

Social Media Diffusion And Implications For Opinion Leadership In Northcentral Nigeria

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Abstract : The classical notion of opinion leadership presupposes that the media is at the center of an effective and successful opinion leadership. Under this idea, an opinion leader is an active media user who consumes, understands, digests and interprets the messages for the understanding and acceptance/adoption by lower-end media users – whose access and understanding of media content are supposedly low. Because of their unique access to and presumed understanding of media functions and their content, opinion leaders are typically esteemed by those who look forward to and accept their opinions. Lazarsfeld and Katz's two-step flow of communication theory is the basis of opinion leadership – propelled by limited access to the media. With the emergence and spread of social media and its unlimited access by all and sundry, however, the study interrogates the relevance and application of opinion leaders and, by implication, the two-step flow communication theory in Nigeria's Northcentral region. It seeks to determine whether opinion leaders still exist in the picture and if they still exert considerable influence, especially in matters of political conversations and decision-making among the citizens of this area. It further explores whether the diffusion of social media is a reality and how the 'low-end' media users react to the new-found freedom of access to media, and how they are using it to inform their decisions on important matters as well as examines if they are still glued to their opinion leaders. This study explores the empirical dimensions of the two-step flow hypothesis in relation to the activities of social media to determine if a change has occurred and in what direction, using mixed methods of Survey and in-depth interviews. Our understanding and belief in some theoretical assumptions may be enhanced or challenged by the study outcome.

Keywords : Opinion Leadership, Active Media User, Two-Step-Flow, Social media, Northcentral Nigeria

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