

Social Media and Political Promotion: Analysis of Edo State APC Gubernatorial Candidate's Promotion on Facebook

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Abstract: The study was conducted to find out if political promotion on Facebook influenced Edo State electorate. The researchers adopted content analysis research methods. Five observable analytical cues were developed by the researchers to understand if the promotional messages on Facebook changed the electorate's perception about All Progressive Congress (APC) party's candidate, and secure their acceptance and support. The content analysis lasted for three weeks. Five research questions were formulated to guide the proper conduct of the research. The findings of the study, amongst others, indicate that the APC party's candidate got support from the posts targeted at promoting him on Facebook, whilst the perception of the electorate about his candidacy (APC candidate) did not change or affected by the incendiary offensive posts on Facebook. The study thus, recommends, among other things, that political party should utilise social media to promote their party-candidates, as well as, its political activities, in subsequent elections.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Promotion, Edo APC, Gubernatorial Candidate.

INTRODUCTION

According to Ngonso and Egielewa (2018, p5), "social media is a new media technology, a product of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)". Social media has revolutionized our communication patterns by way of providing instant feedback, viral content, popular accessibility and availability. Social media can be classified into different categories based on users' interest such as social networks - Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn; media sharing networks- Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube; discussion forum - Reddit, Quora, Digg; bookmarking and content curation networks - Pinterest, Flipboard; consumer review networks - Yelp, Zomato, Trip Advisor; blogging and publishing networks - WordPress, Tumblr, Medium; interest-based networks - Polyvore, Etsy, Fancy; social shopping networks - Goodreads, Houzz, Last.fm; sharing economy networks - Airbnb, Uber, Taskrabbt; Anonymous social media - Whispur, Ask.fm and After School etc. Social media otherwise known as new media is a form of electronic communication, which facilitates interaction based on certain interests and characteristics on web2.0 technology.

Ngonso and Egielewa (2018) state that the advent of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram represent a new phase of the revolution and development of new media in the globalized world. Another unique characteristic of the social media is that it provides platforms with democratised content-creation and dissemination of information among groups, individuals, and institutions, while consolidating existing connections among them. The interactive and democratic nature of social media appears to

have attracted growing number of users worldwide. Approximately 2 billion internet users are using social networks for news, information, entertainment and business activities. This figure is still expected to grow exponentially as mobile device usage and social networks increasingly gain traction. Facebook has the highest number of active users (over 1.5 billion), followed by WhatsApp (900 million) and then others such as QQ, Facebook messenger, Tumblr, Instagram, and Twitter (Ngonso and Egielewa, 2018).

These new media technologies have unarguably shaped political communication amongst political actors and electorates, thereby expanding political sphere for greater and wider participation. In Nigeria for instance, the total dependence on godfatherism is gradually diminishing and no longer lucrative as in the past. In the recent times, Nigerian society has witnessed altercations, disagreements and political gerrymandering between the godfather and his godson, which ultimately have led to several misfortunes on the part of both. The outcomes of the recently conducted Edo State 2020 gubernatorial elections is instructive and affirms the fact that godfatherism-effect in Nigeria is in the decline. Several scholars have attributed this to the growing effect of resort to social media campaign, which re-collected and informed the electorates of things hitherto forgotten, and/or not known about the candidates, amongst others.

According to Chinonye and Obi (2016) asserts that the place of social media (new media) to rally political support is no longer in doubt. To advance

the conversation and mobilize political support, social media has become a crucial political tool. Facebook, Twitter and other social networks reinforce political messages and build online and offline support that will help drive interesting debate about any politician and political party. Ezebuenyi and Ejezieh (2012) cited in Chinonye and Obi, reviewed the strength of social media in political campaign and state that the election campaign that saw Barack Obama become the President of the United States of America in the first and second terms of office (2008-2012 and 2012-2016) was characterized by effective and efficient information management ability interfacing the deployment of the new media technologies by his ability to use online platforms to attract the electorate commonly known as friends of Obama with the “Slogan Change is Possible”. Following the same trend, President Goodluck Jonathan also adopted an online information management skill in his 2011 presidential election campaign, and actually, become the first in Nigeria to use such strategy. In 2015 and 2019 general elections, the political parties that featured candidates for the elections also created several social media platforms to reach the electorate. In fact, the arrival of the social media has opened up a new political communication vista in Nigeria.

In Edo State 2020 gubernatorial election (also known as Edo 2020), a strong political argument emerged, which boils down to *lets' do away with godfatherism in Edo politics*. This was christened “*Edo No Bi Lagos*”, which also serves as the slogan of the incumbent governor of Edo State, Mr Godwin Obaseki, a technocrat, whose campaign for re-election was centered on free-choice and freedom of the electorates to choose their leaders. While this remains his strategy and that of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), his political party; the All Progressive Congress (APC) candidate, Pastor Ize-Iyamu Osagie, was seen as a favoured candidate, because of the overwhelming support from the immediate-past Governor of Edo State and the former National Chairman of APC, Comrade Adams Aliu Oshiomhole, who was also seen by the Edo people as a godfather to the APC candidate. But the main contention in the Edo 2020 gubernatorial election, which gave birth to this study was that the APC's candidate in 2016 was a PDP candidate, whose image was, allegedly, smeared by Comrade Adam Aliu Oshiomhole, in numerous vituperations onslaughts, in the bid to promote the incumbent governor, Mr Godwin

Obaseki, who, then, was his ‘godson’ and the candidate of the APC. Now, these vituperations that maligned and smeared Pastor Ize-Iyamu, the now APC candidate, have surfaced online, and virtually, in all the social media platforms, including Facebook and Youtube, all disparaging, casting aspersions, displaying and magnifying the unfitness of Pastor Ize-Iyamu to hold political office in Edo State.

Statement of the Problem

Available data indicates that political analysts in Nigeria believed that, following the negative vituperation against Pastor Ize-Iyamu, the APC candidate in the Edo State 2020 gubernatorial election, it will not be possible to rebrand Pastor Ize-Iyamu, the APC candidate in the Edo State 2020 gubernatorial election, while some believed that image-assassination of the APC candidate in 2016, when he was the PDP candidate, is a matter of political rhetoric, which can, easily, be erased by counter-political promotion. It is on this premise, that the researchers seek to understand if the social media posts on Facebook targeted at promoting the APC's candidate has changed the electorates' perception of the APC's candidate, and whether or not the change in perception led to acceptance, support and exculpation of the candidate from prejudice occasioned by the negative vituperations. Flowing from the above, the following questions were therefore provided to guide the execution of this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does the APC's candidate gets support response from those who read the posts on Facebook during Edo 2020 Governorship election campaign?
2. Has the perception of Edo electorate changed towards the APC candidate as a result of the posts on Facebook?
3. The responses got through the posts were in favour of PDP instead of APC

To further understand the psychological disposition of the social media users who read the posts targeted at promoting APC's candidate, the researchers also find out if those who read the posts made sarcastic comments as their responses. If abuses were rain on the promoters of APC's candidate and if their comments also deviated from the target of electioneering discourse.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Diffusion of Innovation (DOI). Diffusion of Innovation (DOI)

was developed by Everett Rogers. It originated in communication to explain how, over time an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) through a specific population or social system. The theory identified five adopters for a product, namely, innovators; early adopters; the early majority; the late majority and the laggards; and five stages of the consumer-adoption process - awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. Rogers, further, listed five perceived characteristics of innovators that help the rate at which innovations are adopted as - relative advantage, compatibility, complex, reliability, and observability.

The above elucidates and clearly shows that Edo State citizen's adoption of the social media platform, particularly, Facebook, as a new technology for political communication, may diffuse to other States in Nigeria, once it is viewed as compatible and advantageous, not complex, and its reliability can be ascertained. From the foregoing, one could rightly state that, once it is ascertained that utilisation of the social media platform for political communication meets the five perceived characteristics outlined above, same can be perceived as good instrument for political campaigns, and its adoption inevitable.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Media and Political Campaign

The jury is still out on the impact of the social media on political promotions (campaigns). Several scholars have argued that the impact of the social media has been more on the negative than the positive. This has elicited divergent views and elucidation on whether or not the social media has been utilized for the promotion of political activities qua elections, rather than for manipulation of the electorates, in order to further personal political ends. The above views were expressed and amplified by the United States of America's Congress and the Democratic Party, as the reason why the Republican Party's candidate (Donald Trump) won the 2016 presidential election. Which it accused the Russian President, Vladimir Putin and Russian Federation of meddling in the United States 2016 Presidential election that brought President Donald Trump to office.

To underscore the angst, displeasure, and seriousness attached to issues of election-meddling, several probe-panels, including the classical Muller's panel, were constituted to investigate the allegation. In the same vein,

Cambridge Analytica, a company based in the United Kingdom, was accused of hacking, faking and cloning social media (Facebook) accounts of several million people, in collusion and connivance with the Russian government, to send mediated messages that perjure and injures the image of candidates, whilst, propping-up their preferred-candidates as much-better candidates with inherent potentials and electability value. The investigation led to the arrest of the officials of *Cambridge Analytical*, which, eventually, prompted the closure of the company.

Despite the above, social media utilisation and application in elections has continued to increase and blossom in a gargantuan proportion that triggers enormous fear of it altering the traditional practice of electioneering. This phenomenon, according to Ayo et al (2014), is premised on the rapidly expanding access to internet, occasioned by increased availability of internet-ready smartphones and other communication devices, which enable individuals to simultaneously share information with any number of peers or even the public. The electorates across the globe now leverage on social media platforms or web-based media platforms like personal websites, blogs, social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Quora, amongst others, for political communication. This connection between the modern media and electioneering campaign is captured aptly by Tejumaiye et.al (2018, p3) thus:

Political advertising requires that mass communication be focused, targeted and managed when reaching out to large audience groups. It can include several different mediums and span several months over the course of a political campaign. Unlike the campaigns of the past, advances in media technology have streamlined the process, giving candidates more options to reach even larger groups of constituents with very little physical effort. Political advertising has become a relevant niche of advertising in the contemporary political terrain of Nigeria. This is not unconnected with its usefulness as a veritable means of making the electorate aware of candidates and manifestoes of political parties. Political advertising has become an integral part of politics in Nigeria to the extent that electorate sometimes weigh the seriousness of candidates and political parties against the background of the level and pattern of advertising employed. Underscoring the relevance of political advertising in the current Nigerian political dispensation.

In Nigeria, the situation is not different from the general trend around the world. For instance, the turnout of events in the recently conducted gubernatorial elections in some states points to the important role social media play in ensuring credible elections. Oftentimes, the electorates, candidate-campaign organisations, and the political parties use the social media to promote their candidates, and to drive home messages intended to woo, lure and convince people to support their preferred-candidates. The above depicts the enormity and importance attached to the social media, as well as, the power it has in shaping political thoughts of the members of the society. Available data posits that over 27 million Nigerians use social media, and that the number of users has continued to increase astronomically. The data shows that, between April 2019 – January 2020, the number of users increased to 3.4 million (14%) (Simon Kemp, Digital 2020 Nigeria Report). The implications of all these, show that the electorates and the society now prefer the use of social media for communication and dissemination of information to the use of the traditional news channels, due to the obvious fact that it affords users unfettered access and platform for expression and sharing of information, thoughts, videos, and ideas on any issues of their interest, including political campaign messages. It also provides real-time news-break, thus making it difficult and near-impossible for those with manipulative intentions and/or those manipulating the electoral process or spinning events to favour preferred-political party or candidates to hackle.

In spite of the freelance nature of the social media, controversy still pervades the Nigerian society, with scholars still undecided on the efficacy of the social media to election and electoral activities, particularly electoral promotions. Available data shows that social media platforms have been utilized to publish and circulate information for and against the candidates in the Edo State gubernatorial election. This information is usually rife and laced with all kinds of information that debases and de-esteems the candidates. Scholars agree that some of these campaign/promotional messages or information do not meet the standard-requirement for publishable information, but yet, these messages are allowed to be published on the social media. Ostensibly, relying on the Ekeanyanwu (2017) elucidation that communication is a vital component of our lives and existence and no society has been known to exist without it. And that communication is the

exchange of ideas, views, information, experiences and sharing of meanings between persons, nations, societies, and cultures.

Baran and Davies (2003) x-rayed the exigencies of the media (which the social media is part of) in the society and concluded that the media is influential and powerful. The media all over the globe is regarded as a political instrument, and in advanced societies, an integral part of political life, serving for most people as their major and only link with the government and providing for them the information, which they require to make political judgment on the basis of their political attitudes. The mass media in addition to providing information confers status and legitimacy on political leaders and issues (Ekeanyanwu 2017). The mass media can, also, set political agenda for the society by deciding what political topics the people talk about. This in turn can determine or drive the campaigns or political promotions of candidates in an electioneering process. Looking at the relationship between the press, the governed and the government. Similarly, McQuail (2005, p.523) opined that:

There has always been an intimate connection between mass communication and the conduct of politics, in whatever kind of regime. In totalitarian or authoritarian societies, ruling elites use their control of the media to ensure conformity and compliance and to stifle dissent by one means or another. In democracies, the media have a complex relationship with sources of power and the political system. On the one hand, they usually find their *raison d'être* in their service to their audiences, to whom they provide information and views according to judgments of interest and need.

In the prelude to Edo State 2020 gubernatorial election, several promotional videos, messages, and information surfaced on the social media, most and prominent of them, campaign messages maligning the All Progressive Congress (APC) candidate, Pastor Ize-Iyamu Osagie, by all, including his now supporters. Some of the messages alluded to his incongruous attitude, whilst in the University as a student, and the corruption cases lying and subsisting at the Federal High Court, Edo State. It is uncertain whether or not these promotional/campaign messages and obvious negative characterization of Pastor Ize-Iyamu Osagie, the All Progressive Congress (APC) candidate, affected or promoted his candidature. More-over, led to his trouncing, by the candidate of the Peoples' Democratic Party

(PDP) and the incumbent governor, Mr. Godwin Obaseki, at the recently concluded Edo State 2020 gubernatorial election (Poll). Particularly and in view of the definition of Promotion as something, such as advertising, that is done to make people aware of something and increase its sales or popularity (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, Since 1828). To that extent, this paper attempts to analyse promotional/campaign messages promoted through the social media against and in favour of the APC gubernatorial candidate, Pastor Ize-Iyamu Osagie.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted content analytical research method to study Facebook posts targeted at promoting the APC’s gubernatorial candidate for Edo 2020 election. A total of 94 posts were accessed and analyzed. The posts were collected

from 22 August, 2020 to 15 September, 2020. The researchers decided to study posts within this period, because it was the climax of the political campaign for the election. The researchers’ categorized comments on the posts into positive and negative comments (reactions). The researchers’ used the following analytical cues: sarcastic comments, abuses on the promoters as negative reactions, and positive reaction as posts that support APC candidates. Likes on the posts were also treated as support for APC candidate. However, the researchers sort to understand change of perception of the respondents from such obvious statement. The study was a kind of census since the population was small. The descriptive data were subjected to empirical data using simple percentage.

Data Analysis and Presentations

Table 1: Summary Analysis of the Posts on Facebook that were shared to promote APC Governorship Candidate in Edo Governorship election, 2020

Party	Number of Posts Content Analyzed on Facebook	Positive Reactions by Others who read the post on APC Governorship Candidate	Change of Perception of those who read the post	Negative Reaction Facebook	Likes on Post by Facebook Users
APC	94	19	Nil	43	32
Percentage	100%	20%	Nil	46%	34%

Table 1 above show the findings of this research work. Out of 94 posts that were shared on Facebook by the social media handlers of the APC Governorship candidate in the 2020 election, 19 comments (reactions) from other social media users were positive and 32 likes were also shown on the 94 posts shared to promote the candidate. The positive reactions and likes on the posts were summed up as support for the APC governorship candidate. While 43(46%) negative reactions came as abuse on the promoters of the campaign posts, name calling, and with the use of offensive emoticons. The researchers agreed that these negative comments are proof and show of loyalty to PDP since the election was between the two political parties. The table also show that no respondent (social media user who came across the post comment on the change of perception about the APC candidate, meaning that the still hold onto the previous perception of the APC candidate earlier smear by his Godfather, Comrade Adams Aliu Oshiomhol in 2017.

The findings of this study were discussed in line with the research questions. The findings indicate that the APC’s candidate got support from the posts targeted at promoting him on Facebook, whilst the perception of the electorate about his candidacy did not change or affected by the incendiary posts on Facebook. The findings further show that PDP got more favourable comments from the posts that were targeted at promoting the APC’s candidates. Further, the findings show that there were sarcastic comments made about the posts targeted at promoting the APC’s candidate. This could also be interpreted to mean rejection of the APC’s candidate and his promoters. Also, the findings indicate that abuses were poured on the promoters of the APC’s candidate. This could also be interpreted to mean rejection of the candidate and his promoters.

**Appendix
Social Media and Political Promotion: Analysis of Edo APC Guber Candidate’s Promotion on Facebook**

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Post 1: The PDP candidate’s campaign is anchored on self-defeated rubrics. He is showing casing the renovated stadium as if a new has been built, so is the state secretariat. The thrust of MEGA clearly shows Edo was great before and he at the saddle could not sustain it greatness but need a new

mandate to make it great again. He claims to be a pragmatist but has failed to lift even the 200,000 people he promised jobs out of the bottom billion. It is time to say give way for Ize-Iyamu to provide leadership for Edo People. Vote APC.

Analysis of this post 22 hours after posting (8/22/2020) Daniel Ekhareafu’s Post

Abuse/Calling on the Author	Change of Perception about the promoted Candidate	Support for the promoted Candidate	Neutral comment(joke-test/emoticon	Support for the Opposed Candidate in the post(PDP)	Comments that Deviate from the focus of the author’s target	Retaliation to Defend post by author
2	Nil	1	2	5	Nil	8

Post 2: My research in education has taken me to the three senatorial Districts of Edo State, apart from Benin City that can boast of full staff mix in our secondary schools, the reality in suburbs of the city and other parts of the state revealed that most secondary schools do not have more than three teachers. Some do not have at all. Some communities employ what they call community teachers as a stop gap. These community teachers

are former students awaiting admission into the universities and other tertiary institutions. My fear is how can the children of the poor farmers realize their dreams of becoming engineers, pilots, journalists, accountant, lawyers, medical doctors etc without the right foundation? The time to redress this lopsidedness is now. Vote APC SIMPLE AGENDA to birth qualitative education come September 12, 2020.

Analysis of this post 22/08/2020 after posting (4/08/2020) Daniel Ekhareafu’s Post

Abuse/Name Calling on the Author	Change of Perception about the promoted Candidate	Support for the promoted Candidate	Neutral comment(joke-text/emoticon	Support for the Opposed Candidate in the post(PDP)	Comments that Deviate from the focus of the author’s target	Author’s reaction and re-reactions to defend post
2	Nil	Nil	5	1	2	nil

Post 3: Pastor Ize-Iyamu bestrides the Edo political space like a colossus because he is a strategist and a goal getter. In addition, he knows the Edo man from tributaries of gelegele in Ovia South West to the hills of Ojah in Akuko-Edo

Local Government Area. Vote the man that knows you and your people. APC is the party, Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu is the candidate, come September, 19, 2020.

Analysis of this post 22/08/2020 after posting (4/08/2020) Daniel Ekhareafu’s Post

Abuse/Name Calling on the Author	Change of Perception about the promoted Candidate	Support for the promoted Candidate	Neutral comment(joke-text/emoticon	Support for the Opposed Candidate in the post(PDP)	Comments that Deviate from the focus of the author’s target	Author’s reaction and re-reactions to defend post
Nil	Nil	1	2	6	Nil	3

Post 4: Politics should not be left in the hands of criminals otherwise there will be no hope for Nigeria-Pastor Ize-Iyamu in Proverb 29:2 the

Bible says when the righteous are in authority the people rejoice but when the wicked beareth rule the people mourn #EdoMustMoveForward

Analysis of this post 22/08/2020 after 3 hours posting- Pope Innocent's Post

Abuse/Name Calling on the Author	Change of Perception about the promoted Candidate	Support for the promoted Candidate	Neutral comment(joke-text/emoticon	Support for the Opposed Candidate in the post(PDP)	Comments that Deviate from the focus of the author's target	Author's reaction and re-reactions to defend post
Nil	Nil	3	4	Nil	Nil	8

Post 5: If Edo refinery is a PDP arrangement, all the government needed to do is to tell Edolites the state percentage share in the ownership, the claim that it is the state government own is punctuated by Chinese Company that holds the stake. APC did

not contest Osissiomomo power project because the ownership is not in doubt. The poor information culture manifesting in the form of misinformation and disinformation cannot be the trust of an idea centered idea.

Analysis of this post 26/08/2020 after 13 hours after posting (26/08/2020) Daniel Ekhareafu's Post

Abuse/Name Calling on the Author	Change of Perception about the promoted Candidate	Support for the promoted Candidate	Neutral comment(sarcastic-text/emoticon	Support for the Opposed Candidate in the post(PDP)	Comments that Deviate from the focus of the author's target	Author's reaction and re-reactions to defend post
Nil	Nil	Nil	2	1	Nil	1

Post 6: Now that the ward campaigns are in top gear, it is time people in the hinterland ask questions about what the current administration

has done for them to deserve another term. Say no to failed promises. Punish promise breakers with your vote. Vote APC

Analysis of this post 25/08/2020 after 12 hours after posting (26/08/2020) Daniel Ekhareafu's Post

Abuse/Name Calling on the Author	Change of Perception about the promoted Candidate	Support for the promoted Candidate	Neutral comment(sarcastic-text/emoticon	Support for the Opposed Candidate in the post(PDP)	Comments that Deviate from the focus of the author's target	Author's reaction and re-reactions to defend post
Nil	Nil	2	2	Nil	Nil	Nil

Post 7: Politics is not for noise marker. It is for strategic thinkers. The game is up for GO. A tsunamis will hit his camp in the coming days.

Today's decampes and resignation is a pointer, if you know, you know. POI is the next Governor

Analysis of this post 09/09/2020 1 hour after posting - Daniel Ekhareafu's Post

Abuse/Name Calling on the Author	Change of Perception about the promoted Candidate	Support for the promoted Candidate	Neutral comment(sarcastic-text/emoticon	Support for the Opposed Candidate in the post(PDP)	Comments that Deviate from the focus of the author's target	Author's reaction and re-reactions to defend post
Nil	Nil	1	1	2	1	Nil

Post 8: Every kind hearted person will vote Oshiomhole's Choice of candidate on the 19th of

September to appreciate his infrastructural development (POI).

Analysis of this post 09/09/2020 1 hour after posting – Enadeghe Best’s Post

Abuse/Name Calling on the Author	Change of Perception about the promoted Candidate	Support for the promoted Candidate	Neutral comment(sarcastic-text/emoticon)	Support for the Opposed Candidate in the post(PDP)	Comments that Deviate from the focus of the author’s target	Author’s reaction and re-reactions to defend post
Nil	Nil	10	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Post 10: POI is well informed. The debate has put paid to the propaganda masquerading as performance. We cannot continue on this

trajectory. Indeed Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu is the next Governor of Edo State.

Analysis of this post 15/09/2020 Retrieved 24 hours after posting – Daniel Ekhareafu’s Post

Abuse/Name Calling on the Author	Change of Perception about the promoted Candidate	Support for the promoted Candidate	Neutral comment(sarcastic-text/emoticon)	Support for the Opposed Candidate in the post(PDP)	Comments that Deviate from the focus of the author’s target	Author’s reaction and re-reactions to defend post
Nil	Nil	3	1	8	4	

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Flowing from the above outcomes, the study concludes that the APC party’s candidate got support from the posts targeted at promoting him on Facebook, whilst the perception of the electorate about his candidacy (APC candidate) did not change or affected by the incendiary posts on Facebook. The study thus, recommends that political party should utilize social media to promote their party-candidates, as well as, its political activities, in subsequent elections. The study further recommends that political parties should resist filling a candidate with smear personality in elections irrespective of their social media marketing strategy.

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