



ASSESSMENT OF THE PERCEPTION OF RIVERS STATE GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION
RESULTS BY FACEBOOK USERS

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the perception of Rivers State Gubernatorial election results by Facebook users. The specific objectives of this study were to: find out if Rivers State gubernatorial election results were published on Facebook; and also ascertain the Port Harcourt Facebook users' perception of the Rivers State gubernatorial election results on Facebook among others. To do these, the researcher adopted a survey design and simple random sampling where 384 subjects were sampled and 370 used for data analysis. Based on the foregoing, the findings showed that Rivers' gubernatorial election results were published on Facebook ward by ward. It also showed that Port Harcourt Facebook users' perception was that the results of Rivers gubernatorial election in the 2019 election were published by party faithful and loyalists; and that the results published on Facebook were not the actual results declared in some of the wards; hence, did not represent the will of the masses. Following the findings of this research work, the researcher recommended that INEC establish guidelines for the use of Facebook and the social media generally as a political communication tool in Nigeria. Modalities should be put in place to systematically verify information reported by citizen observers through Facebook and other social media platforms and that INEC establish a social media tracking center to monitor, collate, and interpret trends and reports during elections.

KEYWORD: Electioneering, Election Rigging, Social Media, and Audience Perception

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the social media are playing a dominant role in political mobilization, participation and electioneering process in both developed and developing countries across the world. It is on record that since President Barack Obama of the United State of America efficiently used the social media, there has been a growing use of new media technologies in facilitating political participation. President Goodluck Jonathan and other political candidates equally used the social media to execute their political campaigns during the 2011 presidential election. Throughout history, political activities have evolved around the advancing communication technologies that are available to political candidates and the electoral body. As



technology develops, politicians are able to deploy it to facilitate the dissemination of their manifestos (Emruli & Baca, 2011).

In Nigeria, the 2011 general elections were the first litmus test of the use of social media by political parties, political candidates, and the civil society organizations (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2012). The election was historic in the sense that it was the first time ever that new media technologies like Facebook and other social networks facilitated political communication and participation in Nigeria (Dagona, Karick & Abubakar, 2013). Thus, these new media technologies have redefined methods of political communication in contemporary times and thereby led to significant shift towards the utilization of these modern tools in the electoral process.

According to Kurfi (2015), Nigeria had her first real test of social media use for political purpose during the 2011 general elections. The Facebook played an unprecedented role in the April 2011 Nigerian General Elections. He adds that INEC officials had in early March 2011 welcomed the assistance of civil society volunteers with its Facebook account as well as a new media situation room, which received feedback from the public and later began to provide real time information and answered constituent questions.

Nigerian politicians actively utilized social media in their campaigns. They sent bulk text and voice messages in unprecedented numbers. They made massive use of Facebook pages and other social media platforms to win supports and canvass for votes. President Jonathan declared his intention to run for the presidency on Facebook and subsequently became the second most –liked head of state in the world after US President Barack Obama (fanpagelist.com).

A critical examination of the emerging trend in the use of Facebook specifically in Nigeria shows that Facebook is no longer restricted to the primary purpose of creating and enabling participation on the platform, where people socialize and check out what friends are doing (Olsson & Dahlgren, 2010; Bakardjieva, 2010), but, have rather, become a powerful tool for political communication and engagement, and a useful means of policing election results in Nigeria and by extension, veritable tools for active political participation.

As the Reuters 2017 Digital News Report established, the citizens of many democracies now rely, to a greater extent, on online rather than broadcast and print news, with Facebook specifically playing a greater role in disseminating information than newspapers. In consideration of these views, it could be argued that Facebook now provides new ways for public's political engagement and participation in the country. However, recent anecdotal evidence points to other emerging developments in ways Facebook may have been used recently by its users in Nigerian political election process especially the Nigerian Gubernatorial elections that have different dates from other general elections. For instance, the just concluded Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria's March 9, 2019, gubernatorial polls have been criticized for being characterized and associated with Internet brigandage, fake news, Facebook nuisance, and character vilification on the platforms.

As usual, Facebook users were not silent on the matter. Several comments, arguments, discussions, abuses, etc. sprang up on Facebooks almost daily during this



period. It is based on the foregoing that this study is targeted at assessing Facebook users' perception of the result of the gubernatorial race.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is an incontrovertible fact that Facebook has become an integral tool of political communication on a global scale. The medium is gradually becoming a dependable tool in influencing and changing the opinions and behaviour of the public. Recognizing the huge benefits derived from Facebook for political communication, Nigerian politicians have embraced and exploited it for political campaigns during the 2019 gubernatorial elections. According to Africa Population and Internet Users Statistics (2019 Est.) at least 2,962,691 Nigerians use Facebook, with a good number of them being young. Rivers State held her gubernatorial election in March 9, 2019. Sequel to this election was the uploading of different varying results on Facebook from among the Facebook users. These results generated comments, arguments as well as observations from users. Some Facebook users while rejecting the results claimed the election was marked with high rate of irregularity; in form of ballot-box snatching, violence, killings as well as manipulation of votes.

However, there are yet to be academic-based assessment of how this "Facebook users perceive the 2019 Rivers gubernatorial election result as at the time of this research". It is upon this background that this study seeks to investigate how Facebook users perceive the 2019 Rivers gubernatorial election result. Put differently, how do Facebook users perceive Rivers election results in 2019 election?

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to basically assess the perception of the Rivers gubernatorial election result by Facebook users in the just concluded 2019 Gubernatorial election in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. find out if Rivers State gubernatorial election result was published on Facebook;
2. ascertain the Port Harcourt Facebook users' perception of the Rivers State gubernatorial election result on Facebook;
3. find out the extent of the credibility of Facebook users attach to the Rivers State gubernatorial election results on Facebook by users.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies have indicated that individual personal purpose or intention of having good and reliable information can motivate people to select and use a specific media, therefore this can help in ascertain and justifying Facebook information quality as a motivating factor for youth in particular for using Facebook for offline political participation. This can be supported with the fact that youth select and use Facebook because it may satisfy their political information needs and desires, youth's social and psychological factors often mediate quality of information among them (Diemer & Li, 2011). Uses and Gratification theory for example has recently focused on motivational factors involved in social networks such as Facebook which shifted from simple



information searching to active self-expression and participation in political activities (Tang & Lee, 2013). Thus, Facebook information quality is now becoming increasingly attractive predictor of participation into political affairs as it provides accurate, complete, up to date, well-arranged and organized information needed by the youth (Young & Quan-Haase, 2009).

Thus, youth need Facebook quality information to experience interpersonal communication satisfaction and to seek the approval and support of political party or candidate (Leung & Lee, 2014). This however further suggests the fact that information content quality is an important determinant to offline participation and Facebook has been used to facilitate participation (both online and offline political participation).

Perceived Facebook information quality as earlier discussed demonstrate youth's perception of the collective content quality of Facebook information (Huang et al., 2014). Previous researches have documented that Facebook information quality can influence factors related to online political participation such as interactivity with individuals, usage intention to participate in offline politics activities such as engaging in civic or community services (Dong et al., 2010; Ellen Quintelier, 2007 cited in Dauda, et.al, 2018). This is because youth participation is often considered a significant element of a healthy democracy (Ellen Quintelier & Vissers, 2008 cited in Dauda, et.al, 2018), thus what facilitate youth's offline political participation is very important area of research to academics and political stakeholders. From the communication perspectives, the theoretical development of political participation has been focused on the influence of accurate and quality information from reliable and more interactive media which Facebook stands for because it facilitates interpersonal discussion about politics (Jung et al., 2011). However, a considerable body of research has demonstrated important effects of Facebook information quality on offline political participation (Jung et al., 2011).

Seemingly, when youths compare political parties and candidates and decide to support a particular party or politician the quality of information they will get may likely influence and help them to make an informed decision about the candidate or party (Lin, 2014 cited in Dauda, et.al, 2018) as such youth may actively participate in offline political activities such going for campaign or physical voting. It may be accurate to say that Facebook appears to be well suited for promoting offline political participation due its features such as interactivity, speed, accuracy, timeliness and easy accessibility which Facebook information quality stands for. Further, use of Facebook information quality can build a communicative power such as capacity to foster socio-political movement (Sormanen & Dutton, 2015).

Cogburn and Vasquez, (2011) also claim that Facebook information quality is a determinant of youths' decision to use Facebook for political activities. Supporting this, a study places emphasis on how people, especially youth may likely exploit the informative, educational and political potentials of online networking site such as Facebook with content deemed political.

Similarly, Nigeria had her first real test of Facebook use for political purpose during the 2011 general elections. The new technology played an unprecedented role in the April 2011 Nigerian General Elections. INEC officials had in early March 2011 welcomed the assistance of civil society volunteers with its Facebook and Twitter



accounts as well as a new media situation room which received feedback from the public and later began to provide real time information and answered constituent questions.

Nigerian politicians actively utilized social media in their campaigns. They sent bulk text and voice messages in unprecedented numbers. They made massive use of Facebook pages and other social media platforms to win supports and canvass for votes. President Jonathan as we mentioned earlier declared his intention to run for the presidency on Facebook and subsequently became the second most –liked Head of States in the world after US President Barack Obama (fanpagelist.com).

Organizations like Enough is Enough Nigeria, ReclaimNaija, WangoNet and IamLagos established platforms enabling citizens to report election-related incidences with pictures, videos, text messages and voicemail. At the same time, traditional media houses such as Channels Television, *234Next* and *Punch* newspaper used new media to disseminate information and gather feedback from viewers.

Adibe, Odoemelam and Orji (2012) further observe that during the elections in Nigeria, many Nigerians were armed with their blackberries and Twitter feeds. One of such Nigerians was Gbenga, a 33-year-old IT consultant and an activist. His team had designed a smart phone application called Revoda which allowed voters to instantly upload reports of delayed voting materials and intimidating gangs at their local polling stations to their database; a daily summary was then sent to Nigerian election officials and Western observers as well as posted on their Revoda website; this allowed many people within and outside Nigeria to follow the process. Photos, pictures, details and videos from polling stations were quickly uploaded to Facebook and Twitter. There was another group, – Reclaim Naija|| who used text messages and e-mail reports to compile a live online map of trouble spots. There were also – Twitter activists|| whose job was to look out for rigging and spread warning about bombings at polling stations. (Omenugha & Ukwueze, 2011) observed that this massive use of social media culminated in the success of the election acclaimed the freest and fairest in the history of the country.

Meanwhile, this disagrees with the observations of (Adeyanju & Haruna, 2011) who believe that the technology did the nation greater harm than good as it provided avenue to disseminate provocative and inciting messages that eventually precipitated the post-election violence and tensions witnessed in many parts of the country, particularly in the north. This study will shade more light on the positive effect the social media have particularly Facebook and twitter in creation positive awareness to general public and explore the way individuals use the social media to enlighten the general public to exercise violence free election and even afterward.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is the study is anchored on the interpretations of Technological Determinism which states that media technology shapes how we as individuals in a society think, feel, act, and how society are operated as we move from one technological age to another (Tribal- Literate- Print- Electronic). The theory which was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1964, a Canadian communication scholar, who observed new media technologies in communication, now determine social changes, turning the world



into a global village (McQuail, 2010). He believes socio-political, economic and cultural changes are inevitably based on development and diffusion of technology. McLuhan argued technology undoubtedly causes specific changes on how people think, how society is structured and the form of culture created. This theory portends that, given the emergence of the Internet and its adoption and relevance in mobilizing people for political activities, there is bound to be an impact on the electoral process and overall political environment. Communication is the basic tenet of technological determinism theory. The theory seeks to explain social and historical phenomena in terms of the principal determining factor (technology). The theory states that communication technologies in general are the prime causes of changes in society. Reinforcing this position, Chandler (1995) affirms that technological determinists interpret technology in general and communication technologies in particular as the basis of society in the past, present and even the future.

In relation to this study, Facebook which is a child of modern technology is a platform objectively created to avail users the opportunity to express themselves, just as they feel, think or perceive an issue. Facebook was seriously utilized before, during and even after the 2019 Gubernatorial election in Rivers State. Especially to declare results.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher adopted the survey research design. The reason for this research design was chosen by the researcher over others was so that it could allow the researcher gain knowledge of how a sample of the population under study perceive the results of Rivers gubernatorial election published on Facebook and also use the features for generalisation on the whole population. The research population of this study comprised all registered voters across Rivers State from 18 years and above, which is made up of 3,215,273 according to Pulse.ng in March 2, 2019. This work was ordinarily conducted within Port Harcourt metropolis but since this there was no way of arriving at the total figure of registered voters in Port Harcourt; the researchers the total figure of registered voters in Rivers State. However, Port Harcourt remained the location of the study since it was likely to find more Facebook users within the city. This study drew a sample size of 384 from the total population of over 3,215,273 to form the basis for this study. The sample size was necessitated by Keyton's formula for sample size determination. Simple random sampling was used by the researchers so as to draw the sample from the general population of the study. The reason for choosing this technique is so as to give every member of the population equal chance to be selected since a good number of the population are on Facebook. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. Data for the study were presented and analyzed using simple percentages as well as frequency distribution tables. The essence was to simplify complex information, reduce the size of data, make them more comprehensible and even aid data interpretation.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the data collected for the study are presented, analyzed and discussed. After gathering the data for this study through the use of questionnaire, it was discovered that out of the three hundred and eighty-four (384) copies of questionnaire distributed, three hundred and seventy (370) were retrieved from the respondents completely filled. These are presented by using the following tables below.

7.1 Presentation of Data

Objective one: Find out if Rivers State gubernatorial election result was published on Facebook

Table 7.1: Respondents based on ownership of Facebook account

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Yes, I have Facebook account only	77	20.8
I have Facebook account	293	79.2
I don't have a Facebook account	-	-
Total	370	100

The table indicates that the number of persons who admitted to having Facebook account are more. These subjects may have other accounts but certainly have Facebook account.

Table 7.2: Respondents' frequency of Facebook usage

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Daily	210	56.8
Once or twice weekly	60	16.2
Three to five times weekly	74	20
Couple of times monthly	26	7
Total	370	100

This result of the table above implies that a good number of the respondents have daily access to Facebook.

Table 7.3: Respondents' based on how many minutes/hours do they spend on Facebook daily

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
About 30 minutes	4	1
An hour	24	6.5
Two hours	65	17.6
Three hours	66	17



Over three hours	211	57
Total	370	100%

The response on this table shows how active the subjects are with the social media.

Table 7.4: Respondents by whether they have been following Rivers gubernatorial elections on Facebook

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Yes	270	73
No	100	27
Total	370	100

The table shows that majority of the respondents are claimed to have been following Rivers' gubernatorial elections on Facebook.

Table 7.5: Respondents' response on whether Rivers State gubernatorial election results were published on Facebook

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Yes	264	71.4
No	106	28.6
Total	370	100

From the table, majority of the respondents opined that Rivers State gubernatorial elections results were published on Facebook.

Objective two: Ascertain the Port Harcourt Facebook users' perception of the Rivers State gubernatorial election result on Facebook

Table 7.6: Respondents' response on How it was published

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Unit by unit	66	17.8
Ward by ward	185	50
Local government by local government	105	28.4
Randomly	14	3.7
Total	370	100



The implication of the table is that majority of the gubernatorial elections results that were published were published ward by ward and local government by local government.

Table 7.7: Respondents on whether they think the results were published by party faithful and loyalists

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Yes	243	65.7
No	127	34.3
Total	370	100

The claim here following the result of table is that the elections results were published mostly by party faithfuls and political loyalists.

Table 7.8: Respondents' response on whether there were cases of conflicting results in the Rivers Gubernatorial race on Facebook

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Yes	291	78.7
No	79	21.3
Total	370	100

Implication from the table is that some of the Rivers State gubernatorial results published on Facebook were conflicting

Table 7.9: Response on which of the political party the conflicting result affected the most

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
PDP	106	28.7
AAC	218	58.9
PPP	-	-
Labour Party	46	12.4
Total	370	100

Responses from the above table indicates that the political parties the conflicting tables affected the most were AAC and PDP.



Objective three: Find out the extent of the credibility of Facebook users attach to the Rivers State gubernatorial election results on Facebook by users.

Table 7.10: Respondents’ response on whether they think the 2019 Rivers gubernatorial election results as published on Facebook reflected credible election

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
Yes	132	35.7
No	238	64.3
Total	370	100%

The implication of the table is that the responds believe that the 2019 Rivers gubernatorial election results as published on Facebook did not reflect credible elections.

Table 7.11: Respondents’ response as to what degree they rate the credibility of social media results

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
To a large degree	88	23.8
Low degree	225	60.8
I can’t say	57	15.4
Total	370	100%

The table implies that the respondents rated the credibility of the social media results of Rivers gubernatorial elections low.

Table 7.12: Respondents’ response based on what informed their position on the credibility of the said result on Facebook

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
The win margin	169	45.7
The arrangement of the published results	9	2.4
The supposed preferred candidate of a unit/ward/LGA	102	27.6
What you know about the publisher of the results	64	17.2
Your interest	26	7.1



Total	370	100%
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The table implies that the position of the majority of the respondents on the credibility of the said election results published on Facebook were mostly the win margin and the supposed preferred candidate of a unit/ward/LGA.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study assessed of the perception of Facebook users about Rivers State Gubernatorial election results. In this part of the research work the researcher provided answers to the relevant questions raised in chapter one of this study.

Research question 1: Was Rivers State gubernatorial election result published on Facebook?

Prequel to answering the research question one, table 4, 5 and 6 were utilized to determine the audience usage of Facebook. In table 4, it was shown that all the participants had Facebook account, and over 52.6% of them accessed their Facebook account daily while a smaller majority accessed theirs three times weekly. In table 6, 57% of the subjects affirmed that they spent over three hours on FB account daily. Table also showed that 73% of the respondents have been following Rivers gubernatorial elections on Facebook. In answering the research question proper, In table 8, 9 and 10 were used. In table 8, the subjects affirmed that Rivers State gubernatorial election results were published on Facebook. In table 9, 50% which constituted the majority said they were arranged and published ward by ward while a smaller majority of 28.4% said they were published LGA by LGA. What is important here is that their responses confirms that River gubernatorial election results were published on Facebook. The finding actually agrees with the position of Leung & Lee (2014) in chapter two of this work where they asserted that youth need Facebook quality information to experience interpersonal communication satisfaction and to seek the approval and support of political party or candidate. It also justifies the Uses and Gratification theory which recently has focused more on motivational factors involved in social networks such as Facebook which shifted from simple information searching to active self-expression and participation in political activities (Tang & Lee, 2013).

Research question 2: What is the Port Harcourt Facebook users’ perception of the Rivers State gubernatorial election results on Facebook?

In providing answer to research question two tables 10, 11 and 12 were of immense relevance. In table 10 65.7% of the subjects were of the perception that the results of Rivers Gubernatorial election in the 2019 election were published by party faithful and loyalists. In question item no. 13 where they were requested to state briefly their perception, some of them stated that the results published on Facebook were not the actual results declared in some of the wards; hence, fake. Some others said the results as published on Facebook did not represent the will of the mass and was not what they expected. In other words, the result on FB came as a shock to them since they had already knew the result from their wards. In table 11, 78.7%, which constituted the majority agreed that there were cases of conflicting results in the Rivers Gubernatorial



race on Facebook. This may also have contributed to the perception of FB users on the results in the Rivers Gubernatorial race on Facebook. This is because they have a prior knowledge about the heated political state of the state. To buttress the answer provided for the above research question table 12, 58.9% of the subjects asserted that the political party the conflicting result affected the most was African Action Congress (AAC).

Research question 3: What is the extent of the credibility that Facebook users attach to the Rivers State gubernatorial election results on Facebook by users?

In order to answer research question three, tables 13, 14 15 and 16 were utilized. In table 13, 64.3% of the total respondents were of the opinion that the 2019 Rivers gubernatorial election results as published on Facebook did not reflected credible election. However, 35.7%, a smaller percentage said the above stated result reflected credible election. To further substantiate their position, 60.8% of the total subjects rated the degree of its credibility as being very low. Also, in table 15, 58.4% said they attached low extent of credibility to the Rivers State gubernatorial election results published on Facebook. Table 16 also revealed that what informed the respondents' perception were first, the win margin – going by the view of (45.7%), the majority of them; and the popularity of the supposed preferred candidate of a unit/ward/LGA. For them, the candidate who the results on Facebook projected as the winner was not popular in most of the units and wards.

It is in connection with the above that Apuke & Tunca (2018) posit that The increased availability of smartphones has made electorates who are even in the grassroots to disseminate messages during electioneering campaigns, in turn, creating a new implication for democracy. Therefore, social media are now used in both pre-election and post-election exercises. Whilst these may develop new chances for political campaigns, mobilization, engagement, and participation, it could also create misinformation geared towards discrediting a political adversary as well as electioneering. It is probably upon this backdrop that the respondents posited that the results of Rivers State gubernatorial election published on Facebook were not credible.

CONCLUSION

Facebook serves as tool of engaging and interacting with the public, organizing and mobilizing supporters, gathering voter, campaigns data, reaching the youth vote, how to vote, the use of card readers and others electoral devices and has gone to the extent of publishing election results both Local government, state and federal election results.

While the use of Facebook in the 2019 Rivers gubernatorial elections clearly provides important advantages to candidates, citizens and the public sphere also benefit by having an easy method of acquiring diverse information on the election, a platform for organizing and gaining resources for meaningful participation in democracy, and a means to engage in public dialogue and interact with candidates (Issa, 2015). However, there are many questions about the reliability and credibility of the information collected and shared through the Facebook, including election results; especially in



highly disputed contexts as 2019 Rivers' gubernatorial election. Crowd-sourcing often relies upon information provided by grassroots citizens in the local communities, who are sometimes anonymous reporters. Bearing in mind that some of these citizen journalists might be people with partisan interests just as the findings of this study has proved, it is difficult to affirm the accuracy of the reports without subjecting them to a systematic verification process. Conclusively, the 2019 Rivers gubernatorial election results published on Facebook were perceived as fake. This is conclusion is due to the fact that even if it were real Facebook does not reserve the right to announce election results but INEC. And since it cannot serve as a working document its credibility is equal to nothing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on users perceived challenges and opportunities of the use Facebook particularly Facebook in reporting the 2019 Rivers gubernatorial elections results, we recommend as thus:

- INEC should establish guidelines for the use of Facebook and the social media generally as a political communication tool in Nigeria. Modalities should be established to systematically verify information reported by citizen observers through Facebook and other social media platforms.
- The government should establish a social media tracking center to monitor, collate, and interpret trends and reports during elections.
- Credibility of Facebook should be encouraged because presently, most political stories obtained from the web are mere gossips and rumours which most times are baseless. Hence, a little bit of caution should be exhibited by those who post comments on Facebook and other social media sites in other to earn credibility and reliability.



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