Chapter 7

Social Media, Citizens' Participation in Elections, and the Proverbial Dividends of Democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this chapter are to examine social media and citizens' participation in elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic; appraise social media and delivery of democratic dividends in Nigeria's Fourth Republic; and identify the relationship among social media, citizen participation in elections, and delivery of democratic dividends in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study was hinged on the social capital and democratic participant media theories and a review of relevant academic literature. The study finds that while social media facilitated citizen participation during elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, actual voter turnout was low. Also, the study shows that in spite of social media use by Nigerian citizens, democracy dividends are yet to be delivered to Nigerian citizens. And lastly, findings reveal that there appears to be a weak relationship between social media and citizens' participation in elections in Nigeria and that social media use by Nigerians has not delivered the dividends of democracy to the people.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the trilogical subjects of social media, citizens' participation in elections, and the proverbial dividends of democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It is important to point out that the media in Africa have been acknowledged for their roles in challenging fascist, monocratic, apartheid, or peremptory regimes; shaping democratic politics; and bolstering greater citizen participation in elections in various countries in the continent (Dantani, Wika, & Maigari, 2017; Duru, 2017; Falade, 2014; Imhonopi & Urim, 2004; Imhonopi, 2012; Iruonagbe, Imhonopi, & Ahmadu, 2013; Menocal, 2014; Muriungi, 2006; Oboh, 2016; Suntai & Targema, 2017; Chiluwa, 2012; UNESCO, Ethiopia, & African Union, 2019). The media achieved these goals despite the, sometimes, deleterious macroclimate of repression in which they operate. For example, from the anti-colonial protests that shook the foundations of the colonial enterprise to bring about the independence of some African states; the anti-apartheid agitations; to the vanguard's role in contemporary African countries, the media continue to fight against repression by post-independent megalomaniacs who believe they are more significant than their nations (Iruonagbe, et al., 2013; Menocal, 2014; Muriungi, 2006; Oboh, 2016). Therefore, by informing, educating, sensitizing, and mobilizing the African society, the media, undeniably, play essential roles in the embedment of democratic culture and consciousness in the region (Chinedu-Okeke & Obi, 2016; Dantani et al., 2017; Gberevbie & Oviasogie, 2013; Mustapha, Gbonegun & Mustapha, 2016; Ndavula, & Mberia, 2012; Opeibi, 2019; Urim, Imhonopi & Ojukwu, 2013).

The media play visible roles during elections: shaping the edges of the democratic persona within nations. When the media are not seen to be doing so, they attract criticisms from citizens who have high expectations in their power to hold politicians and the government accountable to the people (Oboh, 2016; UNESCO, et al., 2019). Elections are instrumental in political leadership change and are also heavily influenced and driven by the media. The debouchment of social media changed the media space because it created options for ordinary citizens to participate. Social media have been found in developed and emerging economies to reshape the political landscape and narratives (Abdu, Alamai, Musa, & Halilu, 2018; Bello, Yusuf, Yusuf, & Akintola, 2017; Madueke, Nwosu, Ogbonnaya, Anumadu, & Okeke, 2017). Social media provided platforms for the political leverage that swept former American President Barack Obama into office. The *Arab Spring* was wound around social media use and led to the fall of despotic regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. The ongoing political activism in many African countries such as Senegal, Congo Brazzaville, Uganda, Nigeria, and others, are hastened because social media platforms give rooms for citizens to pass across messages that enable political participation and communication

among citizens (Bello, et al., 2017; Madueke, et al., 2017; Mustapha, et al., 2016; Nnanyelugo & Tsegyu, 2017).

In Nigeria, many young people access social media on their mobile devices. The new media have been acknowledged for their roles in spreading political information, promoting user-generated political contents, galvanizing youths into various political engagements, and expressing political views (Abdu et al., 2018). Bello et al. (2017) also recognize the growing influence of social media in Nigeria, where they have become the media of communication exploited for the following: exposing vices in the society; providing platforms for citizen communication; instigation of action; and putting pressure on political office holders to be alive to their responsibilities. These authors mention how former Nigerian President - Goodluck Jonathan's popularity soared in the build-up to the 2011 general elections because he opened a *Facebook* account. Jonathan was victorious in that year's general elections (Bello et al., 2017). His success motivated other political class members in Nigeria to follow likewise and discover social media's immense benefits.

This chapter attempts to expand the conversation about social media, citizens' participation in elections, and the proverbial dividends of democracy in Nigeria, focusing on the country's Fourth Republic that dawned in 1999.

Problem for Investigation

Democracy cannot exist without periodic elections where the people are expected to continuously assert their authority by directly or indirectly choosing their political leaders. Traditional media's role in aiding citizen participation in elections has been accented in academic literature (Duru, 2017; Menocal, 2014; Muriungi, 2006; Mustapha, et al., 2016; Ndavula & Mberia, 2012). How have social media aided citizens' participation in elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic? The surmise is that social media are instrumental in citizens' communication, just as they have been in other climes. Social media are useful in reinforcing citizen participation for and during elections. Again, this chapter seeks to investigate whether social media have aided the delivery of democratic dividends in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Most studies on social media use in politics in Nigeria and elsewhere show how social media platforms have been adopted during elections, for example, the 2011 and 2015 elections that ushered in Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari's administrations, respectively (Bello, et al., 2017; Madueke, et al., 2017; Mustapha, et al., 2016; Opeibi, 2019); or how social media have helped to belly-flop dictatorial regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and others (Danju, Maasoglu, & Maasoglu, 2013; Odoziobodo, 2019; Oginni, & Moitui, 2015; Suntai & Targema, 2017). But few studies have focused on whether/how social media have caused the delivery of democratic dividends in Nigeria's Fourth Republic to the people, which this research is framed

to do (Abdu, Alamai, & Halilu, 2018; Chinedu-Okeke & Obi, 2016; Madueke, et al., 2017). Lastly, this chapter will also x-ray the relationship that exists among social media, citizen participation, and the delivery of democratic dividends in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Research Objectives

The objectives which this study seeks to address are as follows:

i.   Examine literature on social media and citizens' participation in elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic;
ii. Appraise literature on social media and delivery of democratic dividends in Nigeria's Fourth Republic;
iii. Identify literature showing the relationship among social media, citizen participation in elections, and democratic dividends in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Research Method

The research design adopted for this study is the review method. Recent academic journals, specialized materials, and other academic materials on social media, citizen participation in elections, and delivery of democracy dividends particularly, in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, are examined. This method helps identify common themes in the review process for further scholarly discussions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Social media refer to the internet - or web-based interactive media platforms that allow users to generate and share contents and search for information online. They provide citizens with opportunities to connect with people of like minds, transmit and receive information, perspectives, experiences, knowledge, contacts, and expertise in real-time (Madueke, et al., 2017; National Democratic Institute, 2013; Kayode-Adedeji, Oyero & Aririguzoh, 2019; Nnanyelugo & Tsegyu, 2017). Social media belongs to the new Web 2.0 media genre and is different from traditional media (radio, TV, newspapers, and magazines). This is why they are sometimes called *new media.* They may include social networking sites like *Facebook*; video-content platforms such as *Youtube*; collaborative projects like *Wikipedia*; microblogs and blogs such

as *Twitter*; picture-sharing sites like *Flickr, Instagram,* and *Google Photos*); virtual social worlds, for example, *Second Life*; and virtual game worlds as exemplified by *Scribblenauts* (Madueke, et al., 2017; Olowokere & Audu-Bako, 2019). However, Aririguzoh, Sobowale, Usaini and Amoka (2020) discover that while the internet and social media have helped some people network, they have also caused a dearth of interpersonal communication. Some people prefer to hide behind their computers and other gadgets than having face-to-face communication with others.

Citizens' Participation

Citizens' political participation refers to citizens' direct or indirect engagement in determining the evolution and direction of political systems. Aririguzoh (2014) points out that political participation includes voting. Political participation is a shard of political behaviour in which citizens contribute to the process of nation-building by playing roles in the political lives of their societies (Abdu, Alamai, Musa, & Halilu, 2018; Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019; Adetoro & Omiyefa, 2017; Daniel, 2015; Eneji & Ikeoji, 2018; Falade, 2014; Madueke, et al., 2017). Participation may include activities such as the selection or election of political leaders, or explicitly voting and standing for elections, voting in a referendum, participating in town hall meetings, industrial strikes, organized rebellions, mass protests, demonstrations, and revolutions, or indirectly through political discussions, signing petitions, supporting boycotts, paying taxes, and others (Madueke, et al., 2017; Nkwede, 2019; Shenga & Pereira, 2019).

Elections

Elections involve citizens' periodic selection of preferred candidates into governance through direct or indirect balloting processes. The elected officers represent the citizens in government; and fulfil their campaign promises used to persuade voters to vote for them (Ibrahim & Mato, 2015; Odoziobodo & Nnaji, 2017; Tsegyu, 2016). Elections are essential elements of democracy because political leaders gain access to power. This power normatively is expected to be used for the betterment of the people they owe their legitimacy.

Democracy Dividends

Citizens are the custodians of the state's legitimacy, government, and elected officials. Citizens transmit this legitimacy by electing specific individuals who have shown interest in representing them in public offices. The elected officers are expected to meet the interests of the governed. Large population growth and the

considerable size of democratic boundaries make it difficult for direct democracy to happen(Falade, 2014). Therefore, representative democracy has become imperative, but at the same time, it is expected to be people-centred. The concept of democracy dividend ensures that elected officials do not represent their interests but those of the people. For Olu-Adeyemi (2012) and Umo-Udo (2014), democratic dividends are those intrinsic qualities of democracy that people should enjoy. They include popular sovereignty, citizen participation, the rule of law, an electoral system based on a majority vote, equality among the citizens (politically, economically, legally, and opportunity-wise), freedom and liberty granted to citizens, and popular consultation, and accountability. Extrinsic dividends include providing quality education, durable and modern infrastructure, and other social and economic comfort items for citizens (Urim, et al., 2013; Oloruntoba & Falola, 2018). Fatoki and Ajayi's (2017) prescription of democracy dividends are similar to Olu-Adeyemi's and Umo-Udo's. However, Fatoki and Ajayi add the socio-economic well-being of the people. They claim that healthy people ensure the existence of healthy, genuine, and sustainable democracy. Thus, democracy dividends are those political and socio-economic goods that elected officers in the state are expected to deliver to the governed in a democracy without fail. They are by-products of good governance, and the absence of good governance means that democracy dividends, as stated earlier, will undoubtedly be absent in a democracy.

Theoretical Review

Many useful theories try to explain the role of media (and now social media) in society. However, for this discourse, Social Capital Theory and Democratic Participant Media Theory have been selected. They capture what social media represent: community engagement leading to collective action and social movements and the media space's democratization that affords citizens platforms to intensify citizens voices, political participation, and activism.

Social capital theory emanates from Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James Coleman (1988), who focus on the power of group relations or community versus the individual. The theory received more scholarly attention and accretion by Robert Putnam in 1995 (Mustapha, et al., 2016). The theory states that social capital supports co-operation and community relations and can help combat many social problems in modern societies, such as crime, corruption, political kleptocracy, electoral violence, and others. Therefore, social capital is the resource immanent in social relations and structures that, when mobilized, increase the likelihood of achieving a social or collective action (Mustapha, et al., 2016). Social capital aids collectively desirable behaviour and could spawn social movements aimed at achieving a socially desirable goal. Social capital is generated because social media allows citizens to air their

opinions regarding the happenings within the socio-political and economic milieux. Citizens are empowered to drive social change by aggregating their presence, ideas, and voices, thereby creating mass actions or social movement that inspire or lead to change in the social system. The *Arab Spring* in North Africa and the Middle East; the election of the first black president in the United States; the defeat of the first presidential incumbent in Nigeria in 2015 are among many examples to be cited as offshoots of the power of social capital riding on social media to make these events happen (Abdu, et al., 2018; Bello, et al., 2017; Danju, et al., 2013; Olowokere & Audu-Bako, 2019; Opeibi, 2019). Consequently, social capital theory sees social media as offering a credible platform, like no other in the history of the human race, for greater citizen political participation, which could be parlayed into demanding that democracy dividends be delivered to citizens of a state.

The Democratic Participant Media Theory of Denis McQuail (1987) assumes that traditional media have suffered much bureaucratization, commercialization, and professional hegemony. These constrain citizen participation (Tsegyu, 2016). The traditional media may not afford easier access to all potential users and consumers because they need to make a profit, align with regulations of the countries they operate in, and the limitations of time, reach and space that they also face. Therefore, social media platforms are seen as attempts to democratize real-time media access and participation. Thus, Democratic Participant Media Theory believes the emergence of social media has weakened elitist or dominant groups media access because more citizens now have the platforms to share their views, give voice to their convictions, reach out to communities of like-minded people and even engage in political activism if they so choose. Therefore, while Social Capital Theory emphasizes the benefits found in numbers that social media can enable, the Democratic Participant Media theory believes that encumbrances on the way to citizens participation in holding their governments accountable have been quashed with the advent of social media.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Social Media and Citizens' Participation in Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

A five-country study covering Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe was conducted to find the possibilities of using social media platforms to encourage political participation in Africa. Chatora (2012) argues that they have great potentials to press collaborative political involvement because they enable ordinary citizens to voice their opinions and interact with and even shape their political systems. Falade (2014) finds low levels of citizen participation among some voters in Ondo State

in the 2007 and 2011 elections. Their low participation was caused by endemic factors like political apathy, loss of faith in the political processes, electoral violence culture, and lack of trust of political leaders and institutions. Ibrahim et al. (2015) report that social media messages contribute to making university students and middle-aged citizens participate more during the 2015 Nigerian general elections. However, the authors mention that the fear of post-election violence and insecurity resulted in low general turnout during these elections. Similarly, Madueke et al.'s (2017) study of the 2011 elections suggests that social media's impact on citizens' participation in the election is marginal. However, they say the media have good prospects. This seems to tally with Duru's (2017) study of citizens' attitudes toward civic and political participation in Nigeria between 2011 and 2012. He concludes that although respondents are exposed to social media, they do not trust the political processes. There was low political participation among the randomly selected 2,400 respondents.

Bello et al. (2017) investigate social media usage and political participation among 387 university undergraduates in Nigeria. This study reveals that students use social media mostly to mobilize themselves to vote during elections, engage in protests, join political parties, volunteer for political campaigns, engage in community initiatives, sign petitions, and other things. Adigun (2020) investigated the factors that determined voter turnouts in the 2019 Nigerian presidential election. This author reports that the North-West and North-East zones had the highest turnout rates of 44.00% and 41.71%, respectively. The South-South and South-East zones had the lowest turnout rate of 28.91% and 26.16%, respectively. North-Central zone had 35.75% while the South-West had 36.27%. The election period witnessed southerners running to the south for fear of post-election crises and northerners rushing back to their north for the same reason.

See the table below:

Table 1. Voter Turnout During the 2019 Presidential Elections

Year	Voter Turnout (%)	Total Votes	Registration	VAP Turnout (%)	Voting Age Population (VAP)
2003	69.08	42,018,735	60,823,022	65.33	64,319,246
2007	57.49	35,397,517	61,567,036	49.85	71,004,507
2011	53.68	39,469,484	73,528,040	48.32	81,691,751
2015	43.65	29,432,083	67,422,005	32.11	91,669,312
2019	34.75	28,614,190	82,344,107	26.87	106,490,312

Source: Adigun (2020)

Adigun argues that social media may have facilitated some citizens' participation during the elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Still, the actual voter turnout was moderated by political violence, voter intimidation, and general insecurity.

Social Media and Delivery of Democratic Dividends in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Olu-Adeyemi (2012) claims that Nigeria has been unable to deliver democratic dividends to Nigerians viz. justice, equity, equal access to resources, power, and social welfare since the Fourth Republic's dawn in 1999. Therefore, if social media have stimulated citizens' participation in politics, the different sites' messages have not helped foster democratic dividends to Nigerian citizens since the Fourth Republic was born. Umo-Udo's (2014) study suggests that citizens are also concerned about taking democratic dividends from their elected officers. However, Umo-Udo believes that democracy has not delivered democratic dividends to Nigerian citizens despite their participation. Ajayi and Ojo (2014) reveal that Nigerian democracy has been unable to pay the expected dividends to citizens because of its high cost, focus on making the elected officials comfortable, and the problem of corruption. Duru (2017) agrees with these authors and but adds the government's inability to deliver sociopolitical and economic goods. Ojoh (2017) reveals that Nigerians are still waiting for the delivery of the dividends of democracy since the emergence of the Fourth Republic. Ojoh (2017) believes that genuine citizen participation in governance may compel the government to be more responsive. Ubi and Ibonye (2019) find that Nigerian citizens have not enjoyed the delivery of democracy dividends because of endemic challenges such as poverty, subsistence agriculture, systemic inequity, dependence on primary commodities, impunity, and corruption. Therefore, they surmise that without the provision of welfare, equity, justice, domestic order, and security, Nigerian democratic governments will continue to lack political legitimacy.

From the review above, it can be drawn that Nigerians use social media. Notwithstanding, the dividends of democracy are yet to be delivered to them.

DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the discussion is done in line with each objective of the study.

First Research Objective: Social Media and Citizens' Participation in Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The literature review has shown that social media can build social movements, aggregate citizens' voices, perspectives, and interests. This confirms the Social Capital Theory and Democratic Participant Media Theory positions because social media can be used for social mobilization, relations, and movements. Social media gave citizens the information that may spur them to participate in political processes. In this wise, social media presented platforms that Nigerian citizens found useful for registration, mobilization, and political communication. However, social media's influence on citizen actual participation during elections apparently is low. This may have been due to the pervasive political violence, voter intimidation, ballot snatching, and other forms of electoral violence, which discouraged many citizens from participating in the elections in that period. These are big problems that need to be addressed in Nigeria. Even though social media may be used to get the attention of the citizens, these same citizens may decide to sleep in their homes, play games in the abandoned streets, or watch TVs because they do not want to risk their lives or get harmed if they decide to go out and vote.

Second Research Objective: Social Media and Delivery of Democratic Dividends in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The literature shows that social media have not stimulated or generated the delivery of democracy dividends to Nigerians. Some citizens are still frustrated at injustice, insecurity, poverty, lack of social amenities and welfare. This may not be unconnected with the proposition that some political office holders in Nigeria got into offices through fraudulent means. They, therefore, do not consider themselves accountable to the people. After all, they may think since they could get into their offices through the backdoors, they may continue to ignore the electorate in whose hands lie real power. Also, Nigeria's democracy is costly. Politicians may first seek to recoup all the expenses they incurred. These expenses may include the millions spent to pick up expression of interest forms from their political parties; monies spent to mobilize their supporters and delegates to win the primary elections and running their campaigns. All these costs they would ordinarily want to recoup first may make them not care about delivering any democracy dividends to the people. Furthermore, the Nigerian state itself appears to make it difficult for politicians to pay the dividends of democracy dividends to their constituents. Difficulties that hinder politicians from delivering include corruption, poverty, systemic inequality, and the general air of impunity pervading government business.

Third Research Objective: Social Media, Citizen Participation in Elections, and Delivery of Democratic Dividends in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

From the review of literature, it has been established that social media platforms convey political messages. However, these messages have not influenced some citizens into voting because some of them are afraid. According to Adigun (2020), only 28,614,190 citizens (i.e., 26.87%) of voters who fall into the Voting Age Population (VAP) voted during the 2019 presidential elections. Some indecent politicians may engage their thugs and paid political minions to cause mayhem and attack innocent voters. If such politicians *win*, they may not be interested in delivering any dividends to the people. Social media usage by citizens notwithstanding; this situation may not change as long as these undesirable factors are not addressed. Therefore, until the quality of Nigeria's democracy changes and the socioeconomic system is made to work for all Nigerians irrespective of religion, class, ethnicity, or partisan considerations, the situation may not improve as the country progresses in the Fourth Republic.

Social and Policy Implications

- **The Government of Nigeria needs to do more**

If everything rises and falls on leadership, the government needs to improve the electoral environment by ensuring peaceful, free, and fair elections. The era of political or electoral violence must end. If a national referendum has to be convened to reach this resolution or the issue has to be tabled at the National Assembly, these should be done urgently. This way, citizen participation in elections will be moved from online to offline spaces without fear that one's disposition towards a candidate or party can lead to injury or death.

- **The costly nature of practising Nigeria's democracy has to be revisited**

Where members of the National Assembly and other executives earn far more than what their contemporaries in developed countries do - amid mainly poor citizens – is not ideal. A law should be passed to significantly reduce the cost of running in elections and the resultant government.

- **Activism by academia and civil society**

Civil society organizations need to do more than talk to ensure the government's accountability to and willingness to meet the people's sociopolitical and economic needs. The academia should continue to lead activism through its unions to demand more significant equity, fairness, and justice in Nigeria. Academic researchers should continue to investigate Nigeria's government system to advance recommendations to improve the present system.

- **The media**

As the Fourth Estate of the realm, the media should continue to publish independent messages. Some of these messages have overthrown autocratic and despotic governments for the popular rulers to take over. The traditional media should continue to be the vanguards of peoples' rights. Nigerians should utilize the advantages of the reach, real-time nature, and freedom that social media platforms continue to pummel politicians behind bad governance and engage in political discussions and participation to reshape the nation's political system.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that social media have contributed immensely to the democratization of political space worldwide. In Nigeria, they have helped to increase knowledge and to mobilize. However, some citizens' active participation in elections is hindered because of their fear of being visited with violence. The politicians have not delivered the dividends of democracy to the citizens.

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