Citizen Engagement with Social Media by State Governors in Nigeria

O.V. Mejabi & J.O. Fagbule
Dept. of Information and Communication Science
University of Ilorin
Ilorin, Nigeria
ovmejabi@gmail.com, hormorlholhu@gmail.com
+2348037213521, +2348068286073

ABSTRACT

There is a growing move by government leaders in Nigeria to showcase their social media presence in personal communications or official government websites. However, the motive for using social media is not clear. Is it to take advantage of the power of social media to foster citizen engagement or is it just a case of joining the bandwagon? Are those with high social media activity, the Governor’s perceived as high performers? Nigeria operates a federal system of government with 36 states, each managed by an elected “State Governor”. This study attempts to answer the question posed with respect to the State Governors in Nigeria and their use of social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter. The social media activity of each Governor was scanned for evidence of engagement between them and citizens. The conclusion is reached that while many Governors have social media accounts, citizen engagement is quite low although there seems to be a relationship between a Governor’s social media activity and governance performance.

Keywords: Social media, citizen, citizen engagement, e-governance, government

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media networks which is the focus of this study comprise networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Myspace and so on and it refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks [3]. According to Powell, Groves and Dimos [9] social media introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals. They also point out that social media has greatly changed the way the public communicates and expectations of the responsibility of government have also shifted. Furthermore, while some countries are being pro-active on the social web, others often find themselves in a corner, forced to engage in discussions that often started without them.

Ahlqvist, Bäck, Halonen, and Heinonen ([1] pointed out that government culture remains steeped in traditional ideas about public relations and outreach work, notions that have become archaic in an Internet enabled world. They state further, that like private companies which use social media to manage brand reputations, monitor sentiment and help customers, governments must adapt if they wish to effectively communicate with citizens and stakeholders. Social technologies can make networking and engagement with the public simple and powerful, make research faster, provide mechanisms for combating negative publicity, and measure public sentiment to help inform public policy [9]. The linkage between e-government and good governance results in a more inclusive, effective, efficient, transparent and accountable public administration, which will be key to improved economic development and competitiveness [5]. In 2012, the number of Facebook users in Nigeria was put at 6,630,200, representing a 3.9 percent penetration rate (Internet World Stats, 2012). Nigeria is also the third most active African country on Twitter [10]. Politicians in Nigeria are joining the online community to communicate with their audiences because they believe they are a key demographic who shape and influence perception [4]. However there is no comprehensive knowledge of their activities as well as how this form of media can impact on governance and development.

Nigeria operates a federal system of government with a strong federal center with equally strong 36 states. The states are governed by elected persons who serve as “State Governor”. The purpose of this research is, therefore, to provide evidence-based insights into the use of social media by the Governors to engage with the citizens they govern. It seeks to answer the questions: Do the Governor’s use social media in order take advantage of its power to foster citizen engagement or is it just a case of joining the bandwagon? Can the level of social media activity be linked to their level of perceived governance performance? The research is concerned mainly with examining each of the 36 state Governor’s online activity on two social media sites - Facebook and Twitter, since these are the most used by Nigerians.
2. METHODOLOGY

The data was collected in January, 2014. It involved examining the activity of each of the 36 Governors on Facebook and Twitter. The process did not violate privacy issues in that the entire Governors’ pages on Facebook and their handles on Twitter are free to be surfed by any user and are readily available to the public.

Content analysis from Facebook was summarized under the following themes:

a) Presence – Does the Governor have a public Facebook account?

b) Interactivity and citizen engagement - How many ‘number of likes’ do the Governors have? How often does the Governor post ‘statuses’? Do people comment on the posts? What is the nature of their discourse?

c) Chat activity - To determine chat activity which is private between the visitor of the page and the owner of the page, a message: “Hello Sir/Ma” or “Good day Sir/Ma”, was posted in expectation of a response. This was used to complete the following question: Do the Governors’ respond to people’s chat?

d) Event creation - Facebook allows a template for Event Creation with the options “yes”, “no” or “maybe”. The Governor can use this to invite people to political campaigns, public lectures, project launching, etc. This was checked in order to answer the questions - How often do the Governor’s create events on their page? Do people respond to it?

On Twitter, content analysis was summarized as follows:

a) Presence - Does the Governor have a public Twitter handle?

b) Interactivity - How many people follow them? How many people are they following? How often does the Governor post tweets? Do followers comment on the Governors’ tweets?

c) Event creation - Twitter allows a template for Event Creation with the options “yes”, “no” or “maybe”. The Governor can use this to invite people to political campaigns, public lectures, project launching, etc. This was checked in order to answer the questions - How often do the Governor’s create events on their page? Do people respond to it?

The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Where appropriate the findings were compared against secondary data collected on Governors’ performance rankings. Such rankings, though subjective, provided a means of discussing the social media activity of Governors against their level of perceived performance.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Presence

Not all the State Governors in Nigeria have Facebook or Twitter accounts. While 26 of the 36 Governors have Facebook accounts, only 19 of them have Twitter accounts. The social media activity summarized in Table 1, does not include the 7 State Governors that have no presence on either platform. These are: Akwa Ibom, Delta, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Yobe, Zamfara. In Table 1, data for State Governor’s with no social media account is shown as “nil” while account holders with no record for the activity is shown as “zero”.

3.2 Interactivity and Citizen Engagement

The interactivity between the Governors and citizens can be summarized by the following descriptive statistics:

a) The total number of Facebook likes for all Governors with presence is 240,204 and the average is 9,238 (n=26).

b) The total number of Twitter followers of all Governors is 279,682 and the average is 14,720 (n=19).

c) The total number of Twitter users followed by all the Governors is 572 and the average is 30 (n=19).

d) The total number of Tweets by all the Governors is 11,281 and the average is 593 (n=19).

The five most liked or followed Governors and the five most active Governors on Twitter are shown by their ranking position in Table 2. The rankings shown in Table 2, reveal that with the exception of Sokoto state from the north-west zone of Nigeria, the
Governors identified are those whose states are in the south-west, south-south and south-east zones of the country. Thus, 95 percent of the most active Governors on social media are those from the southern part of the country, where socio-economic and development indicators are usually highest [7].

Table 2. Top 5 performing Governors on various social media activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media activity</th>
<th>No. 1</th>
<th>No. 2</th>
<th>No. 3</th>
<th>No. 4</th>
<th>No. 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governors with most likes on Facebook</td>
<td>Edo</td>
<td>Ogun</td>
<td>Osun</td>
<td>Ondo</td>
<td>Lagos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governors with most followers on Twitter</td>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td>Osun</td>
<td>Ekiti</td>
<td>Ondo</td>
<td>Oyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most tweeting Governors</td>
<td>Ogun</td>
<td>Ekiti</td>
<td>Lagos</td>
<td>Oyo</td>
<td>Sokoto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governors' following others the most on Twitter</td>
<td>Imo</td>
<td>Osun</td>
<td>Sokoto</td>
<td>Ondo</td>
<td>Lagos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Online content analysis, 2014

For statuses and comments, the following were determined: How often do the Governors post statuses? do people comment on the posts or tweets? and what is the nature of their discourse? The frequency with which Governors post statuses and tweets is presented in Table 3 and reveals that no Governor posts or tweets daily. Rather, majority of them (69% on Facebook and 58% on Twitter) post or tweet monthly.

Table 3. Facebook Frequency of Posts on Facebook and Tweets on Twitter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of posts / tweets</th>
<th>Number of Governors</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Number of Governors</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook posts</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yearly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Online content analysis, 2014

This suggests that though the Governors are active on social media, they may not be aware of the potential impact engaging with citizens can have, just as Powell et al. [10].

Table 4. Governors’ discourse on Facebook and Twitter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of discourse</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse and trafficking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Online content analysis, 2014

It was found that Governors responded more to tweets (79% response) than they did to comments on Facebook (23%).

Table 5. Do the Governors respond to people’s comments or tweets?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governor response to citizen posts</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>78.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Online content analysis, 2014

The event creation aspect of the Governors Facebook activity was examined, and the frequency with which they used this feature is presented in Figure 1. The data shows that over 73% of the Governors do not use this medium to invite citizens to events such as political campaigns, public lectures, project launchings, etc. This further reiterates that the Governors who are active on social media are yet to be fully aware of how to exploit the benefits.

Figure 1. Frequency of event creation
4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main focus of this work was on two popular social media networking sites which are Facebook and Twitter. Online presence of all the 36 state Governors was checked on both Facebook and Twitter and it was found 26 of the Governors had a presence on Facebook while 19 had Twitter handles and seven had neither. Across five different social media activities, Governors from the southern part of Nigeria were amongst the top five in most instances. These Governors were those of Edo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Lagos, Ekiti, Oyo, and Imo. Only the Governor of Sokoto state from the northern part of Nigeria, was in this group. Three of these Governors are mentioned on a popular Nigeria online forum, Nairaland, as top five performing Governors: Rochas Okorocha of Imo, 1st; Akpabio Godswill of Akwa Ibom (who did not have a facebook or Twitter account), 2nd; Raji Fashola of Lagos, 3rd; Adams Oshiomole of Edo, 4th; with Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers and Sullivan Chime of Enugu, tying in fifth place [6][2].

Similarly, the Nigeria Governors’ Forum, a formal coalition of the elected Governors, in their annual peer rankings, declared the Governor with the best website as Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti state; Governor with the best security consciousness, Ibikunle Amosun of Ogun state; Governor with the best good roads, Raji Fashola of Lagos state; Governor who created the most employment, Godswill Akpabio of Akwa Ibom state; Governors with the best educational systems, Rochas Okorocha of Imo state and Rauf Aregbesola of Osun state; overall best Governor, Rochas Okorocha of Imo state (Nigeria Governors’ Forum, 2013). Apart from the Governor of Akwa Ibom, without a presence on social media, all others ranked highly by the Forum’s expert panel are amongst the top five found to be most active on social media by this study. Thus, although a categorical statement cannot be made about the type of relationship between Governor social media activity and governance performance, there is enough connection emerging that is worth exploring further in future studies.

The Governors that are using social media do not seem to fully appreciate its power in governance. Their online discourse is more on politics with very little on the budget or education or security or even on child trafficking, all of which are major concerns to Nigerian citizens. Very few of them on Facebook use the event or even on child trafficking, all of which are major concerns to Nigerian citizens. Very few of them on Facebook use the event or even on the budget or education or security. Their online discourse is more on politics with very little on the budget or education or security.

Social media will continue to develop and bring about changes in the interactions between those who govern and the governed. The Governors should try to reach out more to its citizens and be very active on their pages rather than being passive by regularly updating statuses or tweeting, at least once in a week. The Governors and citizens need to understand the benefits of citizen engagement for good governance, accountability and eventually, economic development. Creating this awareness and building the capacity to use social media to make these happen, should be taken up by the academe, civil society and the media.

For further study, it is recommended that a survey of citizens should be done to obtain their knowledge, attitude and practices towards engaging elected leaders via social media. To complement this, a survey of the Governors or their aides, can also be undertaken.

REFERENCES

Authors’ Biography

Dr. Omenogo Veronica Mejabi is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Information and Communication Science at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. She obtained a B.Sc. in Chemistry from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, in 1981, a Postgraduate Diploma (1983) and M.Sc. (1985) from the Department of Chemical Engineering at Aston University, UK, and subsequently, a Ph.D. in Management Science from the University of Ilorin in 2007. Her research interests include building web-based applications and the studies in ICT use in management and governance. Recently, she has been exploring ICT mediated citizen engagement with open data and in governance, especially social media. She can be reached by phone on +234 803 721 3521 and by e-mail on ovmejabi@unilorin.edu.ng

Miss Joan Omololu Fagbule is a student of the Department of Information and Communication Science, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Her interests include citizen engagement in governance and society through social media. She can be reached by phone on +234806 828 6073 and through e-mail at hormorholhu@yahoo.com