

Analysing Media Role in Satisfaction with Democracy among Undergraduates in Selected Universities in Kwara State, Nigeria

Maryam Lasisi Mustapha, Lambe Kayode Mustapha, Aminat Bukola Anafi

Department of Mass Communication
University of Ilorin,
Ilorin, Nigeria

Email: muslakay@yahoo.co.uk, klm@unilorin.edu.ng

Abstract

This study examines the comparative role of mass media in perceived satisfaction with democracy among the youths in selected universities in Kwara State. Based on the belief that the political public sphere is largely complex for direct interaction by majority of citizens, requiring mass-mediated connection, mass of informed citizenry and the notion that informed youths are fundamental to the future of democracy, the study investigates the contribution of dependency on mass media on perceived satisfaction with democracy from Media System Dependency Theoretical paradigm. Sampling 335 respondents proportionately from University of Ilorin and Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria and premising the findings on questionnaires' responses, the study observed significant difference in dependency on mainstream and new media among the respondents in favour of the new media. However, the results revealed that mainstream media contribute more variance in perceived satisfaction with democracy among the youths. The paper recommends that media factor should be included in the exploration of satisfaction with democracy in tandem with other key democratic institutions previously documented.

Keywords: Media system dependency, satisfaction with democracy, mainstream media, new media

1. Introduction

In recent as well as antiquated societies, it is impossible to talk intelligently about democracy without considering the role played by the societal information architecture contemporarily epitomised by the mainstream and the new media of mass communication (Encyclopedia of Communication and Information, 2002). In most cases, however, the asymmetrical relationship between the media and their users creates citizens' dependence on the former (George & Jakob, 2010). According to Ball-Rokeach (1998: 17) "media users have hardly any effect on the way media producers handle their resources". This means that the media provide the means by which members of the audience interpret the external environment, particularly with regards to functioning as democratic citizens, without their input. This state of affairs results from the need for orientation to political milieu in creating informed citizenry necessary for democratic arrangement.

A democracy is a system of government in which the people of a country vote to elect their representatives. This system of government is premised on engaged and informed citizenry, a request being fulfilled by the mass media in the post-industrial society. As the lifeblood of democracy (Mustapha, Ahmad & Abubakar, 2014), media play a crucial role in shaping and defining the quality of democracy in a society. The mass media re-construct, translate and convey issues in human society to the cognitions of their teeming audience. According to de Vreese, (2005), the mass media simultaneously structure public perception of social reality through their representation, construction and contextualisation of unfolding societal events, issues and activities. On centrality of the media to a functioning democracy, Jebril, Stetka and Loveless (2013, p. 6) surmise that "the mass media are regarded as one of the key democratic institutions, vital in improving the quality of the electoral

system, political parties, parliament, judiciary, and other branches of the state... civil society, and safeguarding their democratic performance.”

Across time and epochs, therefore, mass media of communication function as the public sphere, open marketplace of idea and societal watchdog (Mustapha, 2008; Mustapha et al., 2014); roles that so tangential to successful democratic enterprise. Being product of societal power and social exigencies, media of mass communication is not only r(e)volutionary, but function as democratic resources based on the prevailing structure of media ownership, organisational routine and feedback capabilities (Baran & Davis, 2012; Croteau & Hoynes, 2002) . The contemporary new media, propelled by advancement in information and communication technology, therefore, offer new perspective in media-democratic symbiosis.

While opinion differs on the contributions of new media to politics along the continuum of passivism and activism, the political and democratic roles of the media in general and new media in particular have received generous exploration among political communication and media effects scholars. However, little attention has been accorded the role of media in satisfaction with democracy. This study, therefore, opens a new perspective on perceived media role in strengthening democracy among a demographic group that is fundamental to sustainability of the system in an era of increasing media dependency, based on mediamorphosis phenomenon wrought on the contemporary society due to revolution in the media landscape.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Media System Dependency Theory

Dependency theory explicates sociological role of the mass media by explaining the long term effects of media on the audiences and a society (Baran & Davis, 2012; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). According to Miller (2005), media dependency theory is a complicated structure where the media, the individuals, their interpersonal environment as well as their social environment have dependency relationship with each other. Elaborating media dependency, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) submit that a relationship where the fulfilment of needs of one party is shouldered upon the resources of another party can be regarded as dependency (cited in Miller, 2005).

Baran and Davis (2012, pp. 288-299) provide apt conceptualisation of the main thesis of MSD theory, saying that “the more a person depend on having his or her needs met by media use, the more important will be the role that media play in the person’s life, and therefore the more influence those media will have on that person”. MSD theory also explains the concept of dependency relationship by identifying some conditions and consequences attached to the relationship. Perry (1996) cited in (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009, p. 129) notes that “as society increases in complexity, media performs a greater number of functions and people tend to become more dependent upon them”.

MSD theory holds that the increasing roles of media in gratifying individuals’ needs raise the centrality, and subsequently the influence, of the media in individuals’ lived experiences (Miller, 2005; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). The key focus of MSD theory is that people will find the media more influential in their lives proportionate to their degree of dependency. Dependency on the media occurs because of increasing complexity of the post-industrial society. Media dependency increases during period of turmoil and increased need for orientation such as in crises, conflicts, electioneering period, among others. During these conditions, therefore, members of the public turn to the media to help resolve the uncertainty surrounding catastrophic and uncertain events. The arrival of new media, propelled by advance in information and communication technology as well as internetization of the society, has opened a new trend in exploration of various forms of audience dependency among original and subsequent scholars of MSD theory (Baran & Davis, 2012).

2.2 New Media Dependency

The Internet opened a new platform in media ecology, having extensions such as “mobile technology and software/websites that instantaneously connect individuals” (Jebrin et al., 2013, p. 22). The new

medium establishes numerous choices of information rising as the eminent apparatus in building a contemporary state, shaping human attitudes and behaviour beyond local and national level (DeFleur, 2010). Most importantly, the new media environment honours synchronous communication exchange due to the inherent interactive properties which increase the patterns of engagement among the citizens. According to *Encyclopedia of Communication and Information* (2002), the introduction of computer-based interactive media, which includes the Internet, has radicalised the relationship between democracy and the media via facilitation of incomparably fast and low-cost information to the citizens.

New media and Web 2.0 are important “information system” used in making sense of happenings in today’s world (Lenharth & Maddern, 2005) because of their flexibility, portability, interactivity and hypertextual characteristics, which allow horizontal communication and facilitate ease in mobilization of citizens (Mustapha & Mustapha, 2017). Onomo (2012) recognised these abilities by opining that social networking sites have become pervasive platforms for the exchange of information helping individuals to reach a heterogeneous large audience in ways that were hitherto unfathomable. The awesome communicative power of the new media platforms, perhaps, explains audience dependency on them to achieve instrumental and ritualistic gratifications.

Dependency on new media, according to Narasimhamurthy (2014), foretells different behaviors on the part of the citizens which include selective exposure in online participation of information exchange. In this scholar’s view, dependency on new media has a great ability to enable citizens learn cultural production through diverse ways and processes which reduces geographical, temporal, informational and relational constraints that characterised the prior media ecology. The popularity of Social Network Sites (SNSs) among contemporary political actors signals contemporary dependency on the new media as political communication infrastructure and resources. Social network sites (SNSs), an extension of new media, have received enormous attention in recent times due in part to availability of new structure that counters the old-fashioned patterns of information production and consumption (Jung & Moro 2012; Ha, Yoon & Zhang, 2013). The capability of new media to facilitate learning of culture through creation of community of interest groups has led to their incorporation into the political communication calculus (Narasimhamurthy, 2014; Mustapha, Gbonegun & Mustapha, 2016).

2.3 Media Use and Satisfaction with Democracy

According to Whitehead (2002), democratisation is a participatory political process involving citizens in a long-term and dynamic ways towards achieving political progress. Being a consensus-based process and state, democracy is also a communicative endeavour, with information diffusion serving as its main lubricant (Mustapha, 2008; Mustapha et al., 2014). Hence, the mass media function as critical stakeholders in facilitation and nurturing of democratic ethos, even when their hitherto awesome power was short-circuited by commercialisation and liberalisation of the media industry with attendant political economy consequences (Bagdikian, 1997; Croteau & Hoynes, 2002; Herman & Chomsky, 2002). The absence of alternative platform that rivals media information dissemination power, however, still makes vast majority of the mass audience to depend on the institution to fathom going-ons in the society.

With the new media landscape that now accommodate on-the-go connection to the societal information grid, the new and social media have become additional avenues for instantiating audience media dependency (Ha, Yoon & Zhang, 2013). The incapacity of the traditional media to promote unadulterated democratic causes gave way for the internet and the new media to become the latest and most adopted structure to sustain political activities (McNair 2003; Mustapha & Mustapha 2017). Due to their information democratising quality and ability to stimulate audience activism, by turning them to information producers and consumers (prosumers), the new media have gained enviable democratic credence thus redefining media-politic relations. While recognising the democratic potency of the new media, scholars are also of the opinion that the legacy/mainstream media still remain important democratic resources (Jung & Moro, 2012; Mustapha & Mustapha, 2017). Hence, the legacy and the novel media as respectively represented by the mainstream media and the Internet-enabled/Web-propelled media are of great importance to democratic processes and societies.

While the media have been identified as being critical to democracy, little, if any, attention has been accorded their roles in satisfaction with democracy studies compared to other socio-political institutions. Previous studies on satisfaction with democracy, have, for example, explored the role of institutions such as rule of law, well-functioning regulation, low corruption, and other institutions that improve resource allocation (Wanger, Schneider & Halla, 2009); representativeness and perceived accountability (Aarts & Thomassen, 2008); party policy choices and parties character-valence (Linde & Ekman, 2003; Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2009); economic growth and respect for rule of law (Gulbrandtsen & Skaaning, 2010); citizens' evaluation of public administration, political trust and human development (Ariely, 2013) and collective action problem (Halla, Scheneider & Wanger, 2008), among other.

The literature above addressed satisfaction with democracy from politics and public affairs perspective with minimal consideration of other key variables that contribute to establishment and consolidation of democratic values, particularly from fledging democratic climes. This reality leaves a gap in the literature. Being the mediator in the relationship between the citizens and political public sphere, therefore, the media system remains a critical variable that contribute to citizens' perceived satisfaction with democracy. This uncharted realm of democratic satisfaction research, from mediacentric perspective, becomes timely given increasing mediatisation of politics and development of virtual political activism that are being reinforced by revolutionary communication apparatuses of the contemporary society.

Hypotheses

H1: Citizens differ in their use of mainstream media and the new/social media for political information.

H2: The new media enhances satisfaction with democracy than the mainstream media.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a cross sectional survey method and gathered data from the students of Faculty of Communications and Information Sciences, University of Ilorin which has a population of 1627 and students of College of Humanities, Al-Hikmah University which has a population of 904. Based on Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table for selecting sample size, 335 students were proportionately chosen from the total population 2531. Using systematic sampling technique, the study collected data on respondents' demographic variables, pattern of media use based on admixture of interval and categorical levels of measurement. Constructs such as mainstream media dependency for political information, new/social media dependency for political information and satisfaction with democracy were measured using 10 item each on a five-point Likert scale. Data collected were thus analysed using IBM-SPSS version 21.0.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondents' Demographic Profile

The age of the respondents in this study ranges between 16 and 40 years ($M=20.39$, $SD=2.93$). When the age was categorized via recoding mechanism, those below the age of 20 constitute the highest class with 58.5%. The male (54.5%) in this study are slightly more than the female while the Muslims (51.4%) have a minimal dominance over the Christians. This demographic metrics mirror the demographic profile of the population from which the sample was chosen.

4.2 Media Use

Respondents in this study reported using various media platforms concurrently, albeit with differential level of usage. Overall, internet/social media (97.9%) are the most utilised media among the respondents. This was followed by television (75.2%), radio (61.5%) and newspaper (56.1%), being the least used medium.

In terms of time spent on the media, respondents claimed that they read newspapers for three days in a week on the average ($M=3.46$, $SD=2.15$) and spent most of their daily media consumption hours on the internet and social media ($M=6.24$, $SD=2.98$). They also claimed they watched television ($M=2.22$, $SD=2.09$) and spent the least daily hour on the radio ($M=1.13$, $SD=1.46$). These results correspond to youths' media use habits found by Mustapha and Mustapha (2017) and Mustapha, Gbonegun and Mustapha (2016).

4.3 Mainstream Media Dependency

Table 1 presents the results of respondents' dependency on the mainstream media for political information. On the average, respondents slightly agreed to depending on the mainstream media for political information ($M=3.38$, $SD=1.02$). Explicitly, they agreed that they depend on mainstream media to broaden their political knowledge ($M=3.55$, $SD=0.97$); use mainstream media for clarification when confronted with conflicting political information ($M=3.54$, $SD=0.98$) and that mainstream media are very useful for political information than the new/social media ($M=3.27$, $SD=1.09$). However, they slightly agreed that without mainstream media, they would know nothing about politics ($M=2.92$, $SD=1.16$).

Table 1: Mainstream Media Dependency for Political Information

Variable	N	Min	Max	M	SD
I rely on mainstream media for political information	335	1	5	3.52	1.02
I rely on mainstream media to update my political knowledge	335	1	5	3.46	0.99
Without mainstream media, I would know nothing about politics	335	1	5	2.92	1.16
When confronted with conflicting political information, I use mainstream media for clarification	335	1	5	3.54	0.98
I depend on mainstream media to broaden my political knowledge	335	1	5	3.55	0.97
Mainstream media are very useful for political information than the new/social media	335	1	5	3.27	1.09
Mainstream media delivers in-depth political information	335	1	5	3.44	0.95
Total				3.38	1.02

Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

4.4 New/Social Media Dependency

The result of dependency on new media for political information is presented in Table 2. Generally, respondents agreed that they depend on new/social media for political information ($M=3.58$, $SD=0.93$). Particularly, they agreed that new/social media deliver instantaneous political information ($M=3.96$, $SD=0.80$) and multi-media political content ($M=3.90$, $SD=0.731$). They also slightly agreed

that new and social media offer low cost information than the mainstream ($M=2.97$, $SD=1.03$) and that they would know nothing about politics without new and social media ($M=2.98$, $SD=1.21$).

Table 2: New/Social Media Dependency for Political Information

Variable	N	Min	Max	M	SD
New and social media delivers instantaneous political information	335	1	5	3.96	0.80
New and social media delivers interactive political information	335	1	5	3.78	0.86
New and social media delivers multi-media political content	335	1	5	3.90	0.73
New and social media delivers in-depth political information	335	1	5	3.49	0.99
I use new and social media to expand my political knowledge	335	1	5	3.79	0.91
New and social media are very useful for political information than the mainstream media	335	1	5	3.36	0.93
New and social media offer low cost information than the mainstream media	335	1	5	2.97	1.03
When confronted with conflicting political information, I use new and social media for clarification	335	1	5	3.74	0.89
Without new and social media, I would know nothing about politics	335	1	5	2.98	1.21
I rely more on new and social media for political information	335	1	5	3.67	0.92
Total				3.58	0.93

Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

4.5 Media and Satisfaction with Democracy

Table 3 presents a description of respondents' perceived satisfaction with democracy based on media performance and content. Overall, respondents slightly agreed that media content offers satisfaction with democracy ($M=3.11$, $SD=0.961$). Specifically, they agreed that the media assist and support political institutions ($M=3.69$, $SD=0.81$). They also concur that democracy contributes to freedom of the press, expression and information ($M=3.44$, $SD=1.02$) and that political information on the media enhances peace and tranquillity ($M=2.94$, $SD=0.97$), but slightly agreed that are aggregately that they are satisfied with democracy ($M=2.51$, $SD=1.05$).

Table 3: Media-based Perceived Satisfaction with Democracy

Variable	N	Min	Max	M	SD
The media disseminates political news that are accurate and transparent	335	1	5	3.09	0.94
The political programmes and information on the media say the truth about happenings in the country	335	1	5	2.95	1.05
The political contents on the media promotes democracy	335	1	5	3.11	0.92
The political information disseminated on the media enhance peace and tranquility in the country	335	1	5	2.94	0.97
Media facilitates political inclusiveness	334	1	5	3.31	0.92
I am satisfied with media democratic roles	335	1	5	2.97	0.97
Democracy contributes to freedom of the press, expression and information	335	1	5	3.44	1.02
Media assist and support political institutions	335	1	5	3.69	0.82
On the whole, I am satisfied with democracy	335	1	5	2.51	1.05
Total				3.11	0.96

Scale: 1=Very Dissatisfied, 2=Dissatisfied, 3=A Little Satisfied, 4=Satisfied, 5=Very Satisfied

Test of the Hypotheses

Table 4 presents the result of the test of hypothesis one, which states that *there are differences in the use of mainstream and new/social media for political information*. To test this hypothesis, a paired-sample t-test was conducted. The result shows that there is a significant difference in the use of mainstream media and new/social media for political information ($t=-5.143$, $df=334$, $p=.001$). Respondents agreed to depending on the new/social media ($M=3.58$, $SD=0.51$) for political information than the mainstream media ($M=3.38$, $SD=0.67$). This result correlates with the findings of Mustapha & Mustapha (2017) that in terms of the usage of mainstream media and new/social media for political engagement among youths, the new/social media proved to be the most used, supporting the notion that new media are powerful political and democratic resources.

Table 4: Differences in Mainstream and New Media Dependency for Political Information

Media Use	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Mainstream media	335	3.38	0.67	-5.143	334	.001
New/Social media	335	3.58	0.51			

Table 5 presents the result of the test hypothesis two, which states that *the mainstream media enhances satisfaction with democracy than the new/social media*. To test this hypothesis, linear regression was conducted. The result shows that both mainstream and new/social media use for political information contribute 15.2% variance in satisfaction with democracy ($R^2=0.152$, $p=.001$). Mainstream media political information ($\beta=.234$, $p=.000$) than the new/social media ($\beta=.195$, $p=.001$).

This result correlates with the findings of a number of scholars who believe that mainstream media maintain an imperial power over the dissemination of cultural and political information (Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Lin, 2001). Similarly Ceron & Memoli (2016) discovered that mainstream media have positive effects on satisfaction with democracy than Internet usage.

Table 5: Predicting the Effects of Media Dependency on satisfaction with democracy

Model	Beta	SE	t	p
Constant	1.624	.212	7.66	.000
Mainstream Media	.234	.042	5.51	.000
New/Social Media	.195	.056	3.45	.001

$F_{(2,334)}=29.59$, $R^2=0.152$, $p=.001$

Dependent variable: Satisfaction with Democracy

5. Discussion

Explore in this study is the notion that the media system, being a key democratic resource, contributes to cognition and appreciation of the entire gamut of democratic process. As the political public sphere, where political ideas are tested and contested, the media have been found to function in the democratic realm of information dissemination, education, and critical analysis with a view to imbue the citizens with commensurate political socialisation and participatory interest. Premised on the notion that the role that the mass media play in political socialisation is fundamental to citizens' political enculturation and establishment of good governance, this study explore perceived contributions of the institution to satisfaction with democracy.

Based on the assumption that the political public sphere is vast, diverse and beyond direct acquaintance by substantial majority of citizens, this study explicates the contributions of various forms of media to citizens' satisfaction with democracy from Media System Dependency theoretical lens. Included in the exploration are differential effects of media forms, based on the (r)evolutionary nature of the media ecology. In other words, the study explore the citizens' satisfaction with democracy from the predictive impacts of the mainstream as well as the new and social media for political information and enculturation.

Findings from this study reveal acknowledgement of the media system as a key democratic institution connecting key political actors together thus facilitating political socialisation, enculturation and mobilisation, which serve as antecedents to formation of political interest, political mobilisation and political participation. Significantly, the study confirms the established belief about shifting media use, particularly for politics and public affairs' issue orientation that skews in the favour of novel contemporary media exemplified by the social media. Also revealed is the supplementary relations between the Fourth Estate- mainstream media- and the emerging Fifth Estate- new and social media. It is also discovered that dependency on the media predicts modest but significant variance in satisfaction with democracy.

Additionally, it was discovered that the media system contributes significantly to people's perceived satisfaction with democracy, particularly with reference to media's role in supporting political institutions, facilitating political inclusiveness, aiding citizens' expressiveness, information dissemination and promotion of democracy in general. While both the mainstream media and the new media contribute to citizens' perceived satisfaction with democracy, mainstream media were found to predict more variance in perceived satisfaction with democracy.

6. Conclusion

From the earliest century to the modern world, the media system has been shouldered with the responsibility of providing societal orientation to the citizens via reportage of issues needed in taking informed political and economic decisions. Prior the contemporary information revolution that offered a plethora of interactive and ubiquitous media platforms, the mainstream media have functioned as political public sphere, educating and mobilising citizens on the best political options and courses. Hence, the media system serves important political role and remains an important political actor needed to be considered in political and democratic discourses, including exploration of citizens' satisfaction with democracy. This study explores the gap in the literature of satisfaction with democracy created by the absence of a key political actor in the established field- the media. Hence, the contribution of media use to satisfaction with democracy is documented in this research. The impetus for this study emerged from the notion that, the mass media, like other democratic institutions, contribute to internalisation of democratic values, ideology and norms, and thus deserve to be considered when indexing satisfaction with democracy in the society.

Additionally, the study becomes imperative giving the dissensus of viewpoints on how changing media landscape alters the contours of media-politics relations such that the new and social media are considered more democratic than their precursors, the mainstream media. Although, the study documents significant contributions of media to citizens' satisfaction with democracy, it suffers from some theoretical, methodological and analytical inadequacies that future research should endeavour to crystallise. Firstly, while the study utilised the media system dependency theory little constructs from the theory were tested. Future studies could explore MSDT constructs such as media trust, media reliance, and media dependency, among others. Secondly, the study is limited by dearth of literature in satisfaction with democracy from mediacentric perspective. Most of studies in satisfaction with democracy are rooted in political science and sociology. Hence, scholars need to further explicate the tangential role of media in all aspect of democratic and political studies. Methodologically, the study utilised cross-sectional survey design and method, which is limiting in an exploratory study of this nature. Subsequent exploration could factor in qualitative and/or mixed method design, which could help build measures for future replicating quantitative studies. Longitudinal design could also provide insight into changing perceptions of the role of media in democracy within election and in the inter-election years. In addition, study of this nature requires intensive, extensive and diverse sample in order to enjoy robust external validity. Therefore, future endeavour should utilise multi-contextual locales and diversified sample. Despite the aforementioned limitations, the study explicates the importance of considering the mass media as critical and fundamental democratic resources in exploration of citizens' satisfaction with democracy.

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