

How University of Ilorin Undergraduates Perceive Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission's Social Media use for Citizens' Engagement

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Abstract

Using mixed method with questionnaire and in-depth interview as instruments of data collection, a study was carried out with the objective of finding out undergraduates' perception of the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) deployment of social media to engage citizens. Population of the study was 44,919 undergraduates at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria from which a sample of 386 was drawn for the quantitative aspect and fifteen informants for the qualitative aspect. The quantitative data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences 21 version while responses of informants were recorded and transcribed by the researchers. Findings showed that undergraduates, who are active users of social media perceived messages the electoral body posted as untrustworthy. In addition, the body lacked visibility on social media. The study concluded that INEC's use of social media for citizens' engagement was in response to the demand of the contemporary society which social media cannot be ignored. The study recommended the need for INEC to be more aggressive in social media use as well as build public trust through prompt responses to issues and allegations.

Keywords: Citizen engagement, election, electoral body, perception, social media, visibility

Introduction

The emergence of Internet and social media had expanded the media space for people to communicate. Unlike the conventional mass media which were restrictive to a large extent, social media is a free-for-all space by which individuals, corporate bodies, governments and their agencies create, transmit and receive vast messages with relative ease and promptness. Where there is presence of Internet, once people are connected to it either with personal computers or smart phones, they are able to produce and transmit messages the same way they receive messages. This signifies the transformation of the relationship between public sectors and citizens in a more interactive and collaborative way thereby enhancing Government engagement with citizens (Tang & Muruga, 2013). The increased interaction between citizens and government contributes to ease with which citizens gain access to government as well as enable citizens become more informed about what government agencies are doing. The implication is that social media have a transformational effect on

the ways in which citizens interact with governments. Song and Lee (2013) also observed that governments that effectively use their social media to interact with citizens are more likely to be perceived as being transparent; thereby increasing their citizens' trust in them.

Democracy which has become a dominant form of governance across the world is characterised by periodic elections organised and conducted by electoral bodies. In Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC is responsible for the exercise. Section 15, part 1 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended) and Section 2 of the Electoral Act of 2010 (As Amended) confer on INEC the prerogative to midwife all elections. Since the return to democratic rule, INEC has been conducting elections both at federal and local levels. But people perceive the electoral body as an entity, the elections it conducts as well as outcomes of such elections with ambivalence. Most are sceptical and have negative perception on the body. This is why INEC has from time-to-time resorted to civic education using different social media platforms to shape public perception positively towards it and the electoral processes generally.

The effectiveness of civic education depends on the nature of the message and disposition of the electorate. As Hofmann, Beverungen, Räckers and Becker (2013) argue, for the communication to be effective, it is important not only that government communicates with citizens but also how they communicate and, in particular, how the citizens perceive the communication.

There exist studies on government and its agencies' use of social media. Nevertheless, Cummings (2017) is of the view that the literature and research into the use of social media to engage the public is small. Among the available literature is a study on communication tools and challenges of global modernity with a focus on E-governance in Nigeria, (Udende, Tsafa and Iorkase, 2015). Other related studies have been conducted by other researchers (Oladokun & Adebayo, 2012; Abasilim & Edet, 2015). However, past literature have little or no bearing on the adoption of social media by government agencies in Nigeria for citizen's engagement neither do such studies dwell on citizen's perception of the agencies' social media usage. This obvious research gap needs to be filled leading to undertaking this study. In order to undertake the study, the following objectives were used which include to:

1. Examine the levels of social media usage among Undergraduates of University of Ilorin.
2. Investigate level of awareness of Undergraduates of University of Ilorin of INEC's use of social media for citizen engagement.
3. Ascertain the level of interaction between University of Ilorin Undergraduates and INEC on social media.
4. Understand the perception Undergraduates of University of Ilorin have on INEC's posts on social media.

Literature Review

Social media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social media is media that is designed for and centered on social interaction. It is commonly associated with a conglomeration of web-based technologies and services such as blogs, wikis, media-sharing services, collaborative editing tools, and social networking services that enable and empower users to communicate, interact, edit and share content in a social environment (Porter, 2008). This many-to-many interaction that allows users to interact with one another fosters a great level of participation and information sharing. (Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes, 2011).

Social media have opened the way to more direct and fluent communication between government and society (Sadeghi, 2012). Social networks, which are the main representatives of the social media, have redefined the relationships between citizens and governments, facilitating communication and interaction among individuals and encouraging the population to play an active role in public affairs (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2012). The open, dialogic nature of social media eliminates many of the barriers in communication that these governments have experienced in the past (Bertot & Jaeger, 2010). With social media, government and its agencies freely communicate with the public.

Perception

According to Ignatius, Lucky, Ifeyinwa, and Kingdom (2015) perception is a multifaceted concept that has many determinants depending on the disposition of the individual towards a given issue vis-a-vis the value their society attaches to it. But the central idea about perception is the impressions people form of other people's traits and personalities, organisations and institutions. Perception involves social environment. On account of this Michener, DeLamater and Myers (2004) cited in Udende (2017) broadly construed perception as the constructing and understanding of the social world from the data people get through their senses. It involves the sorting out, interpretation, analysis and integration of stimuli with the use of sense organs and brain. This entails that whatever impression formed about an individual, organisation or institution largely depends on information people receive about it. The implication is that the opinions people form about others undergo a process or procedure. According to Udende (2017), the opinion formed varies from place to place and person to person and depends on the amount of information available to them and the extent to which they are able to correctly interpret the information acquired. Udende further elaborated that some people may be in possession of a similar set of information that other people have in a particular situation, person, group or institution but still arrive at different conclusions due to individual differences in the capacity to interpret the information they have

Citizen engagement

Various definitions of citizen engagement abound, but common elements include knowledge of and discussion of public affairs (Mossberger, Tolbert & McNeal, 2008). If citizen engagement includes knowledge, interest, discussion, and participation, then information is one of the resources supporting these different aspects of engagement (Bimber, 2014), and the information provided on government websites and social media pages may act as one ingredient promoting citizen engagement. Information about government services and policy could contribute to citizen engagement in different venues, with varied forms of engagement. One type of participation is citizen initiated contact with government officials, both online and offline. Many citizen-initiated contact is service-related, and it differs from other forms of political participation so far as it is less likely to be associated with higher income and education than more politically-oriented forms of participation, such as voting (Thomas & Melkers 1999; Bimber, 1999).

World Bank Group defines citizens as the ultimate client of government and/or development institutions and private sector interventions in a country (World Bank, 2014a) and citizen engagement as: the two-way interaction between citizens and governments or the private sector which give citizens a stake in decision-making with the objective to improve intermediate and final development outcomes (World Bank, 2014). This is the use of new media or digital information and communication technologies to create or enhance the communication channels which facilitate the interaction between citizens and governments or the private sector. While mobile and web-based technologies are not a panacea to all social problems, they enable information to be conveyed at a cost and scale never before possible. It is believed that if people are able to access, share and create information, they are empowered to create positive change in their own lives and communities.

A number of studies have highlighted variables that results in citizen engagement, they include:

Transparency: This means making access to information which stakeholders are always on the lookout for easy. This is when government makes information pertaining to their activities and decision making a public asset, (Medina & Rufin, 2015) assert that the transparency of an organisation reflects the extent to which it allows its citizens keep an eye on its operations and contribute in the decision making process, for the aim of promoting a better government-citizen relationship. Citizens' yearn for a transparent government is birthing a new age of opportunities through social media.

Trust: Trust in government is the belief that the government will live up to expectation without being constantly audited. This is the perception of integrity, benevolence and honesty. It is in the interest of the government and its agencies to engage its citizens on social media because it allows for citizens to vest their trust not in abstract institutions or faceless bodies, but more as individuals who have a name, reputation and can hold interactions with them (Medina & Rufin, 2015).

Collaboration: Collaboration is a form of citizen engagement whereby the government and citizen work together to solve difficult problems and achieve the mission of the government. Social media helps the government improve their level of cooperation with citizens as well as their interaction. Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli and Sams (2011) said social media offer opportunities where the boundaries between the government and the public both shift and fade. The highest level of collaboration is when citizens are purposefully engaging with government content and finding out other opportunities of engaging with the government (Mergel, 2013).

Participation: this is a form of citizen engagement that entails the active participation of citizens in policy making. This helps to give feedback to the making of government policies, and corrections where needed (Mergel, 2013). This involves citizen participation in public discourse. Social media enhances this opportunity by providing a platform where everyone can actively engage in without restrictions. Citizen participations allows for government to understand take correction on decision making from different perceptions. According to Mergel (2013) the more government agencies engage in higher levels of citizen participation, measuring the extent to which they are engaging unlikely audiences will help them gain access to innovative knowledge to potentially solve government problems. Literature has revealed that people were positive and willing to interact with government agencies through e-government initiatives, and that they trusted government more than the private sector with their personal information. Chang and Kannon (2008) and Michael (2012) also suggests that social media had the potential to promote a positive perception of government through dissemination of information and by providing a platform for citizen and government interaction.

INEC

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established by the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to among other things organize elections into the various political offices in the country. The functions of INEC contained in Section 15, Part 1 of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended) and Section 2 of the Electoral Act of 2010 (As Amended) include:

- (i) To organise, undertake and supervise all elections to the offices of the President and Vice-President, the Governor and Deputy Governor of a state, and to the membership of the Senate, the House of Representatives and the House of Assembly of each state of the federation;
- (ii) To Register political parties in accordance with the provisions of the constitution and Act of the National Assembly;
- (iii) To Monitor the organisation and operation of the political parties, including their finances; conventions, congresses and party primaries;
- (iv) To arrange for the annual examination and auditing of the funds and accounts of political parties, and publish a report on such examination and audit for public information;

- (v) To arrange and conduct the registration of persons qualified to vote and prepare, maintain and revise the register of voters for the purpose of any election under the constitution;
- (vi) To monitor political campaigns and provide rules and regulations which shall govern the political parties;
- (vii) To conduct voter and civic education;
- (viii) To promote knowledge of sound democratic election processes; and
- (ix) To conduct any referendum required to be conducted pursuant to the provision of the 1999 constitution or any other law or Act of the National Assembly (INEC, 2019).

Use of social media by INEC

According to Instinct wake (2017), INEC is the most visible government agency on social media with over one million followers on Twitter, over 315,000 followers on Facebook. For engagement, the report said INEC has 60 per cent engagement on Facebook, 85 per cent on twitter and 30 per cent on Instagram.

During Nigeria's 2011 general elections INEC revamped its website and set up social media accounts to allow for open interaction between the agency and the citizens. Since 2011, INEC has maintained a social media presence for interaction, information dissemination, political communication and citizen engagement.

The deployment of platforms of ICTs in general, and the social media in particular, gave a new lease of life to Nigeria's electoral process in 2015. INEC made the most of technology in carrying out their activities (Agbata Jnr, 2015). This, however, was not a 2015 phenomenon as social media had been used in the preceding general elections of 2011 (SMYF, 2012). However, the level at which social media platforms were used in the 2015 elections was unprecedented in the country's electioneering history.

INEC introduced various innovations through which it sought to curb irregularity and ensure credibility. Among the novel ideas introduced by INEC was eTRAC, a project that enabled signed polling unit result sheets (as pasted at the polling unit) to be accessible on the commission's website. eTRAC aimed at building trust and ensuring transparency in the election process (INEC, 2015). The commission also employed ICT tools to guard against cases of multiple registration that had marred previous elections. INEC equally made use of ICTs platforms in enhancing effective flow of information, making broad use of its website, Facebook page and Twitter handle. Its website had different sections providing valuable database of information for aspirants and candidates, election officials, voters, the media, researchers as well as links to its Citizens Contact Centre and Registration Area Centres Nationwide. The website had information on all the registered political parties in relation to their top officials, address and contact telephone numbers.

This is crucial to the electoral process and information sharing. Among the other critical resources downloadable from the INEC website prior to the elections were code of conduct for Political Parties, Political Parties Finance Manual, Political

Parties Audit Report and Political Parties Handbook. Post-election, the INEC website has list of elected senators, members of the House of Representatives and the result of the presidential election (inecnigeria.org). INEC's Twitter handle, @inecnigeria, created since December 2010, has been used since then to relay information, dispel fake news and engage citizens. The verified account boasts of over 1.1 million followers, 14,400 tweets and 2,945 photos and videos. It has information of links to other INEC platforms including its contact email address and telephone number. The Twitter account especially came in handy when INEC used it to debunk an online viral video aimed at discrediting the yet to be concluded presidential election (Agbata Jnr, 2015). Similarly, INEC's Facebook page is verified and has valuable information about INEC's situation room and is followed by over 322,317 people with over 320,956 likes.

With the prevalence of social media in election, Stakeholders in Nigeria simply adjusted to the global trend, with parties and INEC in particular, adopting innovations and techniques in ICTs, thus enhancing the conduct, credibility and acceptability of the elections. INEC's online accounts functioned as information dissemination platforms and tools of civic education and enlightenment, while also receiving feedbacks from the public on election related issues. Notices and announcements made on the traditional media were equally and simultaneously made on social media accounts. In some cases, the commission's press briefings were tweeted live. The accounts also functioned as complaints response mechanisms, with the handlers responding promptly in most cases to issues of registration, non-functional smart card readers and the attitude of INEC staff (Odeyemi & Mosunmola, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Dialogic public relations theory

Kent and Taylor (1998) propounded this theoretical framework to encourage relationship building between organisation and its publics through the web. They describe dialogic communication as two-way symmetrical communications theoretical imperative to provide a procedural means whereby an organisation and its publics can communicate interactively. The theory suggests that bonds between organisations and publics can be created, adapted and changed through the internet. The theorists proposed some principles guiding the incorporation of dialogic public relations on the internet. They state that for dialogic relationship to exist, parties must view communicating with each other as a goal of relationship (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Kent and Taylor (1998) proposed five dialogic principles that could guide organisations which applies to governments and their agencies to establish mediated, two-way, and dialogic relationships with publics. These principles involved dialogic loops, ease of interface, conservation of visitors, generation of return visits, and providing information relevant to a variety of publics.

Dialogue is any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions (Kent & Taylor, 1998) and represents efforts by those involved in a relationship to participate in an

open and honest exchange. This perspective is attuned with the current thinking about the role communication plays in relationship building, where healthy relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders are cultivated through communication managed by public relations practitioners (Ledingham, 2003). The current, “socially informed” generation, expects governments and their agencies to shift their views of citizens from mainly consumers to active participants by allowing citizens to contribute online to the development of governments (Azyan, 2012).

A number of studies have examined how dialogic relationships is built with publics through weblogs (Traynor, 2008) and social networking sites including Facebook (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008) and Twitter (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Based on this, it can be concluded that social media platforms are useful for dialogue and building relationships. There lies the applicability of this theory to the study.

Empirical Framework

Even as several empirical studies on government use of social media for civic engagement exist, we shall limit our discourse to just a few of them one of which is a study by Salem, Mourtada and Al-Shaer (2014), who carried out a research on Citizen Engagement and Public Services in the Arab World: The Potential of Social Media. The study was carried out in twenty-two Arab countries on 365 respondents. The survey administered in the study measured the public attitude and perceptions towards the utilisation of social media by Arab government to foster citizen engagement and public service delivery. The study discovered that 55 per cent of the respondents share positive perceptions of government design and delivery of public service through the social media. The respondents agreed that social media made government more accessible and collaborative. Majority of the Arab citizens surveyed frequently visit government social media pages to gather information. A much smaller percentage of the respondents visit government social media pages to provide feedback. This indicates an existing perception of the usefulness of social media for two-way communication with government and its citizens. The findings also indicate that social media has the capacity to enable engagement although government would have to live up to expectations of its citizens.

Nica, Popescu, Nicolăescu and Constantin (2014) in their study, the effectiveness of social media implementation at local government levels, did a content analysis of e-participation survey data collected from 806 public administration scholars (64% response rate) from fifty-four countries attending forty-six conferences in Europe between February 2012 and March 2014. Selected scholars tend to generally think social media tools facilitate knowledge and engagement outstandingly. More than 70 per cent of the scholars that responded felt that adopting social media would increase engagement and facilitate communication. Regarding interaction with local governments through online channels, scholars tend to spend mostly between fifteen and thirty minutes per week (55%) with another 34 per cent spending between forty-five to sixty minutes or more on online channels. However, half

of the respondents are either not satisfied or just partially satisfied regarding this interaction so there is clearly room for improvement. The findings from this study suggest that the respondents are generally convinced that e-government and social media can foster citizen participation substantially.

In a study by Darwish (2017) on the effectiveness of using social media in government communication in UAE, established that UAE government communication entities were interested in using one-way push tactics more than using pull and network tactics. The study suggested that they should recognise the most important benefits of social media, which focus on engaging the citizens and allow them to participate in the decision making process. The results of analysing the UAE government communication entities' accounts convey a rich picture of how these entities interact with their stakeholders on their social media pages. Most of them are using twitter, then Facebook, then Instagram and lastly YouTube.

Khan, Yoon and Park (2013) examined the use of Twitter by forty Korean and thirty-two US agencies, the results indicated that Korean ministries were well connected and that both Korean and US agencies used Twitter mostly for informational purposes. Moreover, a positive relation was found between the number of followers and the number of tweets within US agencies, but this was not the case in Korea.

Research Method

Quantitative and qualitative research methods were adopted for this study with the use of questionnaire and in-depth interview to elicit responses from respondents and informants. Population of the study was all the 44,919 (Academic Support Unit, 2019) undergraduates in the University of Ilorin from which a sample of 360 selected through the multistage stratified probability sampling method was drawn. In order to suppress the effect of unanswered and poorly filled instruments, a total 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered. In addition, fifteen informants were then selected for the interview using the nonprobability random technique - convenience sampling method to be precise. The questionnaire was based on Likert rating scale. Structurally, the questionnaire was divided into five sections namely: Section A: Demographic Information, Section B: Pattern of social media usage among citizens, Section C: Citizens' awareness of INEC's social media usage, Section D: Extent of engagement between INEC and Citizens, and Section E: Citizens' perception of INEC's social media usage. Similarly, the interview guide focused on the same parameters. Just as the questionnaire was administered by the researchers, the in-depth interview was personally done by the researchers. The quantitative data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences 21 version while responses of informants were recorded and transcribed by the researchers.

Analysis of Research Questions

RQ1: What were the levels of social media usage among undergraduates of University of Ilorin?

Table 1: Level of Social Media Usage

Table 1: Level of social media usage

(N=386)	Level of Agreement* (%)				M	SD	Overall (%)
	1	2	3	4			
How frequently do you use social media on your device?	83.7	16.3	0	0	16.3	.370	29
How often do you use Facebook?	47.2	34.3	13.4	5.1	1.76	.869	44
How often do you use Twitter?	30.1	35.8	12.9	21.2	2.25	1.10	56.3
How many hours do you spend using social media daily?	7.6	28.5	24.3	39.5	2.96	.993	74
Total					2.03	.833	50.8

Scale: Regularly=1 Occasionally=2 Rarely=3 Never= 4

On frequency of social media use, most respondents [323 (83.7%)] regularly use it. This implies that undergraduates do not only have access to internet, they are active users. Most of them daily spend long hours on social media. Comparatively, respondents use Facebook more than Twitter.

RQ2: To what extent were Undergraduates of University of Ilorin aware of INEC's use of social media for citizens' engagement?

Table 2: Respondents awareness of INEC social media usage

(N=386)	Level of Agreement* (%)				M	SD	Overall (%)
	1	2	3	4			
I am aware of INEC's presence on Twitter	35.0	44.9	15.2	4.8	1.90	.829	47.5
I am aware of INEC's presence on Facebook	23.3	44.8	17.9	13.2	2.21	.952	55.2
INEC uses its Twitter page to engage citizens	31.2	44.2	16.2	8.4	2.25	.900	50.5
INEC uses its Facebook page to engage citizens	23.7	46.9	20.3	9.1	2.02	.886	53.7
I see posts from INEC on Twitter	26.2	40.3	22.0	11.5	2.15	.954	54.7
I see Posts from INEC on Facebook	18.0	46.8	20.4	14.8	2.19	.936	56
INEC uses its Facebook page for voters' education	19.6	46.9	17.0	16.5	2.32	.968	57.5
INEC uses its Twitter page for voters' education	26.9	44.6	15.5	13.0	2.30	.961	53.75
INEC uses its Facebook page for political communication	24.6	45.3	15.5	14.5	2.15	.972	55
INEC uses its Twitter page for political communication	25.8	44.8	18.5	10.9	2.20	.928	53.75
Total					2.15	.939	53.97

* Scale: 1 = Strongly Agree (1 – 25), 2= Agree (26 – 50), 3= Disagree (51 – 75), 4= Strongly Disagree (76 – 100)

Table 2 above shows that respondents are more aware of INEC's presence on Facebook than Twitter. On citizen engagement, respondents disagreed (50.5%) that INEC uses social media or engage citizens. Similarly, respondents are of the view that rarely do they see posts from INEC on social media specifically on Twitter and Facebook. This suggests that INEC has not done enough in using its Facebook and Twitter handle for political communication.

However, informants were of the opinion that INEC uses its social media pages for political communication and voter education, especially before the election and even during the election. This could be surmised in the expression of Informant H thus:

INEC really tried using their social media pages before the election, there were different messages on the pages about how to collect our PVCs, there was even procedures to voting few days to the election. The real problem, I think, is their reach on social media is small, so most people do not see their posts (Informant H).

Another Informant was of the opinion that the first time she saw INEC’s posts was on an election day when the pages were being used as a fact-checking source to dispel fake election results, especially on Twitter when some people were uploading fake election results on their timeline.

RQ3: What was the level of interaction between University of Ilorin students and INEC on social media?

Table 3: Interaction between INEC and Undergraduates

(N=386)	Level of Agreement* (%)				M	SD	Overall (%)
	1	2	3	4			
I interact with INEC consistently on Facebook	8.0	18.4	41.2	32.4	2.98	.911	74.5
I interact with INEC consistently on Twitter	9.2	25.7	34.0	31.2	2.87	.959	71.8
I react positively to INEC’s posts on Facebook	11.8	31.2	39.4	17.3	2.26	.904	65.8
I react positively to INEC’s posts on Twitter	16.4	34.4	27.3	21.0	2.55	.876	63.8
I send feedback to INEC on Facebook	5.7	21.0	42.0	31.3	2.99	.868	74.8
I send feedback to INEC on Twitter	11.4	22.0	38.0	28.2	2.83	.966	70.8
Total					2.81	.936	70.3

*Scale: 1 = Strongly Agree (1 – 25), 2= Agree (26 – 50), 3= Disagree (51 – 75), 4= Strongly Disagree (76 – 100)

On the level of interaction, there is a high level of disagreement among respondents at 70.3 per cent that they do not interact with INEC on both Facebook and Twitter. On the consistency of interaction, Respondents disagreed that they interact with INEC consistently on Facebook and Twitter at 74.5 per cent and 71.8 per cent respectively. Respondents disagreed that they react positively to INEC’s post on Facebook at 65.8 per cent while Twitter has a level of disagreement at 63.8 per cent.

Answering questions on how often they react to INEC’s post on Facebook and Twitter, Informants asserted that they react occasionally to the posts except during the last elections where they retweeted and shared posts on election results. This shows that if INEC’s contents are not engaging and important, Undergraduates won’t react to it.

On feedback, Respondents disagreed at 74.8 per cent that they send feedback to INEC, while for Twitter they also disagreed at 70.8 per cent. This implies that majority Respondents of the Respondents do not interact with INEC on their social media pages. Informant C, during the interview, was of the opinion that most people believe sending feedback to government agencies a waste of time.

When I am online, I don't have that luxury of time to send an unsolicited feedback to an agency that will most definitely not read it, except if I have an issue with the agency, I don't know why I should be sending feedback to INEC (Informant C).

Another informant claimed that except if it is a poll, or he is being asked directly, he has never sent feedback to INEC. "they most probably won't read it". This indicates that the level of interaction between INEC and University of Ilorin undergraduates is low and very poor, which shows a very wide gap in INECs' social media usage for citizen engagement as dialogic relationship has not taken place.

RQ4: How did Undergraduates of University of Ilorin perceive INEC's use of social media for citizens' engagement?

Table 4: Undergraduates' perception of INEC social media usage

Table 4: Undergraduates' perception of INEC social media usage

(N=386)	Level of Agreement* (%)				M	SD	Overall (%)
	1	2	3	4			
I perceive INEC to be transparent when I see its posts on Facebook	13.9	33.4	31.6	21.1	2.60	.971	65
I perceive INEC to be transparent when I see its posts on Twitter	11.8	27.4	36.6	24.2	27.3	.959	68.3
I tend to trust INEC's posts more when posted on Facebook	10.3	38.9	31.0	19.8	2.60	.919	65
I tend to trust INEC's posts more when posted on Twitter	18.1	31.7	25.4	24.9	2.57	.887	64.3
I perceive INEC's posts to be credible when it engages citizens on Facebook	10.3	54.5	18.0	17.2	2.42	.892	60.5
I perceive INEC's posts to be credible when it engages citizens on Twitter	19.7	48.8	12.5	18.9	2.31	.994	57.8
INEC's posts on Twitter aid collaboration with citizens	8.6	26.6	33.2	32.1	2.89	.957	72.3
INEC's posts on Facebook aid collaboration with citizens	11.7	21.3	34.6	32.4	2.88	.998	72
Total					2.63	.968	65.7

* Scale: 1 = Strongly Agree (1 – 25), 2= Agree (26 – 50), 3= Disagree (51 – 75), 4= Strongly Disagree (76 – 100)

Table 4 above shows that respondents have negative perception on INEC's posts especially in the aspect of transparency. Views expressed by informants corroborate this viewpoint as Informant J said:

The fact that they put their contents out there does not mean they are transparent, they will only show us what they want us to know, and we should not get carried away with the façade (Informant J).

In the same vein most of the respondents (65%) disagreed that they trust INEC's posts on Facebook and Twitter (64.3%). An Informant alluded that: Seeing INEC's posts on social media cannot automatically lead to trust, because in this part of the world, agencies will only post what they want you to see... there are a lot of issues that came up after the election that INEC did not address on its page (Informant K).

On the contrary, some informants trust INEC's posts when they see its posts on social media. Informant B was emphatic that:

Putting its activities out there is enough reason to trust them. INEC pages house relevant up-to-date information, carrying citizens along in their activities; why won't we trust them?

Even if INEC social media posts suffers trust and credibility deficit as data show, Informants E spoke the mind of few other informants in affirmation of Informant B's opinion that:

When INEC replies comments, reacts to issues on social media promptly, responds to enquiry, it makes citizens perceive them as credible, which is a positive thing for the agency. During the build up to the election, when INEC was publicizing that people should go and collect their permanent Voters' card, those that had issues at their polling units are usually seen at the comment section of INEC page (twitter), and in most cases, they get a response from the handle, that even made the whole process easier for some people. I personally didn't know we can apply for transfer of our voters' card, until I saw it in the comment section (Informants E).

Informants also admitted that over the years, INEC has made use of social media to collaborate with citizens in delivering smooth elections. An informant cited the eye witness account, where citizens have to post any anomaly arising from polling units by uploading the media and tagging INEC. In her words:

There is this eReporter portal, where citizen journalism is being encouraged. Citizens are allowed to log on to the portal and post their eye witness account about any glitch whatsoever in their ward or polling unit. This has given INEC the opportunity to have eyes everywhere (Informant F).

Discussion of Findings

This study focused on University of Ilorin Undergraduates' perception of INEC's social media use for citizen engagement using the dialogic public relations theory which hallmark is relationship building between organisation, government as well as its agencies and its publics through the internet. In the wake of Internet and

preponderance of social media presence that encourage virtual communication, it is not surprising that majority of the respondents made use of social media regularly. This finding corroborates findings by Lalith and Saidu (2018) and Canoz, Bacan and Tahrán (2015), who found that majority of undergraduates make use of social media. After all, undergraduates are heavy users of social media most of who are well exposed to the communication channel, thus it is a step to forming their perception of messages passed through the channel.

Despite the fact that respondents in this study were more active on Facebook than Twitter, they were more aware of INEC's presence on Twitter than Facebook. There is indication also that undergraduates were more active on Facebook than Twitter. This affirms findings by Hartmann, Mainka and Peters (2015), which show that respondents were more aware of their government Facebook accounts than Twitter accounts. Even as level of interaction between INEC and the respondents was very low, this does not adversely affect the consistency to which undergraduates interact with INEC, they also disagreed to reacting to INEC's posts on both Facebook and Twitter. Given the state of political culture in Nigeria where citizens of adult voting age lack interest in participating at elections and have low level interest in political activities, informants responded in the affirmative that they do not send feedback to INEC, due to the apathy they have about political activities. The implication is that even as undergraduates are avid users of social media, they do not visit INEC social media platforms with a view to providing feedback to INEC posts for information consistent with findings by Salem, Mourtada and Al-Shaer (2014) which show that a much smaller percentage of the respondents visit government social media pages to provide feedback. This finding also validates that of Bakker and DeVreese (2011) and Mergel, (2013), who documented that government agencies at all levels are rapidly adopting social media but they are struggling with citizens' declining engagement with public affairs.

Four variables were used to measure perception which are trust, transparency, credibility and collaboration. Respondents in this study perceive INEC's messages to be transparent when they see the posts on Facebook and Twitter, consistent with what Song and Lee (2015), found out that citizens' perception of government transparency is influenced by their government's social media usage. A reason for this is that they are able to get frequently updated information through constant communication. This underscores the point that use of social media by government and its agencies which INEC constitutes one of them influences citizen's perception of government transparency. Regarding trust, respondents in this study disagreed that INEC's posts on social media do not make them trust the agency. This is inconsistent with the findings of Mossberger and Tolbert (2005), who discovered that there is a significant relationship between trust and use of government social media page and website. This position is canvassed by respondents, who explicitly posit that INEC social media usage does not translate to trust. But as findings by Park, Kang, Rho and Lee (2016) suggest, the interactivity between government agencies and citizens play a mediating role in increasing citizens' perception of trust in government agency. The result from research question three which indicates

that there is a significantly low level of interaction between INEC and citizens could explain why their perceptions of trust in INEC is also low. Contrary to these findings, Median and Rufin (2015) found that the more transparent government institutions were perceived the more the increase citizen's trust in them. This does not seem to be the same in this study, as the respondents perceive INEC as transparent but do not trust the agency.

Respondents also perceive INEC's post to be credible when they see the posts online with the belief that only reliable information would be found on the page and because the pages are used to dispel fake news especially during elections. INEC's social media presence is perceived to aid collaboration with citizens. This is because during elections, INEC encourages citizens to post eye witness accounts of events around them. This avails citizens the opportunity to report suspicious activities on the ePortal in affirmation of Panagiotopoulos, Bigdeli and Sams' (2011) study who documented that social media has been a facilitator of collaboration among government and citizens.

It will be a costly oversight not to point out that INEC has been underutilising its social media platforms to facilitate dialogic communication with the public as proposed by Kent and Taylor (2002). One of the tenets propounded for maintaining dialogic relationship is propinquity, which is the spontaneity of interactions with publics by the organisation. This is absent in INEC social media usage as the results in this study indicate that the level of interaction is low. This finding is in conformity with that of Selzer and Mitrook (2007), who discovered that online platforms as dialogic tools are used very poorly and organisations do not take full advantage of the interactive potential of the internet to build and maintain relationships with society. Broadly speaking, the results from this study indicates that INEC has not fully achieved citizen engagement through their social media usage, as there is a huge gap between the awareness about their presence on these platforms, their interaction with citizens and also the effectiveness of their social media usage in facilitating dialogic communication.

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the use of social media by government agencies which INEC is an integral part for citizen engagement cannot be dismissed. A cardinal feature of social media is their enhancement of dialogic communication which is characterised by interactivity, transparency, trustworthiness and collaboration. Any agency which exhibits the aforementioned characteristics in its social media platforms will be said to have achieved citizen engagement. This is not absolutely the case with INEC. Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that INEC social media usage has not aided interactivity with the publics, it has also not increased the respondents' trust in the agency. INEC is however perceived to have minimally aided collaboration on their social media platforms. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Since undergraduates are heavy users of social media, it is suggested that INEC should maximise the potentials of social media to aid collaboration and engagement with citizens.
2. INEC should strive to become more prominent and visible on social media and also increase awareness about their activities. This can be done through the use of sponsored and promoted posts on both Facebook and Twitter.
3. INEC should do more than just post on social media. The agency needs to build public trust, and this can be achieved by promptly responding to issues and allegations. This will not render their social media platforms redundant leading to its active use by citizens.

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