

**AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF DIGITAL CITIZENS’
POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN THE 2019 PRE-ELECTION
PERIOD IN KAKAAKI SOCIALS ON AFRICA INDEPENDENT
TELEVISION (AIT).**

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Abstract

The study examined the audience perception of digital citizens’ political discourse in kakaaki socials on AIT, prior to the 2019 elections. With the aid of three research questions and technological determinism theory, survey was used as the methodology with a 14 item questionnaire which was distributed to 209 respondents within the department of Mass Communication, Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic, Zaria. Data generated were presented in tables and analysed using descriptive statistics with a 5-point likert scale. Findings revealed that even though the audience are politically conscious and can give their own narrative to issues that affect the society, it was discovered that the programme lacked some ethical and legal considerations in

selecting online stories that were featured in the Kakaaki socials segment. Therefore, it was recommended that the cardinal principles balance, fairness accuracy and responsible reporting must be sacrosanct in carrying out journalism tasks.

Key words: Audience Perception, Digital Media, Digital Citizens, Civic and Social Engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The way we communicate and react to social discourse has changed as a result of the digital abundance available to anyone who cares to become a digital citizen. Social engagement in the world has transcended beyond writing letters and waiting for replies. The citizens can hold their political leaders responsible while accessibility to those leaders is made possible due to the internet spectrum available to digital citizens to play with. Citizens package snippets, video and audio clips to send across messages to higher authorities which cannot be overlooked. The mainstream media have fallen for this by including some of the online discourse into their programmes, to showcase to the mass audience about the happenings in the digital world.

The digital platform has gained legitimacy in the minds of the mass audience that the foremost private Television station in Nigeria-the African Independent Television (AIT) initiated a programme known as “*Kakaaki Socials*” to showcase the political discourse being engaged online. This has generated a lot of heat in the Nigerian nation as contending political issues were brought to the fore, to the point that the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC), refused to renew the license of AIT due to the “*Kakaaki Socials*” which immensely criticized the president Buhari’s administration, being that he wants to be re-elected for a second tenure without fulfilling his agenda of taking Nigerians out of poverty and most importantly, fight insecurity. This

study wants to find out the legitimacy of online discourse serving as news in the mainstream media.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The cardinal principles of news selection which are balance, objectivity, fairness, accuracy which must be observed by the media be they mainstream or in the virtual reality has been relegated. It is evident that news stories churned out by the mainstream media in some instances do not carry the weight it used to, because the other media or alternative sources especially online media has taken over, and some audience see the online stories as more credible than that of the mainstream media. The mainstream media on the other hand- to proof their onions have injected these online stories into their programmes to showcase some of the things that occur online which in some way is legitimising what digital citizens do, sometimes to the detriment of the peaceful co-existence of the polity especially Nigeria.

Kakaaki socials heated up the polity with its selection of uncultured and uncensored stories found online. These uncultured stories range from the report in the *Financial Times* of London which allegedly wrote that President Trump of the United States says he doesn't want to meet anyone as lifeless as President Buhari. Also a Chinese company known as HSBC (Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation) predicted that President Buhari will not win the 2019 elections and even if he does, the Nigeria's economy will be grossly affected. (AIT, Amaize, 2018). Stories like these found their way into a mainstream medium like the AIT, and the comments on twitter were slanderous, but were still reported uncensored. In the digital world's never-ending stream of unfiltered, user-generated content, things are indeed often not what they seem. Without editors, fact checkers, administrators, or regulators to monitor what is being posted, we have no one to vouch for the reliability or credibility of the content we read and see on sites. (Keen, 2007).

This research aims to offer some new perspectives on these issues at a time when mainstream media companies are taking an increasing interest in the role of social media. According to Newman (2011), he opined that ‘media organisations need to pay more attention to the dynamics of influence and trust in third-party networks – as well as wider audience patterns of social discovery’. The right to freedom of expression is carried out more by digital citizens than offline citizens which has led to inciteful comments and hate speech being perpetrated without some form of regulation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to find out how the main stream media like the AIT legitimises the activities of the social media as newsworthy. The specific objectives are

1. To examine the audience perception of *Kakaaki socials* and their stories prior the 2019 elections.
2. To ascertain how the programme *Kakaaki socials* have helped the viewers to see the need for national integration.
3. To find out the ethical and legal implications that *Kakaaki socials* has spurred in the minds of Nigerians.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the audience perception of *Kakaaki socials* and their stories prior to the 2019 pre-elections?
2. How did *Kakaaki socials* help the viewers to see the need for national integration?
3. What ethical and legal implications did *Kakaaki socials* spur in the minds of the audience?
- 4.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Benzell et al (2018), digital abundance, in the world today is driving digital citizens into many ventures and creating

opportunities for youths to voice out and engage in public discourse, civic and social engagement to the awe of many. The political consciousness being witnessed in Nigeria due to digitization and the influx of political commentaries in forms of video clips, audio clips and letter writing to political actors by youths who are digital citizens is reaching the political gladiators to the point that the Africa Independent Television (AIT) which is a main stream medium, birthed a programme called *Kakaaki socials* to showcase the kinds of political discourse that take place in the social media. Whether the “other news” is being legitimized by the main stream media, is what this study intends to find out.

The Nigerian experience of digital citizens’ comments on political issues

Anyone familiar with the political terrain in Nigeria will understand the kind of political comments that flooded the online platforms, especially the days leading to the 2019 elections. The hype of political activities in the nation generated so many comments, and online users were uploading creative contents to either praise the President Buhari’s government, or de-market them from coming back to power, or mentioning societal ills with the hope of correcting using different forms of art. Such contents were so sensational that the *Kakaaki* segment of the AIT introduced the *Kakaaki socials* in which they select online or user generated stories to air on that segment. This segment endeared the audience to the *Kakaaki socials* stories because most of them tend to either ridicule the government or say things in their raw forms not minding how it will go down well in keeping the fragile peaceful co-existence of the country. This shows that the mainstream media in some way agree with the kind of stories churned out by online platforms at that time.

The genesis of the African Independent Television (AIT) saga with the Nigerian Government

Following the series of online stories aired by the AIT in its programme known as *Kakaaki Socials*, prior to the 2019 general elections, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) in a letter addressed to the Daar communications group has called on the media house to give reasons for its ‘unprofessional’, ‘inciting’ and ‘unfair’ contents in the programme *Kakaaki socials*. It has been revealed that since October 2018, the NBC has issued several warnings to the Daar communications to desist from churning out inciteful reports on its *Kakaaki socials* programme segment but the media did not heed to the advice, not until the media was refused license renewal before they ceased to air the programme. The NBC tagged such programme as using ‘treasonable’ comments which could disrupt the fragile peaceful coexistence of Nigeria. (Sahara Reporters, p 1).

The user generated content of the social media has been given legitimacy in the main stream media which hampers on the cardinal principles of news reporting. Some of the sections of the NBC codes were highlighted in the letter sent by the management of the NBC to the Daar communications as follows: “For the avoidance of doubt please note the following section of Nigeria broadcasting code; section 5.6.3 and 5.6.4. “Section 5.6.3: Broadcast shall take responsibility for all user generated content used on their medium. “Section 5.6.4: Material from user generated source shall meet all provision of the code.



Figure 1

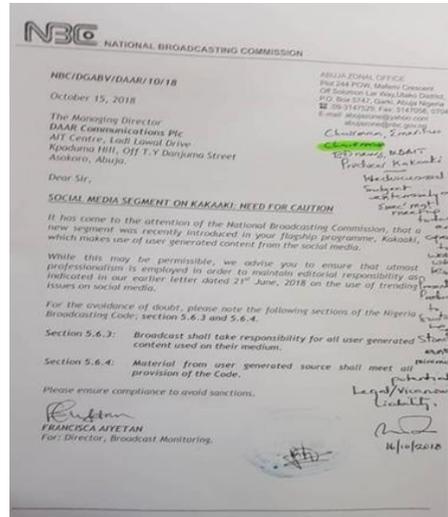


Figure 2

Culled from Sahara Reporters, New York.

Since the premiering of AIT *Kakaaki socials* on August 7, *Kakaaki Socials* has gained widespread acclaim, numerous viewers praising both the station and its presenter, Ohimai Godwin Amaize, for providing a refreshing platform for the amplifying of social-media voices. (Premium Times, 2019).

Media and Technological Revolution

Fuelled by the growth of powerful networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, individuals are now able to create, collaborate and share their own media – often to the bemusement of governments, lawyers and traditional news organisations (Newman 2011). Newman (2011) also corroborates that ‘Citizen Journalism and social media haven’t replaced professional journalism, but it has certainly become harder to define what a journalist is. The line between professional and personal has blurred amid an overwhelming tide of interlinked news

sources and outputs. Terms like old media, new media, social media and blogging have become less and less useful in defining value or quality. New types of journalistic organisations are emerging every day whilst professional journalists have embraced new skills like blogging, social media and the curation of communities. But big media haven't just lost their monopoly of the creation of news; they are also in a fight to maintain their control of distribution, as social media offer alternative ways to find and discover news'. Perhaps, this may be the reason for the introduction of *kakaaki socials* on AIT.

News agencies—and in particular wire services—are facing challenging times. The agencies have lost their traditional monopoly on “raw” news and find themselves faced with multiple parties that operate on their market (Boyer, 2011). While digital citizens are celebrating the non- existence of editors in the online platforms and the public seeking for news wherever they choose to, this has increasingly reduced the sanctity of the newsroom. Editors are no longer the gatekeepers of news. Thanks to the Web, audiences can find many sources of news. Audiences decide what they'll read and where they'll go for news. “The public is increasingly seeking its news not from mainstream television networks or ink-on-dead trees but from grazing online. When we go online, each of us is our own editor, our own gatekeeper. We select the kind of news and opinions that we care the most about. (Bullard, 2013).

But many news organisations are now beginning to respond to the challenge, recognising that they need to work with social networks on major news stories. They have developed new procedures for monitoring, verifying, filtering and sifting as fast as they can, on behalf of a mainstream audience that is short of time and looking for wider context. If this is what is obtainable to source for online stories, the segment of *Kakaaki socials* on AIT air such news in their raw form without subjecting it to monitoring, verifying, filtering and sifting as aforementioned. A case in point was when the Nigeria Broadcasting Commission made reference to a story on a particular on line platform to declare a sovereign state of Biafra on June 1st 2019. (Premium

Times 2019. P 1) the NBC describes this action by Daar Communications as ‘flagrant disregard of editorial responsibility.

Notwithstanding the tremendous benefits of online media, Dyadya (2019. P 64) opines that ‘the current media ecology show tremendous potential and present numerous opportunities for journalist and citizen journalists, there are also potential pitfalls. While social media networks chunk out viable leads and are always the first to break the news, there are also a lot of unfounded information going on and even hoaxes on the new media platform that negate the principle of responsible reporting

More so, Web 2.0 advocates argue that the internet should not be just another form of distribution for big media companies but is an opportunity for a flowering of new creative expression (the read-write web). (Newman, 2009). This is clearly visible to what is obtainable with what the young minds are creating and uploading for the consumption of digital citizens. For the main stream media to answer their names, some have incorporated eye witness account from amateurs since they cannot be everywhere to help upload stories where they cannot access or reach. This is not only applicable in Nigeria but the trend is a global practice.

Conversely, the concern is the legitimacy of accepting the ‘other news’ as real news which questions the integrity of the main stream media. At the moment, the thin line that separates the main stream media from the virtual media is professionalism versus amateurism; credibility versus lack of it, real news versus fake news; fact versus fiction; responsible reporting versus irresponsible reporting; gatekeeping versus gate crashing. When that line is blurred, the general audience will hardly know which is the most credible.

In a recent study on how students engage with online news in the U.S, ‘Most significantly, this study’s findings suggest the news diet of young news consumers is both multi-modal and multi-social; news comes from their peers and professors about as much as from

social media platforms during a given week. Most students know a free press is essential in a democracy, and, yet, the deep political polarization occurring in this country has made them suspicious of biased reporting. Some question the proliferation of “fast news” — oversimplified and fragmentary coverage spewed across social media platforms. And, for many, engaging with news has become hard work, requiring students to evaluate everything they hear or read for truth and objectivity, whether it’s from a Facebook post, a conversation with a friend, or a news tweet on their smartphones’. (Head et al, 2018)

The one-way nature of the media so far has been an unnatural state, argues Jarvis, due to limitations of production and distribution. He says that, properly done, news can be a democratising force and that it should be a conversation between those who know and those who want to know, with journalists in their new roles as curators, enablers, organisers, educators -helping where they can. Against this background, it is not surprising that this study has found mainstream media organisations engaging hard to try and understand the technical and social challenges raised by the rapid growth of personal and social media. (Newman 2009).

As problematic as this social media platforms are, we have seen media outfits soliciting for user generated contents from bloggers and eye witnesses to augment what they have or do not have to build their stories. This has in some way legitimize the activities of digital citizens to also make stories knowing that the main stream media are readily available to receive their stories. Several mainstream media both locally and internationally have their apps where you can download and then upload stories for them which they later disseminate to their audience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Technological Determinism Theory

Technological determinism theory (TD) is a multi-dimensional theory that is applicable in the positivistic, constructivist and technological spheres of human thinking. So many scholars have tried to explain this theory from their own point of view, but for the sake of this study, the theory will be considered based on Marshall McLuhan's social construct of the theory. Technological determinism theory simply put, is the idea that technology has important effects on our lives. This idea figures prominently in the popular imagination and political rhetoric, for example in the idea that the Internet is revolutionizing economy and society. As stated by Adler (2006), TD has also had a long and controversial history in the social sciences in general and in organization studies in particular.

Critics of TD argue variously that technology itself is socially determined, that technology and social structures co-evolve in a non-deterministic, emergent process, or that the effects of any given technology depend mainly on how it is implemented which is in turn socially determined. Statistics have shown that we spend 6 hours 42 minutes online each day using mobile devices and more than 100 days of online time every year. (Hughes, 2019). According to Clement (2019), there are about 113.3 million internet users in Nigeria as at 2019. It is estimated that 187.8 million users will be available by 2023.

METHOD

The study adopted the survey method of research. The justification for the choice of survey as a methodology is that it is directly related to the field and appropriate for the topic under study. Survey also describes and explains why certain situations exist in order to examine the relationship between variables. (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006, p. 185). The instrument for data collection was the

questionnaire. The population for the study were the academic staff of mass communication and the HND I and II students of the department in Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic, Zaria. With a total of 453 serving as the population, the sample size was calculated using the survey monkey with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, we got a sample size of 209. The choice of the population was based on the behavioural pattern of the people with a high tendency to watch *Kakaaki socials* on AIT.

A 14 item questionnaire and the three research questions posed for this study was designed to elicit the desired response from the respondents. Items were presented in tables and analyzed using the Likert scale form of descriptive statistical analysis.

The five point Likert scale were as follows: Strongly Agreed (S) =5, Agreed (A) = 4, Undecided (UND) = 3, Disagree (D) =2, Strongly Disagree (SD) =1

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS.

The formula used to analyse the Likert scale formula is as follows

$$\bar{X} = \frac{FX}{N}$$

Where \bar{X} = sample mean, F = Frequency, X = allotted values, N = Total number of the score

1. Audience perception of *Kakaaki socials* and their stories during the 2019 pre-election period

Table 1

Values	5	4	3	2	1	Total	\bar{X}	Decision
4 Perception of the stories	Interesting	Thought provoking	Encouraging hate speech	Speaking the truth				Accepted
	82	36	26	65		209		
	410	144	78	130		762/209	3.64	
5 Socially responsible	Yes	No	Don't know					Accepted
	147	52	10			209		
	735	208	30			973/209	4.65	
6 Skewed reporting	Yes	No	Don't know					Accepted
	146	50	13			209		
	730	200	39			969/209	4.63	
7 Audience rating of <i>Kakaaki socials</i>	5	4	3	2				Accepted
	18	110	59	21		209		
	90	440	177	42		750/209	3.58	

Table 1 shows the mean scores of the responses posed on the audience perception of *the Kakaaki socials* 2019 pre-election period related stories. In a study such as this using the likert scale rule, all the mean scores were above 3.00, which indicates that the results are accepted. For question 4, majority of the respondents find *Kakaaki socials* interesting, which means they enjoy the entertaining aspect of it more than for any other reason. Even though some of the respondents say it encourages hate speech, others believe it was thought provoking. For question 6 which talked about skewed reporting, it shows that majority of the audience believed that *Kakaaki socials* stories prior to the 2019 elections were skewed in their reportage. Findings here agree with that of Dyadya's study (2019, P.65) on journalists perception of new media platforms. It was discovered that it affects the effective compliance with code of conduct, harbours unethical practice and create social tension in the society.

2. How the programme *Kakaaki socials* have helped viewers to see the need for national intergration.

Table 2

	5	4	3	2	1	Total	\bar{X}	Decision
8 <i>Kakaaki Socials</i> have Increased Nigerians patriotism	Strongly agreed 37 185	Agreed 109 436	Undecided 41 123	Disagreed 22 44	Strongly Disagreed 00 00	209 788/209	3.77	Accepted
9 Increased social cohesion	Strongly agreed 27 135	Agreed 121 484	Undecided 30 90	Disagreed 24 48	Strongly Disagreed 07 7	209 764/209	3.65	Accepted
10 Improved political consciousness	Strongly agreed 45 225	Agreed 116 464	Undecided 27 81	Disagreed 13 26	Strongly Disagreed 08 8	209 804/209	3.84	Accepted

Table 2 describes how *Kakaaki socials* have attempted to integrate the Nigerian polity. From the mean scores, it shows that the programme has made Nigerians more patriotic, increased social cohesion and national consciousness. But a point to note is that as digital citizens carry out their amateurish reports which has found its way to the main stream media, its shows that these online citizens have seen the need to be politically conscious because the online spectrum have given them access to voice their opinions on issues that affect the Nigerian state, unlike when information was a one-way flow with gatekeeping to check what should see the light of the day. Digital citizens have seen the need to point out those ills in the society with the hope of correcting them. This is buttressed by the works of Abdulrauf-Salau and Tanko (2019, P. 383), when they emphasized that political activism encouraged by social media has increased national consciousness in the minds of the young ones, especially Twitter and hash tag activism.

3. Ethical and legal implications that *Kakaaki socials* spurred in the minds of the audience.

Table 3

		Responses					Total	\bar{X}	Decision
11	Improved credibility of mainstream media	Strongly agreed 51 255	Agreed 132 528	Undecided 10 30	Disagreed 10 20	Strongly Disagreed 06 06	209 839/209	4.01	Accepted
12	Applied balance, objectivity and fairness	Strongly agreed 31 155	Agreed 101 404	Undecided 33 99	Disagreed 33 66	Strongly Disagreed 11 11	209 735/209	3.51	Accepted
13	Usage of right ethical standards	Strongly agreed 32 160	Agreed 103 412	Undecided 16 48	Disagreed 49 98	Strongly Disagreed 09 09	209 599/209	2.86	Rejected
14	Legitimacy of social media stories for consumption	Strongly agreed 47 235	Agreed 119 476	Undecided 26 78	Disagreed 12 24	Strongly Disagreed 05 05	209 209/818	3.91	Accepted

In table 3, which depicts the application of ethical and legal standard in *kakaaki socials*, question 13 mean score has debunked that as evident in the mean score of 2.86, which falls below the likert scale acceptance standard of 3.00. This is evident on the letter written by the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to warn the AIT on the programme which they said was ‘treasonable and inciteful to the peaceful coexistence of Nigeria’.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study sought to find out the audience perception of *Kakaaki socials* stories prior to the 2019 elections and how online stories are being legitimised in the main stream media. It has realised that the fusion of online and offline media has come to stay in such a way that one can hardly differentiate the two. However, the credibility and authenticity of main stream media has been side-lined and the consumption of online news stories have gained global acceptance. That is not to say that that the mainstream or online have separate rules guiding them, but it is easier to hold the mainstream media more

responsible than the online media because the online media comes with all sorts whether professional or unprofessional narratives while the mainstream media has no option than to be professional, if not, the laws and the regulatory bodies are there to put them in check.

To start with, research question one which sought to know the perception of the audience on *Kakaaki socials* before the 2019 elections has been answered in questions 4 and 6 because of its thought provoking stories and unbalanced and skewed forms of reporting. In watching the *Kakaaki* show, one will notice that the show was more against president Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC) winning the elections than former Vice President Atiku of the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Consequently, on how *Kakaaki socials* have helped to integrate the Nigerian polity, this has been answered in questions 8 and 10 while question 9 has rejected the affirmation that the programme has increased national cohesion. This goes a long way to show that online political activism has made Nigeria more polarised than before because it is more of war of words and hate speech than national cohesion. So research question 2 is not fully answered.

More so, for research question 3, which considered the ethical and legal implications of the programme prior to the 2019 elections, question 13 rejected the notion that *Kakaaki socials* considered the ethics of journalism in airing the programme. This led to the NBC writing several letters of warning to the station regarding the programme and the subsequent annulment of the *Kakaaki Socials* segment.

CONCLUSION

As the findings of this study suggest, it is certain that online media coupled with digitization and a clear and easy access to broadcast spectrum has come to stay. It therefore behoves on media regulators and all stake-holders concerned to draw a line between real media practice and those who do it for fun. There is no doubt that the

digital space has contributed immensely in information dissemination and it has also added to the avalanche of the tools of the trade, but care must be taken when accepting information online.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the following recommendations:

1. There should be proper sifting, editing and filtering of stories sourced online to be aired on mainstream media in order for the audience to decipher properly real news from fake news.
2. The mainstream media should not throw the cardinal principles of accuracy, fairness and balanced reporting to the dogs for the sake of using technology in carrying out their journalistic functions. In the findings of (Head et al, 2018) they stress that ‘To a large extent, the news habits young adults have today will determine the future of news production. Understanding how journalism will fulfill its role in the service of democracy rests on a deeper knowledge of how young people gather, assess, and critically engage with news now and what role news plays in their lives’.
3. Professionalism in journalism practice must be strictly adhered to so that the porous nature of the job is not left for citizen journalists alone.

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