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Social media, propaganda and electioneering campaigns: The Nigerian experience (1999 – 2019)

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Abstract

The use of propaganda to secure the support of the electorate before elections has become common place in the Nigerian political arena. With the advent of social media which has been described as democratic because of the unfettered access of its users to send and receive information; political campaigns in recent times have become more or less, an avenue for peddling deliberate falsehood against the perceived opponents. In Nigeria, politicians always embark on battle of wits as they struggle for the minds of the voters on whom their victory depends in elections. Sometimes, they go for the opponent's jugular using the instrumentality of social media and propaganda. This paper is an analytical study anchored on technological determinism and uses gratifications theories. It examines the utilization of social media and propaganda in electioneering campaigns by political parties and their candidates in Nigeria. The paper argues that, in their bid to win elections, political parties and their candidates resorted to propaganda and making of big promises that are hardly met; which translates to dashing the hopes of the electorate after voting them to power. The paper concludes that propaganda and social media posts or tweets cannot translate into electoral victory if not backed up with actual voting of a candidate during elections by the electorate. The paper recommends among other things that political parties and their candidates should rise beyond propaganda and social media posts and carry out issue-based campaigns devoid of calumny, character assassination and hate as done in saner climes.

Keywords: social media, propaganda, election, voting, campaigns, Nigerian

Introduction

Democracy has been acknowledged as the best form of government by a good number of nations across the globe. This is because it provides opportunities for the people to participate in the affairs of their state. Accordingly, Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights {UDHR} (1948) provides that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government and that such shall be expressed through periodic elections. Consequently, political parties and contenders to political offices carry out electioneering campaigns prior to the elections as a way of galvanizing the support of the electorate in order to coast home to victory. These campaigns are usually done through different platforms among which are the social media. Ekwueme and Folarin (2017) ^[10] contended that 21st century is the age of information technology which is why politicians have swerved from the use of use of conventional media to the use of social media while carrying out their campaigns.

Due to its democratic and unregulated nature, unlike the traditional mass media, social media have become an avenue used by politicians to spread propaganda against real or imagined opponents in a bid to get the support of the voters. Palmer and Perkins (2007) likened propaganda to advertising and selling. They argued that just like the advertiser and salesman, "the propagandist must study his market and tailor his product to suit the demand". They maintained that the propagandist "must analyze the preconceptions, fears, desires, and weaknesses" of the target audience so as to design

appropriate messages that will best appeal to them.

In recent times, social media have become so powerful and significant in currying the support of the electorate such that every contender to an elective office embraces it with two hands. To this end, Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) argued that because the social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Youtube are participatory, interactive and cost-effective, "they have become veritable instruments for carrying out election campaigns and other electioneering activities, political engagement and mobilization among others".

Unfortunately, however, Ekwueme and Folarin (2017) ^[10], argued that "the major challenges of electioneering in the 21st century is that due to the faceless nature of the internet, social media spread propaganda, false information, and hate speeches about contending electoral candidate". The efficacy of social media in mobilizing support for an electoral candidate was brought to the limelight during 2008 US presidential elections. Barack Obama recorded a huge success in the use of social media for political purposes, thereby prompting other politicians and nations to toe that line (Okoro and Nwafor, 2013). This is why Dang-Xuan and Stieglitz (2012) were correct to have argued that social media have the potential to increase political discussion and participation among citizens. Therefore, it is noteworthy that social media have democratized communication and created a virtual community of people with common interest, aspiration and goal to air their views without restriction of any form. It is on this premise that this study seeks a review of "social media, propaganda and

electioneering campaigns: The Nigeria Experience". Within this context, the following sub-themes will be explored: theoretical framework, conceptual framework and social media, propaganda and electioneering campaigns: exploring the nexus.

Theoretical framework

This study is hinged on two theories: technological determinism and uses and gratifications theories. The propositions of these two theories provide the basis for their relevance to the study.

a) Technological Determinism Theory

Thorstein Veblen was reported to have propounded the theory. Hauer (2017) maintained that, "technological determinism is the belief that technology is the principal initiator of the society's transformation". He argued that the supporters of technological determinism are of the view that social changes in the society are controlled by technology, technological development, communications technology and the media.

Since the advent of the theory in the 20th century, two branches or categories of it have been identified such as the radical technological determinism and moderate technological determinism. They are also called hard technological determinism and soft technological determinism (Hauer, 2017). According to the scholar, whereas the radical version of the theory sees technology as a prerequisite for a change in the society, the moderate version believes that technology is a factor which may or may not cause change in society. Within this concept, McQuail (2010) summarized the main propositions of the theory as follows:

- Communication technology is fundamental to society.
- Each technology has a bias to particular communication forms, contents and use.
- The sequence of invention and application of communication technology influences the direction and pace of social change.
- Communication revolutions lead to social change.

Arguing along similar line of thought, Hamilton (2016) described technological determinism as a reductionist theory that presumes that society's technology drives the development of its social structure and cultural values. However, contemporary researchers have argued that the relationship between technology and society cannot be reduced to the simplistic cause and effect formula" but rather, "an intertwining concept, whereby technology does not determine but operates; and is be operated upon in a complex social field" (Hamilton, 2016). There are those who even believe that social circumstances alone determine which technologies are accepted or rejected (Hamilton, 2016), so they are social determinists.

b) Uses and gratifications theory

This theory is associated with the works of Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch published in 1974 (Okoro and Nwafor, 2013). The theory believes that the audience expose themselves to the media that can satisfy their needs (gratifications). The needs, according to Okunna and Omenuga (2012) include information, entertainment, self-esteem, prestige *et cetera*. This therefore presupposes that

various audiences have different needs for exposing themselves to the media. Ojobor (2002) opined that before the emergence of uses and gratifications, discussions centred on what media do to the people but discussions has shifted to what people derive with the media. He elaborated the needs which audience seeks to satisfy through exposure to the media as follows: surveillance, excitement, guidance, relaxation, tension release, social integration, entertainment, escape, identity, socialization and information acquisition. This is in line with Okoro and Nwafor (2013) view that people use the media to fulfill specific gratifications. This theory sees the audience active because of its (audience) ability to decide what media to get exposed to, receive messages from and retain messages obtained as well.

Uses and gratifications theory is suitable as one of the theoretical frameworks for this study because users of social media such as the electorate and the politicians intentionally use the social media because they believe they can satisfy their gratifications. Equally, technological determinism theory is suitable for this study because social media is the prevailing technology which can influence voters' political behavior in terms of voting and campaigning for votes.

Conceptual Framework

1. Social media

Social media is defined as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated contents" (Dang-Xuan and Stieglitz, 2012). The implication of the above definition is that people who use social media have been upgraded from mere consumers of contents to producers of contents. This is what scholars have described as "prosumers", that is, a situation whereby people are both consumers and producers of contents.

The advent of social media has made everybody who could afford a smart phone a journalist. Okoro and Nwafor (2013) argued that social media are internet-based tools and services which allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute, and search for information online. According to them, they are interactive web-based media platforms that avail users the opportunity of connecting, sharing opinions, experiences, views, contacts, knowledge, expertise *et cetera*. The above position supports Stieglitz *et al.*, (2012) who maintained that social media enable individuals to share knowledge, experiences, opinions and ideas with one another.

According to Orji (2014), since 2007, social media have become an important tool of political communication in Nigeria. However, the first real test of the use of social media for political participation in Nigeria was during the 2011 general elections (Okoro and Nwafor, 2013). The scholars argued that the high importance attached to social media for campaigns in Nigeria was demonstrated by former President Goodluck Jonathan when he announced his decision to run for the office of the president of Nigeria on social media. The social media, no doubt, have provided an electronic public sphere where people converge and discuss their affairs and the affairs of the nation without restriction. This is why social media have been hailed by people because they have rescued the people from the dominance of mainstream media by few

voices, predominance of a vertical flow of communication, almost unbridled news commercialization which has led to disregard for decentralization and democratization of communication (McQuail, 2010).

According to McQuail (2010) the new media have provided an avenue for a variety of political information and ideas, nearly unlimited access in principle for all voices, much feedback and negotiation between leaders and followers as well as enabled dialogue between politicians and citizens without political party interference. On the contrary, the mainstream media are concentrated in few hands. And just like the saying goes, he who pays the piper dictates the tune. The mainstream media further the interest of their proprietors, be it political, economic or otherwise. And he who controls the media determines the amount of political information which they carry. And here lies the importance of social media as they provide equal opportunities to everybody to ventilate their grievances, for instance, or express their opinions as the case may be. In fact, Ekwueme and Folarin (2017) ^[10] argued that social media have impacted so much on this generation that some individuals can hardly stay a day without going online. Despite the benefits of social media, scholars have argued that social media have the ability to promote unreliable information, fake news, hate speeches and campaign of calumny to denigrate the opponents (Orji, 2013; Ikoroha, 2017; Ekwueme and Folarin, 2017) ^[10]. The reason is not far from the fact that social media are democratic, unregulated and uncontrolled.

Again, it should also be noted that the contents of social media are not edited just as they do not go through the crucible of gate keeping as done in conventional media. In addition, due to the flexibility and ease of use of social media, individuals easily share information from multiple sources without confirming its authenticity. Adeniyi (2017) argued that there is an explosion in the power of the people to debate and influence the happenings in the management of their lives as a result of the advent of the internet. According to him:

This is the age of instant information, disinformation and post truth. Fact, fiction, outlandish lies and 'alternative facts' mix and meet in a new amorphous reality in which the truth may have disappeared for all time. Every man is now an information hub, a reporter, editor, commentator, publisher and carrier of value judgments.

It is therefore not debatable that social media contents, most of the times, lack credibility due to the rise of citizen journalists but that does not erase the strengths and potentials of social media in engendering political participation, mobilization of voters and electioneering campaigns.

The role of social media in electioneering campaigns cannot be over-emphasized. Nowadays, any contender to any public office who has no active presence on social media may be regarded as an old fashioned (analogue) politician. The reason is that social media provide an unfettered opportunity to the politician to "sell" himself/herself to the electorate.

Marketing a politician on the social media is also important because young people that constitute a greater percentage of the voters maintain heavy presence and dominance on the social media. So, it will not be out of place to say that political candidates stand to lose a huge chunk of votes if they do not incorporate social media in their campaigns. According to

Stieglitz *et al.*, (2012), social media have the potentials to enhance political participation and democracy. Corroborating the above, Vaccari (2013) argued that social media have become increasingly relevant in election campaigns because both the citizens and the politicians have included them in their communication tool kits.

2. Propaganda

Propaganda is the expression of opinions or actions carried out deliberately by individuals or groups with a view to influence the opinions or actions of other individuals or groups for predetermined ends through psychological manipulations (Aduradola and Ojukwu, 2013). Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013) further affirmed that this is usually repeated and transmitted over a wide range of media with the purpose of stimulating and sensitizing the electorate and ultimately assist in denigrating an opponent.

Palmer and Perkins conceptualized propaganda as "the manipulation of symbols to control controversial attitudes". Scholars seem to agree that truth may be good propaganda (Palmer and Perkins, 2007; McQuail, 2010) either because of how it is presented or the motive behind the telling of the truth. This is why Palmer and Perkins (2007) likened the propagandist to a trial lawyer who meticulously argues to prove one side of the case thus:

His approach is more like that of a trial lawyer who carefully organizes his argument to prove one side of the case. He may keep to the truth but not to the whole truth. He omits evidence contrary to his view.

Scholars characterized the nature of politics being played by Nigerian political class in the guise of party manifestoes and agenda. They opined that historically, what literally adorns our newspaper pages and fills the broadcast and online media airtime, especially the social media during electioneering campaigns, are deliberately cooked-up falsehood, blatant lies and disparaging comments against both perceived and contending political opponents.

The cogent, core socio-economic issues that have direct bearing on the poor masses they canvass for their votes, which if addressed responsibly, could positively transform their abysmally low and impoverished social status, are rather relegated to the background and never brought to the front burner for discussion during their campaign exercise. It is in this light that Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013) observed that "language is often used not to communicate but to deceive. This is often true of political and religious propaganda..."

They argued that basically in every given society, it is the intention of the political class to manipulate people's mind and thought and this is symbolically expressed through print and broadcast media, particularly during political campaigns and when they eventually assume office. They observed that "man, as a political animal, engages in the practice of politics as a social and noble activity to express his political agenda either positively or negatively".

The instrument of propaganda in global politics is one of the veritable tools in politicking that is as old as the game itself. Political leaders across the world are as familiar with the intrigues, intricacies and innuendos entwined in the process of advancing the course of this political gimmick like the backs of

their hands. It is, therefore, not surprising that during any electioneering campaign, politicians leave no stone unturned in ensuring that all the bits and pieces of their propaganda messages are carefully prepared, tailored and orchestrated in order to achieve their desired effect (Fasakin *et al.*, 2017). The import of any form of political propaganda is to deliberately misinform prospective electorate in order to persuade them into accepting their ideology and doctrine. Some scholars argued that the sole purpose of propaganda is to misinform people, mislead them and to consciously indoctrinate them. They further opined that propaganda is solely introduced to damage character and is often derogatory in nature.

At inception, propaganda had nothing to do with negative connotations which are now attached to it. It was rather “synonymous with positive information dissemination, communication, persuasion, education and spread of knowledge, new ideas, beliefs, attitudes and values” (Nweke, 2001) meant to influence the target audience in the right direction.

Propaganda is of Catholic origin having been coined from “*Congregatio de propaganda Fide*” (Committee for the propagation of the Faith) which was set up in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV.

The amazing thing about the use of propaganda is that none of the political divides ever agrees that it uses propaganda. They always claim that it is only the opponent that ‘propagandizes’ while they themselves provide information, evidence and argument (McQuail, 2010). Propaganda dwells on emotions rather than reason because the propagandist always tries to sway the opinion of the ‘*propagandee*’ in his favour. McQuail (2010), characterized propaganda thus:

It differs in some respects from simple persuasion attempts. It can be coercive and aggressive in manner; it is not objective and it has little regard for truth, even if it is not necessarily false, since some times, the truth can be good propaganda. It comes in a range of types from ‘black’ (deceptive, frightening and unscrupulous) to ‘white’ (soft and with a selective use of truth). Finally, it is always carried out to further some interest of the propagandist, not the target audience.

A critical analysis of the above observation shows that propaganda always caters for the interest of the propagandist not that of the ‘*propagandee*’. It can be deduced that it is usually manipulative since it thrives on deceit and deception. Baran and Davis (2012) identified three types of propaganda namely white, black and gray propaganda. According to them, white propaganda is the intentional suppression of potentially harmful information and ideas, combined with deliberate promotion of positive information or ideas to distract attention from problematic events. They argued that whereas black propaganda is deliberate and strategic transmission of lies, gray propaganda is the transmission of information or ideas that might or might not be false without making any effort to determine their validity. Baran and Davis (2012) argued that the secret of propaganda is to simplify a complex issue and repeat that simplification over and over again. They argued further that, “effective propaganda persuades people without seeming to do so, features massive orchestration of communication and emphasizes tricky language designed to discourage reflective thought.

3. Electioneering campaigns

Electioneering campaigns have become part of political communication through which the electorate could be reached and their support obtained (Akubor, 2015). Political communication has been defined as “a process whereby political information is passed on to whom it may concern by those assigned or who assume such responsibility (Udoakah, 1998). The above definition is defective because communication, irrespective of the type or the form it takes, is usually a two-way process in the form of dialogue. This is why Norris (2004), defined political communication as “an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, the news media and the public”. He argued that the process operates downwards from governing institutions towards the citizens, horizontally in linkages among political actors, and also upwards from public opinion towards authorities. In an ideal democratic dispensation, the people are the kings because they decide who govern them through the process of election.

For this reason, political parties and their candidates struggle for victory with their opponents through electioneering campaigns using political advertising as a process of ‘selling’ their parties or candidates to the electorate.

Therefore, electioneering campaigns are not treated with levity by those who understand the game of politics and election. This stems from the fact that the masses, whether in democratic or autocratic regimes, are critically important as they form the pool of the human machinery necessary for the maintenance or overthrow of the status-quo (Nweke, 2001; Olabamiji, 2014). This means that the electorate decides whether an elected political office holder remains in office or changed. The people are therefore, the bosses not the leaders or rulers as we see in Nigeria. Nweke (2001) defined political advertising as:

the evolution of effective strategies aimed at building and packaging candidates and political platforms within the framework of credibility on the one hand or the creation of doubts towards the opponents on the other hand, for the purpose of winning the support of the masses in democratic or non-democratic states.

A critical analysis of the above position shows that political advertising aims at building and packaging the candidates for an election and their parties to ensure acceptance by emphasizing the qualities that make them credible. Political advertising does not end there as it also presents the opponent in a bad light in order to discredit him to the advantage of the sponsor(s) of the political advertising. While picking hole with the tasks of political advertising as listed by Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) which include attracting attention, arousing interest, stimulating desire, creating conviction and getting action in the form of support. Nweke (2001) argued that the tasks of political advertising also include countering the strong points of the opponents, shoring up the weaknesses of the subject of political adverts and inundating the target audience’s socio-psychological space with messages of the superiority of the subject over other contenders. The thoughts of the two scholars are different but somehow complementary. However, the tasks of political advertising as presented by Lund are based on the AIDA model of advertising which stands for

Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. Nweke (2001) categorized political advertising into activists adverts which seek to protect the interest of neglected group, status quo adverts which aim at maintaining the status quo, that is retaining the present regime or administration, office holders and their policies and continuity/change adverts which focus on galvanizing and winning the support for the continuity of a political party, office holder or the change of the status quo.

Social Media, Propaganda and Electioneering Campaigns Exploring the Nexus (1999-2019)

One of the fundamental responsibilities of the media is to inform the public, and this, ethically and professionally obliges them to do so objectively, accurately, and fairly; reflecting all shades of opinions without any fear or favour to all concerned (Akubor, 2015). Also, the media, as part of their social obligations as being the watchdogs of the society, are looked up to by the public to produce and present unbiased, apolitical media contents that engender national integration, peace and unity among citizenry. However, with the unfettered access and right of the citizens in the mechanism of media contents creation and distribution, occasioned by the advent of the social media, it is becoming increasingly challenging for the mainstream media professionals and managers to ensure that the sanctity and standard of the profession is upheld. This is simply because the walls of gate keeping have heavily fallen down and as such media consumers are no longer restricted to what is only churned out in the traditional media such as radio, television and newspaper. This is compounded by the fact that most of these conventional media outlets are now owned and controlled by members of the political class and the few financially powerful elite in the society, who use these media for commercial reasons and to propagate their political propaganda and agenda especially during the time of electioneering campaigns (Popoola, 2015).

But instead of actually engaging in public service 'journalism' that promotes the interests of the public, the social media have been hijacked by the political actors who now use the channels, especially when general elections are around the corner to publicize their campaigns of calumny, disinformation, propaganda and selfish agenda in their desperate effort to win elections at all costs.

Ever since the social media platforms especially the Facebook, have been made popular by its use during the 2008 Barack Obama political campaign, many nations including Nigeria across the globe, have been following the trend to engage their different publics for political participation, though, the aftermath experience vary from one country to another. As noted by Okoro and Nwafor (2013):

One remarkable thing about the 2011 general elections was the adoption of social media especially the Facebook by the politicians, the political parties and the electorates as a platform for political participation.

Although, there is no contending the fact that social media is a formidable force for social and political electioneering and a medium of the moment as far as political participation and communication are concerned. This is because the technology is participatory, interactive and cost effective (Okoro and Nwafor, 2013). Equally, it gets favourable reception and

affinity among Nigerians to the extent that it has become a major source and provider of news in the country (Dauda *et al.*, 2017). Its adverse use by politicians to spread hate speeches, fake news and political propaganda, as well as its attendant consequences, has taken the shine off its value. Okoro and Nwafor (2013) lent credence to this when they affirmed that social media played a huge role in instigating and fuelling the violence that followed the announcement of the 2011 general elections results in the Northern States of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara by political rioters who believed that they have been rigged.

They argued that according to Human Rights Watch Report (undated), a total of not less than 800 persons were murdered, more than 65,000 people internally displaced and over 350 churches either burnt or destroyed during the mayhem. They affirmed that during the period, false rumours and gossips littered the Facebook pages which created unnecessary tension and added to the embers of fire that already heated the polity. Again, in the submission of Okoro and Nwafor (2013):

There was a lot of 'social media war' that went viral on the various social media platforms, making use of all kinds of abusive languages. All manners of attacks and counter attacks among supporters of various opposition parties and groups. Several insulting and inciting messages flourished on Facebook and GSM-SMS. These culminated in the violence and tension witnessed before, during and after the elections in many parts of the country with some States.

As aptly put by Dunu (2018), social media platforms have not only become potent tools used by different agencies such as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Civil Society Organizations (CSO's), political gladiators and their parties, as well as electorates and political observers for increased active political participation and communication; they have also become platforms used especially by politicians to spread hate speeches, misinformation, fake news and political propaganda. It is therefore, clear that users of social media platforms especially the political actors and party stalwarts have widened the frontiers of the medium beyond the fundamental social networking purpose for which it was originally meant, to include its use for political persuasive messages which often times are derogatory, abusive, sour and manipulative in nature; targeted against contending and perceived political opponents. Lending credence to this, Dunu (2018) contended that the November 2015 gubernatorial election in Southeastern Nigeria have been criticized for being characterized and marred with internet brigandage, fake news, social media nuisance and assassination of character most especially on Facebook, WhatsApp and other social media platforms. According to her:

The social media such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp became the major source of political news and conversations, and as such was inundated with real and fake news concerning political activities of different candidates. For instance, these 'internet warriors' who are really most at times media personal assistants of these candidates or party supporters used pseudonyms to write disparaging and false information about other candidates; post substantial quantity of fake information about political candidate's activities and past achievements and

also created chat groups designed to purposefully attack and vilify opponents.

Dunu (2018) underscored the twist in the flagrant misuse of social media by political class during the 2015 and 2019 gubernatorial elections when she pointed out deliberate concealing of their identities by use of fake names and aliases credited to various online posts which often times are filled with unverified reports and deliberate falsehood.

It is imperative to underscore the fact that since the 2011 general elections in Nigeria when the genre of social media 'journalism' became popular among politicians and their respective parties as a tool of engaging the electorate in political communication and participation, various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, *et cetera* are now being used, especially by political actors, as veritable conduits through which their political shenanigans are disseminated and propagated. It is, therefore, paradoxical to note that the watchdog role of the media as the fourth estate of the realm has been upturned to that of a 'devil's advocate' with the incessant abuse and misuse of social media platforms by the Nigerian political gladiators; who will rather use the medium to spread their propaganda, primordial agenda and vilify opposing candidates during electioneering campaigns instead of bringing into fore issue-based discourses that will be beneficial to the masses.

With a benefit of hindsight, a cursory assessment of one of the political propaganda messages of the Peoples Democratic Party, (PDP) for example, during the 2011 electioneering campaigns for their Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Namadi Sambo respectively, amplified among other issues, the capability of their flag-bearers to bring about the long awaited transformation of Nigeria. As noted by Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013), in one of the party's catchy phrases during the campaign period "GOOD LUCK NIGERIA, TIME FOR TRANSFORMATION", the slogan was not only meant to inform but also to swing the electorate to their side of divide by opting for the agenda of transformation among other competing alternatives. Seven years down the line after the 2011 presidential election which produced the duo of Goodluck Jonathan and Namadi Sambo as President and Vice-President to run the affairs of the nation then, the question on the lips of every Nigerian is whether or not their administration actually effected the needed transformation promised the electorate during their electioneering campaigns.

Similarly, during the 2015 general elections, in which the PDP lost to the incumbent APC, the dominant slogan for APC's Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates, Muhammed Buhari and Yemi Osibajo was "CHANGE". Their party also vigorously sold this propaganda to their electorate during the 2015 electioneering campaigns. But three and half years after they won the election, the change promised is yet to be validated by the electorate against all socio-economic indices.

There is no gainsaying the fact that all political classes, irrespective of their political leanings and affiliations adopt the strategy of deliberate deceit of their prospective electorate during electioneering campaigns to woo them into accepting their party ideologies and manifestoes, which more often than not are pure innuendos.

Furthermore, in their bid to outsmart their opponents, political parties and their candidates go for the former's jugular and in the process, caution and decorum are thrown to the winds. Consequently, they adopt various propaganda devices some of which include name calling, testimonial, card stacking, plain folks, hate speech, fake news, glittering generalities, transfer and bandwagon.

Name calling

This involves branding people with bad nomenclatures, or stereotyping (Nweke, 2001) to give the impression that the opponents so branded are evil whereas the propagandist is good. Ahead of the mid-term election in 2018, the American President, Donald Trump called the Democrats in America, "angry left-wing mob". Here in Nigeria, the opposition parties would call the ruling party "incompetent", "insensitive", "corrupt", "clueless" *et cetera*. The propagandist using this device believes that, "the portrayal of people as evil has its benefits. If your enemy is seen in bad light, then any means to stop them (sic) becomes acceptable" (Twiss, 2003).

Testimonial

This involves getting the endorsement of an idea or an individual from people considered noble, influential or honourable to give that idea or individual an aura of credibility. A good example of the use of this device was the campaign poster of Mr. Peter Obi before his re-election as a two-term Governor of Anambra State. The poster had the pictures of Mr. Obi and Chief Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu wherein Chief Ojukwu said, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. Vote for him". The idea behind the poster was that due to the kind of person Chief Ojukwu was, anybody he recommended would be a good candidate and the people would see him as such.

Card stacking

In order to appeal to the emotions of the voters, the propagandist downplays his failures and promotes his accomplishments and achievements. This is why Ossai (2002) argued that the propagandist "spreads the guilt thin on his side and piles it heavily on the enemy's side". For instance, in Nigeria, the government of All Progressives Congress (APC) does not accept responsibility for its inability to tackle the security and economic challenges facing the country but always blames the major opposition party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for the country's woes. The irony of the whole thing is that the ruling party was elected because it promised to provide solutions to the above-mentioned challenges. It is therefore ridiculous that instead of tackling the challenges headlong, it has decided to embark on blame game which cannot proffer the solutions which the people hoped for while voting the present government into power.

Plain folks

This propaganda device is used to present the propagandist as being in the same situation with the people. This was clearly expressed by Calvin Coolidge when she said, "we're just plain folks" (Palmer and Perkins, 2007). According to Palmer & Perkins, the emphasis here is usually on the candidate's

humble origins. They argued that:

In the attempt to convince men of his regard for their welfare the propagandist may stress his similarity to them. Many an American politician has been elected because he appealed to the voters as “a man of the people”.

In Nigeria, a contender to a political office would always try to give the people the impression that he/she is one of them either by speaking to them in their local language or dialect or by putting on the people’s traditional attire during campaigns. This propaganda device was exemplified by one of former President Jonathan’s campaign posters used before the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. In the said campaign poster, President Goodluck Jonathan said, “Fellow Nigerians, I once had no shoes. If I could make it, you too can”. This placed much emphasis on his humble background and it appealed to the people too.

Hate Speech

The phenomenon of hate speech in Nigerian politics may not be an entirely new political divisive strategy being deployed by the political actors. Its over-bearing effect on the polity and its attendant consequences, before, during and after elections cannot be over-emphasized and should be of serious and grave concern to all stakeholders. The objective behind every hate speech is not far-fetched and not different from what any political propagandist seeks to achieve during any electioneering campaign. It is primarily meant to bring into disrepute or ridicule the personality of contending political opponents such that public opinions towards such perceived opponents are negatively influenced and swayed to the advantage of the perpetrators. Unfortunately again, it is the mass media, especially the social media, that are used in fanning the resultant embers of fire of these ill-conceived, premeditated discords deliberately sown by politicians in their desperate efforts to gain political relevance and power in their respective jurisdiction, not minding whose ox is gored; as well as the peace and stability of the nation that could be compromised in the process. Corroborating the above position, Mohan and Barnes (2018) affirmed that:

Democracies at various stages of development and consolidation have proven vulnerable to hate speeches and its ill effects. Election campaigns provide particularly fertile ground for hate speech and incitement to hatred. Elected officials, political parties, candidates, other opinion makers and members of civil society are all among the influential purveyors of hate speech. The authority wielded by, and the amplifying effect of mass media, social media in particular, carries considerable weight.

They further emphasized the extent of the desperation of the politicians who perceive elections as a do-or-die contest using all crooked means at their disposal to wrestle power. The above cited scholars argued that:

The electioneering (rhetoric is) increasingly becoming inciting and violent with less restraint and consideration. There is the notion that (an) election is war and only the winner is a good strategist.

Fasakin *et al.*, (2017) underscored how significant number of political messages and propaganda were embellished with elements of hate speeches and campaigns of calumny which

were targeted at ridiculing opponents and opposition parties during the 2015 electioneering campaigns in Nigeria. A critical review of some of these inciting and hate messages that were put in the public domain prior to 2015 general elections becomes expedient, taking into cognizance the fact that another general election is around the corner; thus, the need to take queues from lessons learnt, if any, by all political gladiators and stakeholders so as to forestall unnecessary breakdown of law and order and protect our fledgling democracy.

It could be recalled that one of the highlights of this irresponsible behavior and derogatory speeches by our political class during the 2015 electioneering campaigns was the popular documentary aired on African Independent Television (AIT), on March 1st, 2015, to condemn the persons of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC Chieftain) and the APC presidential candidate, General Muhammad Buhari (now president) by the opposition party, PDP. The resultant penalty meted out by the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission against AIT and 21 other broadcast stations for violating its code was tough indictment and sanction (Nigerian Eye, October 28, 2016). According to Fasakin *et al.*, (2017) the immediate past Governor of Ekiti State, Ayodele Fayose, in January 2015, placed what was widely known as ‘death-wish’ advertorials in virtually all the front pages of Nigerian newspapers.

These adverts which insinuated that President Muhammad Buhari was likely to die in office, like the late President Yaradua, if voted for, was a calculated attempt by Governor Fayose and his party, PDP, to cast aspersions on the person of the President and ultimately cajole voters to their camp. All these spurious allegations, counter allegations and many degrading and disparaging comments and speeches from one political party or candidate to another are too numerous to mention, and are not limited to the Peoples Democratic Party as even the ruling APC was no saint. They all engaged and still do, in a make or mar political contest of hatred, character assassination and extreme violent electioneering campaigns. This is put in a better perspective by the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN), North Dakota State University and other Partners (2018), when they argued thus:

However, due to paucity of posts from GEJ, and low level of presence of the PDP on social media, the APC posted more hate messages than the PDP. But on the part of the PDP, the greatest users of hate messages were Femi Fani-Kayode and the Governor Ayodele Fayose, just like posts by Governor Babatunde Raji Fasola and Alhaji Bola Tinubu of the APC. Thus, supporters of the two opposing presidential candidates were more inclined towards hate messages on the social media than their respective presidential candidates.

It is apparently clear that the use of hate speeches and other manipulative devices by our political class to gain voters’ attention and support has divisive tendencies that are potent enough to ignite unimaginable violent destructions and cause extremism of different dimensions. Therefore, all relevant political institutions and stakeholders should be seen to be above board and play the game strictly according to the rules set out by the umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Mass media should be more alive to their

social responsibility role by glorifying professional ethics above commercial gains, such that they turn down political innuendoes and propaganda that are venomous in nature. Politics should not be by hook or crook, but should be in the spirit of altruistic compromise for the peace and progress of the nation.

Fake News

One of the adverse fallouts of the new media, especially the social media, is the unguarded and uncontrollable manner with which its users abuse the medium in the name of their fundamental rights to inform and be informed. Nobody contends the fact that the birth of the new media, (social media to be precise) has ushered in the dawn of new paradigm in the pattern with which news and social occurrences could now be consumed. The development has given rise to more participation of citizens in the process of gathering, producing and distributing media contents; a phenomenon that is widely known as citizen 'journalism'. But what should be a source of concern to all stakeholders of the project, Nigeria, is the flagrant misuse of the medium. What is even more alarming is the lukewarm approach and reaction of the relevant authorities and regulatory bodies such as Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) towards this hydra-dreaded cankerworm of fake news that is raving across the length and breadth of the country unchecked. As noted by Ikoroha (2018):

Fake news (or fake stories) websites deliberately publish hoaxes, propaganda and disinformation purporting to be real news—often using social media to drive web traffic and amplify their effect. Unlike news satire, fake news websites seek to mislead rather than entertain readers, often for financial or political gain.

More often than not, we have heard or read in the public domain many unsubstantiated stories that went viral especially on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, et cetera which were later found to be totally untrue and incorrect. In the recent past, for example, the personality and office of the Nigerian President have been denigrated several times with fake news and spurious statements; ranging from stories that he has no secondary school certificate to that of his death while receiving medical treatment at a hospital in United Kingdom. In all these, it is the integrity of the Nigerian mass media that is now more at stake than any other times, as its ethical standards and professionalism are under scrutiny more than ever before. This is so because, in a way, they are also complicit in the act of peddling unverified news reports and information and also by casting screaming and sensational headlines; driven by their goal for financial gains, which more often than not, lack related context. Also, the magnitude of the aftermath effect of the scourge of disinformation which has now pervaded our Nigerian media space, in terms of possibly breeding social insecurity and instability should be underscored; and as such, all hands should be on deck to mitigate or totally prevent it. To this end, it is important for more sustainable regulatory frameworks to be developed by all the relevant authorities and bodies in order to curb the excesses of this fake 'journalists', if not totally eradicate it; so that this ugly tide of fake news

monster that is posing a threat to both the journalism profession and the nation's security could be nipped in the bud. All political stakeholders and actors should recognize the explosive potency of disunity and social disorder inherent in the act of disseminating fake information and unverified news; and as such, consider the overall interest of the nation above their personal political ambition, sectional pursuit or party agenda.

Glittering generalities

Glittering generalities thrive on generalization. Here, the propagandist employing slogans or simple catch phrases makes "vague, sweeping statements, without offering supporting evidence" (Baran and Davis, 2012). The statements appear to be totally correct even when they are not. A staunch supporter of President Goodluck Jonathan and then member of PDP boasted that he should be called bastard if President Jonathan did not win 2015 presidential election. Again, the Secretary of the defunct Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Alhaji Buba Galadima, while featuring on *Democracy Today*, a political programme of African Independent Television (AIT) on 18th October, 2018 categorically stated, "I bet you with my life that Magu (Acting Chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) cannot probe Oshiomhole (Chairman of APC). He said that to dismiss the idea of fight against corruption by the present government. Alhaji Galadima who now doubles as the Chairman of Reformed All Progressives Congress (R-APC) used to be an ardent supporter of President Buhari and a member of APC.

Transfer

Here, the propagandist claims the support or approval of a popular figure with the belief that people would accept him/her the same way they accept that popular figure. Echoing the above position, Baran and Davis (2012) noted that propagandists claim approval of someone or thing as theirs, hoping that public's support for the "authority" will transfer to them. When President Jonathan was Nigeria's president, many people contesting for one position or the other attached his picture to their campaign posters all in a bid to make people love them the same way they loved Jonathan.

Bandwagon

Bandwagon is a technique that operates on the idea of what the majority of people are doing or what is in vogue. Here, the propagandist presents himself to be in the winning side which everybody should join. In fact, the idea behind this device is, "if you can't beat them, you join them". During campaigns, the propagandist using this device tells the voters that others are in support of him/his party and for that, they should do likewise. For example, you would hear people say that there are only two parties contesting for a position which are their own party and others in a contest involving over twenty political parties. In as much as the politicians are charged to be more committed and responsible towards their campaign promises, it is high time the electorate embraced more comprehensive voter education which will mentally equip them to discern between sincere and feasible political promises from the juicy baits of propaganda.

Conclusion and recommendations

One cannot, but underscore the fact that the new digital communication paradigm of media contents creation and distribution has opened a floodgate for what media scholars referred to as citizen journalism. This 'revolution' conferred on the citizens unbridled right to be informed and be heard, an unfettered freedom which the old media did not guarantee. But despite all the unique features, such as interactivity and real-time update that the new communication technology provides, the new media genre is much vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation, especially by mischief makers like the political actors during electioneering campaigns to sell their agenda.

Past studies reveal that, in Nigeria's political landscape for instance, politicians are often guilty of using various social media platforms to disparage and bring their political opponents into public disrepute through their campaign of calumny, disinformation and sheer propaganda; which most of the times do not translate into success for them at the polls. In the light of this, all regulatory agencies such as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Civil Society Organizations (CSO's), Communication bodies such as National Communication Commission (NCC), should formulate and enforce enduring, sustainable policy framework and regulations that will ethically streamline media campaigns of political parties and their candidates in both the traditional and social media during any electioneering campaign.

With the successful conclusion of 2019 general elections, the time is now for all political stakeholders and social media users in Nigeria to have a change of mindset that will be geared towards a more positive use of the medium to foster national integration, security and peace, instead of spreading hate, fake and denigrating information or propaganda which divide rather than unite the country. There is the need for candidates and their political parties to carry out issue-based campaigns devoid of calumny and character assassination as done in advanced democracies.

Granted that social media have democratized communication, but that should not be a license to plunge the country into crisis just for political gains. The social media should be used cautiously for good ends rather than for overheating the polity which does nobody any good.

Relevant agencies of the government such as National Orientation Agency (NOA) and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should ensure that young people who maintain heavy presence on social media are enlightened and educated on the need to use the social media professionally for the good of the nation with particular emphasis on patriotism and the need to avoid the propaganda involved in electioneering.

Also, political parties and their candidates should formulate and present workable manifestos as well as make realizable promises to the electorate instead of making utopian promises which only dash the hope of the electorate at the end of the day when election promises are not met.

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