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Information Diffusion on Social Media During Elections in Nigeria: Extrapolating the Constructs of Dual Process Theory

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Abstract

The paper reports the findings of a qualitative case study that tested the Dual process theory in the Nigerian social setting. It reports the findings of a dissertation that sought to understand the role that social media played in the generation and diffusion of information during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. Nine (9) respondents were purposively sampled for the research and a content analysis of their social media pages was conducted. Inductive approach was employed in analyzing the data realized from the content analyzed pages from the respondents. The findings of the study showed that there was a higher use of social media during the 2015 general elections as compared to previous elections and was used to post offensive information about the candidates. Also, the study revealed that most people shared or were most likely to share what they believed to be true which had propaganda and high misinformation. People and friends on social media made sense of information received at face value and in most cases were not as interested in the message posted but where the person making the post was from. Social media was extensively used to propagate hate and divisive sentiments during the 2015 electioneering period in Nigeria. The study concluded that as social media continues to gain immense traction in terms of use in society, steps need to be taken to reduce the unending possibilities for misinformation, propaganda, and rumours which if misconstrued could lead to conflict situations.

Keywords: Elections; Information diffusion; Dual process theory; Social media

Introduction

Electioneering periods are characterized by a high amount of information generated and diffused. Diffusion of information during these political transition periods potentially lead to conflicts (Kühne, 2010; Zurich & Vorrath, 2010; Vladisavljevic, 2015). Most of the diffused

information are aimed at educating the populace on expected behaviour (on the part of electoral agencies), convincing and cajoling prospective voters to swing votes to particular candidates and parties. The increased level of information circulating during elections have the capacity of creating tension, which have the tendencies of becoming conflicts situations, if not properly understood (Irenoa, 2017). Some of these types of information diffused during election periods help voters to make decisions about the candidates to vote for.

However, there is little research that studied how people evaluate and make judgements of information diffused through social media during electioneering periods in Nigeria, particularly, what makes people accept or reject received information and the motivation that makes them forward such received information. A framework that explains the expected behaviour of individuals based on the information they have generated and the information that diffused to them is the dual process theory. This Chapter reports the findings of a dissertation that explored this expected behaviour through the lens of the Dual Process Theory in the context of Nigerian Electioneering Process.

Dual Process Theory

Dual process theory is a psychological theory that posits two distinct categories or types of influences on the persuasiveness of received messages: informational influence and normative influence (Deutsch and Gerrard 1955) cited in: (Irenoa, 2017). Morton Deutsch and Harold B. Gerrard conducted experimental studies which were developed in a way to prove that social influences have an impact on an individual's psychological processes. Social influences affect an individual's decision making and judgement, individuals are said to rely on the judgements and perceptions of other individuals as a trustworthy source of correct evidence in regards of reality. Social media provides an avenue where multiplicity of interactions take place, a place where people are influenced by each other. These influences have social implications regarding decisions and judgement calls about issues, events, and phenomena.

Deutsch and Gerrard's dual process theory has been studied in various contexts, such as neighborhoods, university settings and workplace communities, all of which have demonstrated the significant role of normative forces (Burnkrant and Cousineau 1975; Kaplan and Miller 1987). Dual process theory has been adopted to explain how different types of influences (normative factors vs. informational factors) affect the persuasiveness of online consumer reviews. Informational influence is based on the content of the reviews, whereas

normative influence reflects the impact of social aggregation mechanisms available to today's online consumers (Man Yee Cheung et al. 2009). According to the theory, informational and normative influence work together to shape the reader's information credibility judgment. This theory focuses on a communication influence model based on both the receiver's self-judgment of the information and the normative power of other audiences. It is useful in explaining communication effectiveness when group opinions/discussions are present (Briggs et al. 2002; Sia et al. 2002). Thus, it has both informational elements from the shared discussion content and normative influences from the community of participant opinions.
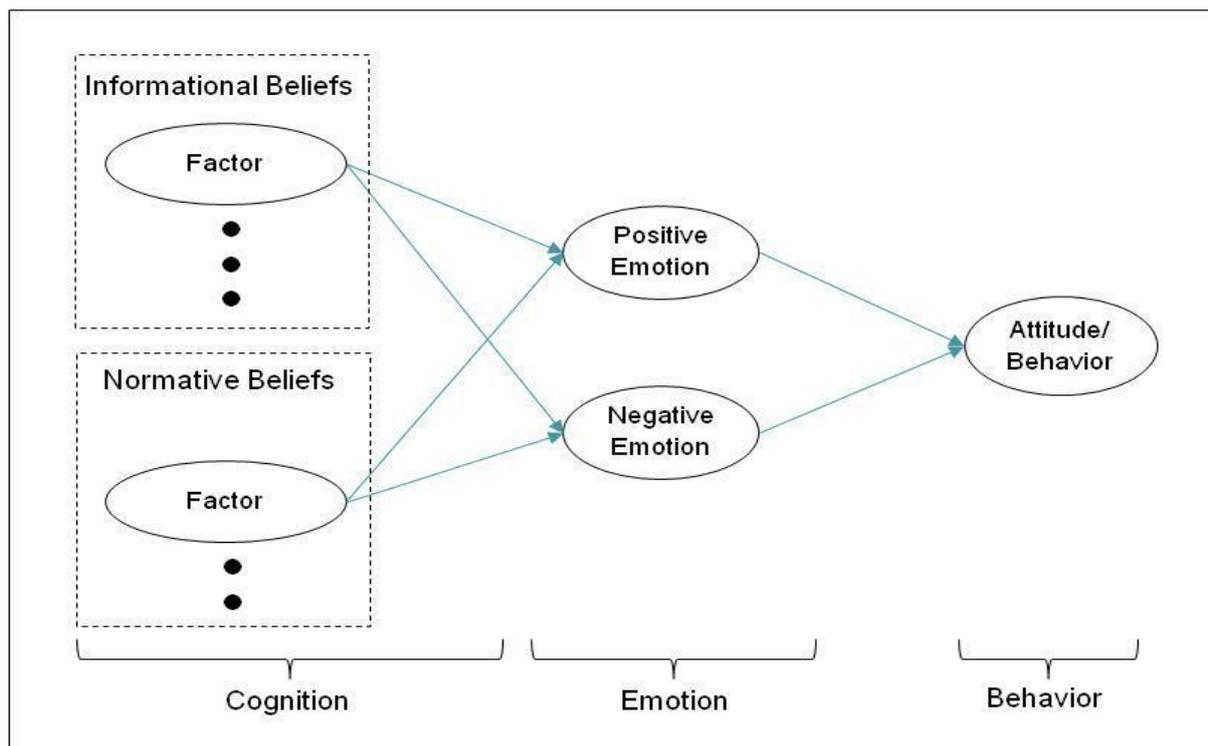

Fig. 1. Dual Process Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Literature Review of Previous Studies that adopted Theory of Dual Process Theory (DPT)

Studies have been conducted using the Deutsch and Gerrard's (1955) Dual Process Theory (DPT). Kim and Bock (2011) using the two factors/influences of DPT studied the factors that affect the behaviour of spreading online rumours focusing on the emotion of the recipient. Kim and Bock hinged their study on trying to understand the characteristics of online rumours that facilitate the behaviour of rumour spreading. The study raised one research question "What kinds of factors affect the behaviour of spreading rumours online"? The study applied the

cognitive emotion theory and dual process theory of information processing to examine how online users express their emotions of online rumours. They found out that informational based determinants significantly influenced positive emotion. They also found out that there were significant differences between positive and negative emotion, noting that consensus played an important part in forming their positive emotion.

In another study by Bartle, Avineri, & Chatterjee (2013) titled "online information-sharing: a qualitative analysis of community, trust and social influence amongst commuter cyclists in the UK". The research took into consideration the use and behavioural effects of travel as experienced shared through word-of-mouth in everyday travel behaviour. It discussed social interactions about travel with informational influence where beliefs are based on the experiences of other individuals. It explored using qualitative approach the social processes which occurred when a group of 23 commuter cyclists interacted with one another through a specially designed, map-based website over a period of six weeks. Methods used were observations of website interactions, participant questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study found out that processes of group identification and trust were found to be associated with strong positive attitudes towards cycling relating to the fact that information sharing was performing a social role alongside its more obvious function of diffusing practice travel information.

In a study by Sia, Tan, and Wei (2002), group polarization and computer mediated communication: effects of communication cues, social presence, and anonymity. They explained what group polarization was and the tendency for people to become more extreme in their thinking following group discussion. The study examined how computer-mediated communication may be associated with group polarization. Two experiments were carried out, at the end of which insights into the processes that trigger group polarization. The results highlighted the potential for critical organizational decisions to become prone to group polarization. The study uncovers two settings in which group polarization tends to be high, they highlighted the benefits of these settings which they noted encourages innovation and entrepreneurship because the settings may cause people to generate a greater number of novel arguments.

In another study, Yang, Chiu, and Chen (2011) in their study titled "examining the social influence on college students for playing online games: gender differences and implications". They tried to examine the social influence that online gaming had on college students with

particular reference to the role that gender plays with its attendant implications, their argument which is premised on the increasing popularity of online games. The study used the informational influence, normative influence and attitude to test their hypotheses. They employed a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative, questionnaires and focus group interview used to generate the data for the research. A result which showed that more males engaged in online gaming as against the lower number of their female counterparts. Also, it revealed significant effect of social influence on each group's attitude with the males being more obvious.

Mendes-Filho and Tan (2009) in their study "User-generated content and consumer empowerment in the travel industry: a uses and gratification and dual-process conceptualization". They examined the user behaviour on the web, in terms of the time spent on the web and what they shared while on the web. The purpose of the study they claimed was to theoretically propose a set of factors that integrate user generated content (UGC) adoption with consumer empowerment variables to enhance our understanding of how UGC empowers online consumer in the travel industry. The study came up with three contributions; proposing a new construct of consumer empowerment, conceptualizing the UGC using theories, and providing a framework for the design, implementation and managing of websites.

Cheung, Luo, Sia, and Chen (2009) from their study "credibility of electronic word-of-mouth: informational and normative determinants of online consumer recommendations". They explored how rumour was transmitted historically via Word-of-mouth (WOM) and extending the study to the on-line context (eWOM) by examining the informational and normative determinants of the perceived credibility of on-line consumer recommendations. A survey of users of an on-line consumer discussion forum in China substantiated the effects of the determinants, although post-hoc analyses revealed that prior knowledge and involvement level moderate some of them. Implications for research and practice are discussed. The study explores how informational and normative determinants influence the perceived credibility of on-line consumer recommendations. In addition, for nomological completeness, the relationship between information credibility and readers' eventual adoption of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) recommendations is also examined and discussed. The research questions are: How would informational and normative determinants affect a user's credibility evaluation of on-line consumer recommendations? How would an information reader's motivation and ability level influence the relationship between the informational and normative determinants

and the reader's perceived information credibility? How would this perceived credibility of eWOM influence its adoption?

In another study by (Barrouillet, 2011) Assert that the dual-process framework has proven especially heuristic in accounting for a variety of human activities such as reasoning, judgment, and social cognition (Evans, 2008). The present article was more restricted in scope and aimed at demonstrating that this framework is also suited for understanding the development of conditional reasoning. Arguing that the distinctions introduced by the dual-process approach are especially appropriate for understanding cognitive development, and can be traced back to the most venerable theories of cognitive development such as Piaget's theory. They endorsed a constructivist approach of development, supporting Piaget rejection of the idea that logic was innate in humans and designed an impressive series of studies aiming at demonstrating that even the simplest elementary logical structures were absent from child's thinking and developed slowly through a series of levels (Piaget & Inhelder, 1954). The study drawing from some of the prominent dual-process theories of conditional reasoning and tested these theories against developmental findings. This test revealed that all the proposed approaches have strengths and account for a part of the available developmental findings. As a consequence, I proposed a comprehensive dual-process theory that integrates Evans' suppositional approach and Johnson-Laird's mental model theory. This theory suggests that both the Ramsey test on which the suppositional account is based and the extensional approach favored by the mental model theory grasp something of the way adults represent and treat conditionals. However, the developmental analysis also demonstrates that both the Ramsey test and the three-model representation are developmental achievements resulting from the evolution of reflective mind, and cannot be considered as representing the basic meaning of conditional provided by the intuitive mind. The study claimed that the intuitive/reflective distinction has a long-lasting history in developmental psychology that could shed some light on the contemporary dual-process theories of reasoning.

Furley, Schweizer, and Bertrams (2015) in their study "The two modes of an athlete: dual-process theories in the field of sport" The article introduced dual-process theories – in particular the default-interventionist model – as an overarching framework for attention-related research in sports. Dual-process theories propose that two different types of processing guide human behavior. Type 1 processing is independent of available working memory capacity (WMC), whereas Type 2 processing depends on available working memory capacity. We review the latest theoretical developments on dual-process theories and present evidence for the validity

of dual-process theories from various domains. We demonstrate how existing sport psychology findings can be integrated within the dual-process framework. We illustrate how future sport psychology research might benefit from adopting the dual-process framework as a meta-theoretical framework by arguing that the complex interplay between Type 1 and Type 2 processing has to be taken into account in order to gain a more complete understanding of the dynamic nature of attentional processing during sport performance at varying levels of expertise. Finally, we demonstrate that sport psychology applications might benefit from the dual-process perspective as well: dual-process theories are able to predict which behaviors can be more successfully executed when relying on Type 1 processing and which behaviors benefit from Type 2 processing.

Methodology

The research adopted the qualitative methodology to gather data focusing on the reasons behind various aspects of behaviour (Yauch & Steudel, 2003; Joubish, et al 2011). The choice is based on the interest at gaining in-depth understanding of human behaviour and how the objects ideas and how they feel with regard to the subject under investigation, rather than measuring how largely they are held (Yauch & Steudel, 2003). The design of the research is a qualitative case study. Because the focus of the research is on the relationship between the person (or group) and the setting, so that, it is significant to detach one from the other (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The population for this study includes users of social media platforms particularly, individual pages and groups to which they belong on Facebook in Nigerians who were eighteen (18) years as at 1st October, 2014 and created or shared content about the presidential candidates during the Nigeria general elections of 2015. The sample was purposively selected due to the non-probability nature of the sample and the unique features of groups within the sampled population (Patton, 2002; Palinkas et al., 2013).

For this study, use of documentary sources (Facebook screen grabs from the study's consenting respondents) was the source of data. the study resorted to documentary sources to collect data which the researcher believed was more appropriate for the research questions. The use of documentary sources refers to the analysis of documents that contain information about the phenomenon under study (Austin & de Jong, 2008; Bowen, 2009).

The inductive approach was used for data analysis. An approached described by Thomas (2003) as a "simple and straightforward approach for deriving findings (themes, concepts) from raw data through detailed readings of the data transcripts." Using this approach, the researcher

determined the important themes, and selected the data to support, describe and derive meaning from these. The collected information was thoroughly read, then from the narratives, open codes were derived, then the open codes were grouped and placed in sub-categories. The sub-categories were grouped into related sub-categories, then they were categorized. The categories were then developed around themes for the study and analysis conducted with the intent to interpret the meanings inherent in the collected narratives. The study carried out a content analysis of the Facebook walls of nine (9) consenting respondents based on the research questions raised. The analysis was of posts (narratives) from the walls of the respondents that answered the research questions.

Results/Discussion

How the Two Constructs of Dual Process Theory (Informational and Normative Factors) Explain Information Generated and Diffused on Social Media during Elections

Deutsch and Gerrard's Dual Process Theory (DPT) is a psychological theory which postulates two distinct influences (factors) on the persuasiveness of received messages. They include: Informational and Normative Influences. The factors (influences) were developed to prove that social influences affected the psychological processes. It particularly focused on how it affected an individual's decision making and judgement. In essence, individuals make judgement calls on daily basis about issues, events, happenings, etc. Social media in Nigeria is relatively free (that is, no recorded evidence of restrictions placed on its use so far), which means that people can post whatever they feel like posting without any form of sanction. Social media creates room for social interactions to occur

Informative Influences

Informational influences are based on the acceptance of information obtained from others as evidence of reality. Communication on social media involves a series of interactions forth and back. People generate and diffuse information on a variety of interests to which they have. In doing this, they share artefacts which carry contextual, and sometimes circumstantial meanings. They make judgements and evaluations about the presenter (source of information received) with bias in some cases (depending on their evaluation of who, where, and the message – usually last in that order). The theory posits that people view truth and accept such information based on the judgement made of the presenter to have the requisite knowledge to

give such information. This is referred to as informational influence. Informational Influence is defined as "influence to accept information obtained from another as evidence about reality". It is often that influence that derives from the power of an individual or group to present their perspective on a subject as more authoritative and erudite than the opinion of the majority (Kaplan and Miller, 1987).

Acceptance of Information from others – acceptance of received information is based on a previous knowledge. People tend to accept information that was in consonance with or close to their previous belief. The respondents believed or preferred to accept as truth information which came from people who were seen to share similar interest particularly with regards to the candidates involved in the elections. It is based on the receiver's self-judgment of the received information, and hence the relevant components of the information, such as the content, source, and receiver, are important sources of influence (Cheung, et al. 2009). The study noted that respondents from their interactions were more likely to make judgements from their previously held information repertoire, which in many cases are based on their religious and ethnic affiliations. A poster reacting to a criticism of one of the candidates stated that "*Religion and ethnicity are the strongest forces in Nigeria. Some regions are only speaking English, no unifying agenda. Shame*"

Evidence about reality – what people/individuals accept as reality is subject to a number of factors, among which include: environment, norms, family, religion, and so on. Information generation and sharing is influenced by these factors because the society accepts what is shared because they believe in the power of the presenter. To be able to understand the meanings from the information in circulation, people draw from their experiences and knowledge to make credibility judgement on the truthfulness or otherwise of what is received as evidence of reality. For instance, informational influence may be derived from the power of the presenter if he/she is considered to be more authoritative and erudite about the topic being presented. An example is evidenced in the shared post that reported former president Olusegun Obasanjo as predicting that General Buhari would win the 2015 elections: "*Obasanjo says Buhari will be next President*", which was shared by another northern respondent to his friends who "liked" the shared information, since it furthered a choice of candidate which they seemingly preferred.

Normative Influences

Normative influence according to Deutsch and Gerrard (1955) is the need to conform with the positive expectations of others, particularly in a group environment. Social interactions connote

the presence of more than one person in a communicative process. It entails exchange among participants engaged in the interaction.

Need to conform - Every interaction has rules and norms which govern how people make contributions during the discussion. From the interactions captured in the study, it is evident that norms were expected to be adhered to, with those who break from it sanctioned (though not punitively, as they do not have such powers, except in the event where it offends the administrator/social media account holder). This is particularly noted among respondents from the Northern region, with lesser inclination to positive conformity on information received from other people from the South-East, South-South, and South-West. For example, a Northern respondent countered another Northern respondent for what seemed like a positive comment he made in reference to president Jonathan:

"We have seen President Goodluck Jonathan at work generally as well as specifically on (University) education for the past four years", (post from a Northern respondent) the information posted drew the following reaction from another (response from a Northerner) which was written in a mixed code of English and Hausa languages: "Ok kaima dan goodluck ne ko boko haram with d university issue" (interpretation: ok are you also supporting Goodluck? Forget about the university issue)

It was not expected of the respondent to post anything which could be viewed as supporting or portraying Jonathan in good light from the respondent who was a Northerner. Information generated, diffused and shared by respondents and their friends on social media revealed a kind of unstated rule among respondents from same region against the candidate from the other region. Respondents (particularly from the North) were expected to automatically support the candidature of Buhari.

Positive expectations of others – Groups in most climes set rules and regulations to foster seamless communication. Though in most groups (with exception to formal groups) there is an unstated code that all members engaged in the group or communicative process were expected to adhere to. Adherence to these unstated codes is expected of participants within the group. However, the study noted that majority only positively conformed along religious, ethnic and tribal lines. That is, those from the North were expected to automatically give positive comments to posts from people from the same region, and other regions too were expected to follow suit.

Social media as a Group environment – group environment connotes where two or more persons meet and interact. Social media has particularly broken the traditional group by extending interactions across states, countries and now continents. Individuals make friends with people without necessarily having to be within the same small community. A simple "Friend Request" and acceptance by the individual requested from is all it takes to make friends. Though the early connections could have been from school environment, places of religious worship, sports, etc. Facebook enhances the odds of making new friends by showing a list of people who are friends with the people you are already friend with. That is, if Mr. A is friends with Mr. B, friends of Mr. A are made available to Mr. B and vice versa.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Electioneering periods over the years in Nigeria have been characterized with a great deal of information. The influx and easy accessibility of social media platforms have made them become very fertile information grounds for the propagation of different types information, making it all the more important to understand the influences that heighten the information generated and diffused on social media. The informational and normative constructs of the dual process theory explain the influences on how individuals and groups make credibility judgement of information received on social media. Social media is currently the most rapid medium for diffusing information (the Ebola night for instance), and if not properly understood and managed could become a curse to the already strained unity of the Nigerian State. Nigerians have turned the social space to a war theatre with propaganda rife, incitements, misinformation, and rumour gaining traction on daily basis. Judging from the current trend, the government has not made substantial success in stemming the division already pervading the country. Unfortunately, the war of attrition and intrigues of the APC and PDP is creating further division in the country, with unguarded utterances which litter the social space. It is pertinent to have better understanding of the motivating factors for the transmission (diffusion and spread) of harmful information and fashion out strategies to nip its spread due to the current political atmosphere in Nigeria which is in a really delicate state.

The study recommends a cautiously and well-planned education programme targeted at religious and ethnic settings (due to the very high normative influence on the actions of the people) on acceptance of the diversity of the Nigerian State in the different languages. Also, cognitive authorities, opinion leaders and politicians must become more cautious with their utterances due to the ripple effects in the polity by intentionally focusing on trust building among their people.

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