



SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTORAL INTEGRITY: LESSONS FROM NIGERIA.

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INTRODUCTION

- ▶ In an effort to gain the confidence of Nigerian citizens and build trust in its electoral process, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Nigeria, prior to the 2011 General Elections, set up social media platforms to disseminate information directly to citizens as well as to monitor Election Day processes and procedures.
- ▶ The availability of this new media changed the electoral environment. The 2011 General Elections were the first in which social media was actively employed throughout Nigeria's electoral process by a wide range of stakeholders that included civil society organizations, political parties and candidates, the police, citizens, traditional media outlets and Nigeria's EMB, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

INTRODUCTION...Contd.

- ▶ In the ACE project report of the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria, prior to election day, Social Media Tracking Centre was established in order to ‘**explore how social media platforms were working during the election period; what trends might be developing; possible course corrections and whether groups could learn from one another’s experience**’.

2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS



2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS...Contd.

- ▶ The ACE project report concluded that trust in the INEC and electoral process grew throughout the electoral process due to the EMB's use of social media. The 'presence of social media', it wrote, 'and the willingness of the INEC to receive and act on information gave Nigerian citizens the feeling that, perhaps for the first time, their voices would be heard. Eligible citizens made an effort to register and vote, and also to protect their votes. Even non-activists followed poll results and continued checking in order to ensure that what was happening on ground was what was being reported.'

NIGERIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA STATUS

- ▶ Since the 2011 experience, and given the Statistics which indicate that out of a population of approximately 200 million Nigerians; there are:
- ▶ 162 million mobile subscriptions, which amount to 84% of the population
- ▶ 89 million have internet access,
- ▶ approximately 22.4 million Nigerians are on Facebook
- ▶ 1.6 million are on twitter
- ▶ Given the statistics above, online social media have become an increasing avenue for INEC, Nigeria to communicate and share information with its citizen in general and voters in particular.
- ▶ The deployment of Social Media as a communication strategy employed by INEC has had a profound impact on electoral processes, changing the channels used by citizens and voters to obtain information from the traditional media or one-way communication channel to the mobile-based platforms that allow for two-way interactions through user-generated content (UGC) and communication.

INEC COMMUNICATION POLICY AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

- ▶ The Commission has put in place a Communication Policy and this has been the guiding principle for all matters pertaining to communication of information and messages since the 2011 General Elections. The purpose of the policy is to ensure a well-coordinated and effectively managed communication flow not only between the Commission and its state offices nationwide, and within the Commission Headquarters itself, but also between the Commission and information dissemination channels that ultimately gets to the public. The Communication Policy is to help INEC strategize and achieve some objectives which include amongst others:
 - ▶ Providing the public timely, accurate, clear and complete information about Commission's policies, programs, services and initiatives.
 - ▶ Ensuring that INEC is visible, accessible and accountable to the

INEC COMMUNICATION POLICY AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION (Cont'd)

- ▶ Delivering prompt, courteous and responsive service that is sensitive to the needs and concerns of the public.
- ▶ Providing the electorate with information about all aspects and stages of the electoral process.
- ▶ Ensuring that the electorate have a proper understanding of basic issues in all aspects and stages of the electoral process, including timeframes, timelines, appropriate procedures, complaints and redress mechanisms, etc.
- ▶ Encouraging and mobilizing qualified Nigerian citizens to participate in the electoral process, including voter registration and elections.

THE INEC CITIZENS CONTACT CENTRE (ICCC)

- ▶ The ICCC is a facility that was established to play a major role in the Commission's public communication with some of its critical stakeholders. It is a product of the INEC Communication Policy and it is domiciled in the Voter Education and Publicity department of the Commission. It offers the public access to the Commission with enquiries and also serves as a center for exchange of Information between INEC and the general public.
- ▶ The ICCC is designed as a daily Situation Room and a channel for continuous communication and exchange of information principally with all citizens, but also with other stakeholders in the electoral process. It operates during official working hours from Monday to Friday, between 9am and 5pm. However, during elections, the operations of the ICCC is usually escalated to 24 hours.

THE INEC CITIZENS CONTACT CENTRE (ICCC)..Contd.

- ▶ The ICCC primarily utilizes new communication technologies and social media platforms with feedback mechanisms to reach out to voters. The use of social media within the framework of the ICCC provides a vehicle for the unprecedented mobilisation of an emergent and active generation of youths in the political process.

BENEFITS OF THE NEW MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR ENGAGEMENT

- ▶ The Commission has recorded many benefits for this usage which include:
- ▶ The affordability for citizens to use the web and text messaging platforms because they are cheap and convenient, ensures direct interaction with the Commission.
- ▶ Global discussions on INEC activities are ensured through connection and conversation.
- ▶ The Commission's social media accounts (twitter Facebook and Instagram) provide Nigerians with the opportunity of getting responses to inquiries, reports, complaints and queries about any aspect of the electoral process.
- ▶ INEC new media platforms (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) ensure a speedy feedback and offer online users opportunity to react to INEC articles and stories.

INEC'S COMMUNICATION TOOLS & OPTIONS

- ▶ During the 2019 General Elections, the underlisted tools were available for engagement by INEC
- ▶ INEC Press Corps - 90 members
- ▶ INEC Website - overhauled just before the elections
- ▶ Facebook; [facebook.com/inecnigeria](https://www.facebook.com/inecnigeria) - 401, 896 followers as at February, 2020.
- ▶ Instagram: [@inecnigeria](https://www.instagram.com/inecnigeria) - 103,000 followers as at February, 2020.
- ▶ INEC Online Newspaper (www.inecnews.com)
- ▶ INEC Citizens Contact Centre
- ▶ Twitter: twitter.com/inecnigeria (@inecnigeria) with 1.4 million followers as at February, 2020
- ▶ Email iccc@inec.gov.ng
- ▶ Website: www.inecnigeria.org
- ▶ My INEC APP: (Available in the Google Play Store)
- ▶ e-reporter: (Download from Google and Apple Play Store)
- ▶ INEC News: www.inecnews.com
- ▶ INEC Hotlines: 0700-CALL-INEC (0700-2255-4632)
- ▶ 09050858629, 09050858675, 09050858649, 08180958715, 08180958717, 08180958709, 09025038466, 07086945927, 08120183063, 07062896047, 08105119010, 08146697603
- ▶ **Note:** it is the Commission's target to have at least, a 50 million followership of its social media handles by the 2023 General Elections (CPS, INEC, 2019).

MEDIA MONITORING IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

- ▶ INEC engaged in media monitoring through the Voter Education and Publicity Department (VEP). By this, it ensured the deliberate reading, listening to and watching published or aired editorial content by diverse media platforms, with a view to identifying, isolating and carefully analyzing news items/ documentaries/ programmes or topics that are of special interest.
- ▶ The Office of the Chief Press Secretary (CPS) to the Honourable Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) plays a very significant role in media and publicity for the Hon. Chairman and the Commission as well. Most of the above media engagements by the Voter Education and Publicity department are done in coordination and collaboration with the Chief Press Secretary (CPS).

FAKE NEWS IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

- ▶ Fake News refers to pseudo news content deliberately created to hoodwink and misinform the general public with the purpose of achieving specific goals. Purveyors of fake news range from individuals to groups, or even organizations.
- ▶ Some examples of the Fake News encountered before, during and after the 2019 General Elections are as follows:
- ▶ Some supporters of a political party posted videos on the social media On 22nd February, 2019 - the day the Presidential election took place, purportedly showing some “INEC Staff” allegedly “thumb-printing” ballots papers in favour of a political party in order to influence the result of the election. It turned out to be false.

FAKE NEWS IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS (Con'td)

- ▶ One Farooq Kperogi on February 25 2019 also posted a video with a caption: *See shameless rigging by INEC officials: thumbprinting on an industrial scale.* But the same video clip had previously been shared several times and notably during the 2016 Edo governorship election
- ▶ There was a rumour posted on the social media on 21st June 2019 that the Commission's ICT Director, Engineer Chidi Nwafor had resigned. Still the Server palaver. The Commission promptly denied the fake news on its twitter handle. Engr. Chidi Nwafor never resigned his appointment and is still the Director, ICT of INEC.

FAKE NEWS IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

(Contd.)

- ▶ One Timi Frank on 17th February 2019 issued a statement that the INEC Chairman and National Commissioner Amina Zakari held a secret meeting with President Muhammadu Buhari at Aso Villa to perfect plans to rig the 2019 general elections. This was not true as journalists made enquiries and confirmed that no such meeting ever took place. It turned out to be fake news.
- ▶ Some faceless bloggers alleged that result of the Ogun State Governorship election was skewed to favour Dapo Abiodun of APC who got 241,670 votes to defeat Akinlade of APM who had 222,153 votes with only a margin of 19,517 votes. Whereas, the number of cancelled votes was 25,670. INEC promptly declared on its social media platforms that a declaration was made because the total number of registered voters in polling units with cancellations was less than the margin of lead, which is in line with Sections 26 (5) and 53 (4) of the 2010 Electoral Act (as amended).

FAKE NEWS IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS (Contd.)

- ▶ One Reno Omokri posted on Twitter on July 4 2019 that he was in possession of “incontrovertible proof that INEC had a server in form of a “signed admission” by INEC’s spokesman. But the so-called “proof” was nothing other than a circular from the Secretary to the Commission to all Resident Electoral Commissioners, requesting them to account for polling units without Smart Card Reader Accreditation Data for the 2019 Presidential Elections. This same person tweeted on 15th July 2019 that his “moles” had informed him that there was severe “panic” at the INEC Headquarters over the names of firms he published as those who installed the server.

FAKE NEWS IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS (Contd.)

- ▶ Purveyors of fake news went to town in the first week of February, 2019 claiming that National Commissioner, Mrs. Amina Zakari would be in charge of the results of the 2019 Presidential Election. The INEC Chairman promptly responded in a statement that as the Chief Returning Officer of the Presidential Election, he would not share that responsibility with anyone. Posted on INEC Nigeria Twitter handle on 09/02/2019. That result issues was a big FAKE NEWS
- ▶ Distribution of Permanent Voter Cards to Governors: A presidential candidate alleged that INEC was distributing PVCs to governors of a political party (Punch, January 16)

FAKE NEWS IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS (Contd.)

- ▶ Recruitment of Ad-Hoc Staff for 2019 General Elections: Several obscure online platforms and WhatsApp groups have been circulating news about the Commission's recruitment of ad-hoc staff long before it was advertised/ A Fake Facebook Page was also opened.
- ▶ Alleged creation of Polling Units in Niger Republic, Chad: After the launching of the Framework for IDP Voting on 12th December, 2018, a national newspaper inadvertently reported that the Commission was setting up polling units in Niger Republic and Chad. This follows from earlier allegations that the Commission had perfected plans to establish 30,000 new polling units in a particular section of the country. That News was Fake.

FAKE NEWS IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS (Contd.)

- ▶ “INEC Budgets N6 billion to Feed Police”: Some online platforms and newspapers alleged that the Commission had allocated N6billion to feed the men and officers of the Nigeria Police Force during the general elections. That was Fake News carried too far.
- ▶ Under-age Voting in Kano Local Government Elections: The media was awash with fake news that INEC allowed underage voting in the Kano local government elections held on 10th February 2018. The narrative also alleged that there were several underage persons in the Voter’s register. Apparently, the local government elections was not even under the purview of INEC. Local Government Elections are conducted by respective state governments

FAKE NEWS IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS (Contd.)

- ▶ Diversion of sensitive materials meant for the Anambra Governorship election: The Chairman of one political party alleged that two lorry loads of sensitive materials meant for the November 18 governorship elections were stored in a hotel in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. That was a big lie/Fake News.
- ▶ Also meant to derail the electoral process was the lie that the INEC Chairman had stepped down. Later, the report was changed to say that he had stepped down from his car at the International Conference Centre, venue of the 2019 Presidential Election Collation.

INEC'S RESPONSE TO FAKE NEWS DURING 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS AND OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGES

- ▶ INEC Chairman gave daily briefings from February 16th 2019 when the elections were postponed to the date when the re-scheduled elections began.
- ▶ Combination of National Commissioner in charge of Information and Publicity, Festus Okoye Esq, the Head of VEP Department, Barrister Oluwole Osaze-Uzzi, as well as the Chief Press Secretary, Rotimi Oyekanmi participated in several live and special programmes and individually granted interviews on various issues at regular intervals before, during and after the elections.
- ▶ The Commission issued press statements after its weekly Commission (Thursday) meetings and as the need arose containing robust information to explain policies and issues to the general public
- ▶ Commission also made extensive use of its social media platforms.

LESSONS LEARNED FOR IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

- ▶ The Commission was generally alert to issues that were brought up in the social media. While positive reports/assessments/comments were appreciated, the Commission was always quick to react to the negatives that were capable of derailing the peaceful conduct of elections and the entire electoral process.
- ▶ The Commission was also not unmindful of the tendency for social media to be used by mischievous politicians, political parties and other stakeholders who craved for spotlight. Remember that there were 91 registered political parties during the conduct of the 2019 General Elections with over half of the number inactive.
- ▶ The Commission has also learned that the Revised INEC Communication Policy must be vigorously implemented. This must begin with training workshops for all relevant officers in all the states. Equally, capacity development training on Social Media dynamics is to be organized at regular intervals, to fortify the INEC Citizens Contact Centre (ICCC).

LESSONS LEARNED FOR IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

- ▶ The Commission also intends to intensify the use of the media/tools, particularly advocacy visits; market outreaches, sensitization workshops; mass media (posters, leaflets/flyers, INEC Bulletin, electoral magazine, Jingles etc to counteract the effect of negative use of the social media. Other tools such as road shows, stakeholders' forums, INEC Website, advertorials, press conferences and press releases, etc. is also being employed to improve voter education and counter the negative messages that may be spread through the social media.

CONCLUSION



- ▶ Prior to the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria, the Political space was characterized by high level propaganda, dissemination of fake and uncoordinated information including the use of State Power by incumbents to deprive Political contenders from accessing the Media.
- ▶ With the advent of the social media, there is a heightened awareness by both the leaders and citizens in the advantages the Social media presents for active participation in the political process.
- ▶ The INEC, Nigeria has also positioned itself in the aggressive use of social media platforms to disseminate their Voter Education Messages and further exploit Social Media to stimulate citizen engagement in the Nation's political life.

Thank you for
listening!

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