taken place with the assistance of the aforementioned communication channels, for instance Arab Spring that took place in the Middle East. Moreover, social media has now become an integral source of political awareness as many politicians and political parties are now using this medium to propagate their manifestos and opinions to the general public especially the youth in order to garner their support.

Use of Media in political parties

Ali (2013), describes that various political parties and celebrities use social media and their fans follow them. Facebook users' "likes" and "comments" the information shared by their political party or celebrity. The research shows the popularity of social media among political parties. And general public and also portrays the importance of using social media for political purposes. Eijaz, (2013) describes that Delta State political parties use new media technologies which inflict the dynamics of the country's politics. The study reveals that rural respondents who live in university hostels are quick to adopt Facebook. According to the researcher, when compared to other social media tools such as TwitterTwitter, myspace, blogs, etc., Facebook is the most popular social networking site among young youth for disseminating political information.

Shabir, et al. (2014). illustrated that in the era of technological advancement, social media dependency has been considerably increased and its impact has also been enhanced due to the result of this rise. According to the researcher, social media is a venue for both young and old youth to actively participate in politics. Around the world, social media is playing an important role as a powerful instrument for social and political empowerment. It disseminates news & information from all around society to keep members informed about political events in their communities.

According to Butt &Awang (2017), describe that boosting individual participation in social media, such as Facebook, might improve voting intention. The research reveals that the use of social media as a tool for altering views and influencing others has an impact on the political arena. According to Ahmad, et al. (2019), online political activities affect political efficacy and realworld political participation among university youth in rural Delta State. There exists a link between political activity and political awareness. The majority of youth utilize social media to stay informed about current events. Online political participation has a huge impact on political efficacy. Furthermore, social media is an important venue for the public to engage in real-world political activities. Political awareness and offline political participation are highly linked to internet political actions.

Ida & Saud (2020) describe that the youth play a considerable influence in the political dialogue and the use of social media makes it easier for young youth to participate in political activities, which increases their knowledge, allows them to participate, and builds their political efficacy capacity. The researcher also argues that youth are actively engaged and use social media to discuss political issues to educate the public. The study reveals that the role of youth is influential in political activities in a country. Njegomir (2016) argues that social media does not have a complete influence on some public's political conduct. The researcher selected three different social networking sites viz: Facebook, Twitter &Youtube. Facebook was the most popular among other social media tools whereas YouTube came in second and Twitter came in third. The participants of the survey were active Facebook users who were politically knowledgeable enough to judge the authenticity of political information. They were all in accord with Facebook's political influence. Finally, the researcher revealed that actual political participation will eventually fade away in the focus group. As a result, internet political activity will obliterate genuine voter turnout.

Zaheer, (2016) argues the relationship between social media use and political participation in the context of Delta State. The researcher describes that Delta State youth use Facebook to remain to engage with the politics of the country and use Facebook to gain political objectives which has an impact on both online and offline political activity. Further, the researcher pointed out that political engagement is strongly linked to demographic parameters such as gender and age.

As discovered by Oji and Erubami (2020) in their study to examine social media use by youths in the south-south, among the many purposes identified for using the social media, young people in Nigeria seem to be most interested in social interaction, relationship building and download or sharing of multimedia contents. Online discussions and information sharing also ranked top among the purposes for which youths deploy the social media. Erubami (2021) on his part believes the pervasiveness and popularity of the social media could be linked to their unwritten principle of 'share it and share in it'. Users do not only receive and consume contents on the social media, but are also empowered to produce and disseminate information they deem fit, making them 'prosumers' in the process.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on the Social Judgment Theory (SJT) and the Technological Frame of Reference theory. Propounded in 1961 by Muzafer Sherif, Carolyn Sherif and Carl Hovland, the SJT explains the underlying factors that may actuate youth's acceptance, rejection or non-commitment to a communication encounter based on their perception and cognitive map. In relation to the current study, the SJT suggests that exposure to political information on the (social) media will encourage youth to assimilate or equate their feelings about related pre-existing attitudes, and youth's reactions to such political information (be it positive or negative) will be determined by their disposition at the time of exposure (Ekwueme & Folarin, 2018).

On the other hand, the TFR espoused in the 1994 works of Wanda Orlikowski and Debra Gash assumes that different youth have different perspectives on the usefulness, importance and significance of technological artifacts and these differences significantly define how they perceive and relate with such technology (Segaard, 2015). According to the theory, youth develop different frames- assumptions, expectations and knowledge- about a technology while trying to make sense of such technology and these developed frames shape their

subsequent actions and dispositions towards the technology. Deductively, the TFR suggests that different youth will hold different perceptions on the contributions of the social media to political participation processes based on their experiences, assumptions, expectations and knowledge about online communication platforms.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey research method which is suitable for examining youth's perception and opinion towards issues (Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo&Okpanachi, 2017). The population of study comprised 663,362 youth resident in Delta State (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018.). A sample size of 500 was drawn for the study in line with Comrey and Lee's 1992 recommendations that a sample of 50 is very poor; 100 is poor; 200 is fair; 300 is good; 500 is very good; and 1,000 is excellent (Asemah et al., 2017).

A multi stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents. At the first stage, stratified sampling was used to divide the population into three senatorial districts- Delta South, Delta North and Delta Central. Delta Central was selected through a lucky dip. At the second stage, Ethiope West and Ughelli North local government areas (LGAs) were selected using the simple random sampling technique. The simple random sampling technique was also used at the third stage to select five towns each from the two selected LGAs: Ethiope West- Jesse, Mosogar, Otefe, Ogharefe and Oghareki; Ughelli North- Oteri, Afiesere, Ekiugbo, Ododegho and Iwhremaragha. At the last stage, accidental sampling technique was used to select 50 respondents from each of the ten towns. Data were collected using a structured likert scale questionnaire with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Prior to administration, the instrument was subjected to content validity by two experts in research and media studies who affirmed that the awareness were intelligible enough to elicit responses that would actualize the objectives of the study. On reliability, a pilot survey was conducted using 20 youth residing in Effurun, a town outside the study area. The result yielded a Cronbach Alpha of .878 (87.8%), implying reliability of the data set.

The descriptive statistics of percentage (%), mean (X) and Standard Deviation (SD) were used to analyse the data. The mean and standard deviation are considered the strongest and most widely used descriptive statistical tools in social science research (Nworgu, 2006; Asemah et al., 2017). The responses to each statement were averaged to determine the mean cut-off point for the study at 3.00, while the SD benchmark for the study was 1.41. The decision to either

accept or reject a statement was adapted from Nworgu's (2006) recommendation that where a computed mean score is equal to or less than the bench mark (cut off point), the outcome is negative (rejected) but where a computed mean is greater than the benchmark, the outcome is positive (accepted). Accordingly, a high mean and low or moderate standard deviation indicated that the responses were markedly different (high variability), while a low mean and a low or moderate standard deviation indicated a low variability in the responses.

5. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Out of the 500 copies of the distributed questionnaire, 475 copies were appropriately filled, returned and found usable, representing a 95% response rate. 54.4% of the respondents were male; the least possible age of the respondents was 18 and the highest was 65, the modal age range was 26-35 years. A total of 10.7% of the respondents have had primary education, 53% have had secondary education, while the remaining 36.3% have received various levels of tertiary education. Most of the respondents (55.8%) were self employed, 14.8% were civil servants, while the remaining 29.4% were either students or unemployed at the time of data collection.

Table 1. Respondents' level of exposure to social media

Item	Response	Frequency (%)
Respondents' I use of social media	Yes	475 (100)
	No	
	Total	475 (100)
Most frequently used social media platforms	Whatsapp	151 (31.8)
	Twitter	66 (13.9)
	Facebook	191 (40.2)
	Instagram	58 (12.2)
	YouTube	09 (1.9)
	Total	475 (100)
Extent of social media usage	Daily	305 (64.2)
	Weekly	112 (23.6)
	Monthly	58 (12.2)
	Total	475 (100)
Frequency exposure to social media	Always	78 (16.4)
	Very often	263 (55.4)

Sometime	99 (20.8)
Rarely	35 (7.4)
Never	
Total	475 (100)

Table 1 showed that all the respondents (100%) used the social media, with Facebook (40.2%), Whatsapp (31.8%) and Twitter (13.9%) ranking as the most frequently used platforms. Daily access topped the pattern of social media use among the respondents (64.2%) and during the usage, exposure to social media has become a very often experience among majority of the survey respondents (55.4%). This indicates the commonality of the social media as communication platforms and ubiquity of social media platforms.

Table 2. Respondents' Perception of political interest people in delta state seek social media

S/ N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	X (SD)	Dec.
1	Social media usage for political interest are mostly negative	73 (15)	43 (9)	57 (12)	208 (44)	94 (20)	2.6 (1.3)	Reject
2	Most political information on social media are false and unreliable	177 (37)	97 (20)	13 (3)	131 (28)	57 (12)	3.4 (1.5)	Accept
3	Political awareness found on the social media are never current and up to date	26 (6)	26 (3)	12 (5)	243 (51)	168 (35)	1.9 (1.0)	Reject
4	Political conversations on social media are often mundane, trivial and rarely highlight important issues of the society	326 (69)	42 (9)	5 (1)	40 (8)	62 (13)	4.1 (1.5)	Accept
5	Social media political awareness are generated by anyone and everyone	266 (56)	85 (18)	4 (1)	66 (14)	54 (11)	3.9 (1.5)	Accept

Table 2 showed that although the respondents identified the peculiar nature of social media political awareness to be false, unreliable (N = 58%; X = 3.4; SD = 1.5) and largely centered on trivial issues of the society (N = 52%; X = 3.1; SD = 1.6), the awareness are often current (N = 86%; X = 1.9; SD = 1.0) and targeted at majority of citizens (N = 77%; X = 4.1; SD = 1.5).

Table 3. Respondents of what extent social media helps young people in Delta State participate in political processes?

1	Social media political help	30	8	86	4	5	7	Accept
	To fueled the hate speech	(65)	(18)	(1)	(12)	(4)	(1.2)	
	phenomenon in Nigeria							
2	Social media have	315	140	9	7	4	4.6	Accept
	facilitated the unhindered	(66)	(29)					
	dissemination of political			(2)	(2)	(1)	(0.7)	
	information at reduced cost							
	and without needless							
	censorship							
3	The increasing level of	237	142	13	67	16	4.1	Accept
	political tension and	(50)	(30)	(3)		(3)		
	violence in Nigeria is				(14)		(1.2)	
	traceable to the use of social							
	media in politics							
4	Social media awareness on	211	112	9	93	51	3.7	Acc
	politics have stirred up public	(44)	(23)					
	interest in activities of			(2)	(20)	(11)	(1.5)	ept
	political parties, groups and							
	candidates							
5	Exposure to social	261	100	11	86	17	4.1	Accept
	media political awareness	(55)	(21)	(2)		(4)		
	have given me a better				(18)		(1.3)	
	understanding of							
	political happenings							

6	Social media merely empower users to discuss politics online without enough motivation to act offline	113 (24)	207 (44)	25 (5)	99 (21)	31 (7)	3.6 (1.2)	Accept
7	Exposure to political awareness on social media has encouraged me to fight for a particular political cause	219 (46)	136 (29)	16 (3)	94 (20)	10 (2)	4.0 (1.2)	Accept
8	Social media have provided me the opportunity to get feedback from political leaders	251 (53)	112 (24)	12 (2)	73 (16)	27 (6)	4.0 (1.3)	Accept

Data in Table 3 indicated that some of the perceived positive contributions of the social media to politics were the enhancement of the flow of political information (N= 96%; X = 4.6; SD = 0.7), creation of opportunity for direct interaction with and feedback from public officers (N = 77%; X =4.0; SD = 1.3) as well as hold government accountable (N = 86%; X =4.2; SD = 1.2), awakening of political interests among users (N = 68%; X = 3.7; SD = 1.5),enhancement of public understanding of political issues (N = 76%; X =4.1; SD = 1.3), and encouragement of citizens to agitate for a popular cause (N = 75%; X = 4.0; SD =1.3). On the negative side, the online media were also perceived to have contributed to the growing phenomenon of hate speech in Nigeria (N= 83%; X = 4.3; SD =1.2), increased political unease (N= 80%; X =4.1; SD =1.2) and turned the average users to much of a talker with less offline action (N=66%; X =3.6; SD =1.2).

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study has affirmed the popularity of the use social media creating political awareness among youths in Delta State. All the respondents admitted to have used, at least, one of the various web 2.0 based platforms for communication, with Facebook (40.2%),

Whatsapp (31.8%) and Twitter (13.9%) being the most frequently used social media platforms. This is consistent with previous studies (Ajayi&Adesote, 2015; Akpoghiran&Erubami, 2019; Clement, 2019). The popularity of the social media could be linked to their peculiar traits of convenience, interactivity, affordability and universality which allow geographically detached users to connect among themselves on the virtual space, and to do so with little or no restriction on the content of communication. Daily usage was found to be the dominant pattern of social media use among majority of the respondents (64.2%). This corroborated the findings of Ashiekpe and Mojaye (2017). Observably, most social media platforms such as Facebook, Whatsapp and Twitter are often very personal and engaging. Countless messages are constantly shared to users either by their direct friends or members of a networked group to which they subscribe, thereby making their visitation and use of these platforms a continuum. Many of the messages shared on the social media are laced with political awareness (Abdu et al., 2018), and this was reflected in the views of the respondents who admitted to getting exposed to political issues on the social media either always (16.4%) or very often (55.4%).

The respondents held both positive and negative perception towards the peculiar nature of political news and information shared on the social media. Data in Table 2 indicated that the respondents largely perceived social media political awareness as false, unreliable and often times centered on mundane discussions. This is in agreement with previous study in which online communication media were found to be harbinger/promoter of half truth and outright falsehood (Okoro&Nwafor, 2013; Apuke & Appollos, 2017). Credibility deficit remains a pending challenge undermining the adoption of social media as alternative communication platform and until the issue is sufficiently addressed, it may continue to significantly weaken the success of online communication efforts.

On the positive side, social media political awareness were perceived to be current, tailored towards majority of citizens and based on UGC. Undoubtedly, the advantage of currency is one of the main gains of the social media which are often touted as ‘the media of the now’. Their essential features enable users to post news, photos and videos about events simultaneously as they are taking place. Online tools like Twitter and Facebook do not just break the major news of the day, but also play some loosely defined roles in shaping public response to the news. By sharing and commenting on daily societal happenings, social media users do not only share the news of the day but also share in it. It was this UGC phenomenon

that birthed the ‘prosumer’ concept, a situation whereby the ordinary consumers of news are also producing news for others to guzzle.

Regarding the specific contributions of the social media to political participation processes, our result showed that the respondents perceived online platforms to have positively contributed to the growth of democracy by facilitating the unrestricted flow of political information at reduced cost and without needless censorship. Inadvertently, the social media have also stimulated public interest in the activities of government, political parties, groups and individual politicians; enhanced public understanding of political events; provided a citizens-government interaction and feedback mechanism; as well as enhanced citizens’ capacity to hold public officers accountable for their actions and inactions. Evidently, the information power shift made possible by the social media remains one of the notable contributions of online communication media to politics and democracy in Nigeria. The alteration of the conventional top-down communication paradigm typified by the mainstream media has taken the world some steps closer to the ideals of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Similarly, the ‘prosumer’ experience activated by social media tools has partly brought to fruition Karl Marx’s principle of power redistribution and control in which the tools and means of distribution are in the hands of the workers. In this case, what is being distributed is political information which is crucial to informed decision making.

However, the perceived positive contributions of the social media to political participation processes seem to be dwarfed by their perceived negative contributions. The respondents agreed that social media political awareness have significantly contributed to the growing phenomenon of hate speech, stoked political tension and violence; and given rise to politically active ‘netizens’ with inadequate motivation for offline political engagement. This affirms the conclusion of previous studies (Fenton & Barassi, 2011; Okoro & Nwafor, 2013; Apuke & Appollos, 2017) that online communication tools promote subtle political cynicism and other harmful political outcomes.

7. CONCLUSION

The study has shown that the social media are popular means through which youth get exposed to political news and information in Nigeria and using online communication platforms has become a daily ritual among users in Delta State, Nigeria. Most users perceive the political awareness shared on social media platforms to be false, unreliable and often woven around

mundane issues, even though such awareness may be current and user generated. Consequently, the perceived positive contributions of the social media to political processes in Delta State, Nigeria are being undermined by the impact of the perceived negativities associated with online media political awareness.

Recommendations

In the light of these findings, it is recommended that social media users should act responsibly, be more sensitive to public needs and expectations, and where possible, adopt a self-censoring technique to check the correctness and appropriateness of the political information they share and receive online. As much as will be consistent with the right to freedom of speech and of expression, the society should device democratically appropriate measures to check the callous and unregulated use of social media tools for negative purposes. Governments and civil society organisations should engage in the mass sensitisation of users on the most beneficial ways to use the social media, particularly in relation to politics.

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