

SOCIAL MEDIA AND BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES OF ELECTORATES DURING 2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The use of social media to rally support during electioneering process is no longer in doubt, to advance the conversation and mobilize political supports. Social media has become a strong political tool for campaigning strategists. Nigerian politicians indeed, have taken their campaigns to the social networking sites and other online platforms while the electorates also have embraced the platform as a vehicle of activities for political engagement, within the election period, political aspirants were disposing of all means to gear up their support based beyond traditional forms of media, following the realization that electioneering process requires more than just handshake and physical persuasion. The study was anchored on the theoretical framework of technological determinism, it explains new media technologies in communication that it would soon determine social changes, turning the world into a global village. Also, grounded on the Agenda-setting theory of the mass media, the theory opined that the media set agenda for the public to follow. The study adopted quantitative research approach, surveyed 150 respondents purposively drawn from Students of Mass Communication Department, Interlink Polytechnic, Ijebu-Jesa, Osun State, and used the questionnaire as instrument of data collection. The percentage method was also used to analyse data. Findings of the study show that usage of social media for electioneering greatly influenced the electorates behavior towards voting pattern for their preferred candidates during 2015 general election. Also, it revealed that, the two leading political parties in Nigeria did use the social media much in the electioneering campaigns of the 2015 elections, and the candidates of the two leading political parties utilised the social media and other platforms to engage the electorates more than traditional media. Lastly the activities they disseminated in the social media bordered mainly on announcement of programmes, personalities of the party flag bearers and their manifestoes. The researcher recommended more proactive and continual use of the social media platforms by the Political Aspirants, leading political parties and all registered parties in Nigeria.

Keywords: Electorates, Social Media, Electioneering. Campaigns, Aspirants

1. INTRODUCTION

Before the advent of social media, the mass media have been used as veritable tools for information dissemination during elections. They have been used to propagate

ideas often known as propaganda and as instrument of political mobilization. The information projected by the different media of mass communication alongside other societal factors influence voter's choice(s) during electioneering. Mass media in the context of this work are understood as constituting social institution created to perform, as required by the society, identifiable task of information, interpretation, education and entertainment. In performing these roles, they employ technologies of communication such as radio, television, internet, newspaper and magazine to communicate message to a large, heterogeneous, anonymous, and scattered audience. Furthermore, the media (print and electronics) in Nigeria especially have always been strong tools of sensitization and mobilization of people towards democracy even in the dark days of brutal military dictatorship (Ajayi, 2007). However, their reach was limited by such factors as government intimidation and harassments, logistics, limited resources and their elitist ownership and control. But with the widening of communication media space through improved technology, information dissemination and sensitization of people now have a widespread, immediacy and more diligent follow up of events. This is as a result of their easy accessibility and availability irrespective of social status. Even with the cheapest mobile phones one can still access some social media platforms at information reasonable cost for information, education and entertainment. Fundamentally, the media exists as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, social enlightenment and mobilization, these functions set the media apart as an important factor in the relationship between the government and the governed, thereby making them indispensable for good governance, the deepening of democracy, societal growth and development generally. (Olujide, Adeyemi & Gbadeyan, 2010).

However, the evolution of social media is a major factor in the 21st century that has change the nomenclature in the interaction, communication and sharing of information between people throughout the world. Social media most often refers to as activities that integrate technology, telecommunication and social interactions, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. This interaction and the manner in which information is presented, depends on the varied perspectives and building of shared meaning among communities, as people share their stories and experience (Wattal *et al.* 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Some of the popular and widely used social networking sites include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Blogs, Myspace, LinkedIn, Whatsapp among others.

In addition, internet-based communication has equally started to gain importance in Nigeria particularly and Africa in general. Both mobile phones and the internet provide exciting new opportunities for one-to-one as well as one-to-many communication, the much reported rapid spread of mobile connectivity and services, as well as different forms of public and share internet access like social media have allowed a growing number of people who may not have access to a computer or a fixed connection to take part in " the global conversation. (Andre Michel, 2010). Thus, the use of social media in politics has continued to grow in many parts of Africa including Nigeria since the 21st century.

For instance, 2011 general election marked a significant milestone in the use of social media for political communication in Nigeria. Mosreso, 2015 witnessed a massive use of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Blogs in the general

election in Nigeria. Due to their participatory, interactive, and cost-effective nature, social media have become veritable and significant instruments for political campaign engagement and mobilization among others. Thus, the place of social media in rallying political support is no longer in doubt. Eledan (2011) stated that; politics is not a spectator sport and now people have more and easier ways to get involved, Nigeria voters have the opportunity to participate and potentially help design a new conversation at the political level, something that has not been possible for years in the political landscape in Nigeria.

The above assertion acknowledges a new media platform for politics in Nigeria. In the past, the politicking process has been dominated by the use of conventional mass media, regardless of the obvious disadvantage of providing one-way non-interactive message to a large audience. However, the latest resort to the use of “old” and new media for political communication has added impetus to the electorate/candidate relationships due to the interactive nature of the new media. Just as social media has opened a dialogue between business and consumers, its value is apparent to those in political office, whose work and professional survival hinges on the needs and perception of their constituents. As it stands, the social web according to Farrell and Drezner (2008) is ripe with opportunities for candidates and office holders alike to connect with voters, foster transparency, and even spar with opponents in the same ways they have been in the conventional media for hundreds of years. As a results, the potentials of social media appear to be most promising in political context as they can be an enabler for more participation and democracy. According to Creighton (2005), Public participation is the process by which public concern, needs and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision-making. E-participation focuses not only on this process but also on using the internet as an additional or exclusive instrument to create dialogs between the elected and the electorates.

Social media have enhanced the use of various platform for political intention to be known to the targeted audience, in creating and disseminating political messages in the recent times in Nigeria. The 2015 general elections held in April was characterized by an appreciable use of the new media especially the use of facebook for political advertisement and election campaigns. The adoption of former president Goodluck Jonathan the use of Facebook in his presidential election decided campaign and actually became the first Nigeria to adopt such strategy that has increasingly made an inroad into our electoral process and in overall political environment. Whereas there are some arguable positions that application of social media has no influence on electorates decision on whom to vote for neither does it make impact on the electioneering processes.

It is on this trend, this study investigated on how the use of social media has influence the behvaioural changes of the electorates towards 2015 general election.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were posed for investigation;

1. Does the social media influence electorates choice of political party candidates during 2015 general election in Nigeria?
2. Was the popularity of presidential candidates during the 2015 presidential election influence by their social media usage?

3. Does social media influence behavioural changes of electorates during 2015 presidential election in Nigeria?
4. How does political campaign messages on social/traditional media influence Nigerian electorates' choice of votes?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper was anchored on the Agenda-setting theory of mass communication, which could be traced back to Walter Lippman (1922), cited in Edegoh and Asemah (2014), who suggested that the media were responsible for the pictures in our heads. Cohen (1963), cited in Edegoh and Asemah (2014) further articulated the notion of agenda-setting role of the mass media when he argued that the media may not always be successful in telling people what to think, but they are successful in telling what to think about. The work of Lang and Lang (1966), cited in Asemah (2011), contributed in reinforcing this notion by arguing that the mass media pay attention to certain issues: they are constantly presenting objectives, suggesting what individuals should think and have feeling about. Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw note in their writing in 1972 that in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality (Asemah, 2011; Edegoh and Asemah, 2014).

The Agenda-setting theory of the mass media holds that the media set agenda for the public to follow. According to the theory, the media dictate what issues (agenda) that should be considered most important by the society. Agenda-setting theory believes that the media predetermines what issues the audience should think about (Edegoh, Ezebuonyi and Asemah, 2013).

This theory is relevant to the study at hand in that the mass media (generally) and the social media (specifically) set political agenda, particularly during electioneering campaign period, which voters are bound to follow. Political parties in Nigeria (in general) and the two frontline political parties (PDP and APC) could harness the potentials of the social media to determine political issues that voters should think about.

The study is also grounded on the Technological determinism Theory. The concept, technological determinism theory explains the setting of this study. The theory which was propounded by Marshall McLuhan (1964), a Canadian Communication Scholar, who observed new media technologies in communication would soon determine social changes, turning the world into a global village. He believes socio-political, economic and cultural changes are inevitably based on development and diffusion of technology. McLuhan argued technology undoubtedly causes specific changes on how people think, how society is structured and the form of culture created. This theory portends that, given the emergence of internet and its adoption and relevance in mobilizing people for political activities, there is bound to be an impact on the electoral process and overall political environment. Communication is the basic tenet of technological determinism theory. The theory seeks to explain social and historical phenomena in terms of the principal determining factor (Technology). The theory states that communication technologies in general are the prime causes of changes in society.

Reinforcing this position, Chandler (1995) affirms that technological determinists interpret technology in general and communication technologies in particular as the basis of society in the past, present and even the future. However, as far as communication is concerned, we are increasingly dealing with a world without frontiers. The amazing technological revolution, which McLuhan was so fascinated about, has not stood still, same goes to the people that handle the process and what they do (Oliver, 2011). According to Baran (2004:22), technological determinism is the thinking in some quarters that it is machine and their development that drive historical, economic political and cultural changes. There is however, a perspective to technological determinism, which sees technology as more neutral and claim the way people use it is what gives it significance. This perspective that accepts technology as one of the many factors that shape historical, economic, political and cultural changes is ultimately determined by how much power it is given by the people and cultures that use it (Baran, 2004). These two perspectives of technological determinism pose an important question: are we more or less powerless in the wake of technological advances like internet? If we are at the mercy of technology as the former perspective argues, the culture that surrounds us will not be of our making, and the best we can hope to do is to make our way reasonably well in a world outside our own control. But if these technological advances are indeed neutral and their power resides in how we choose to use them as maintained by the latter perspective, we can utilize them responsibly and thoughtfully to construct and maintain whatever culture we want. In relation to this study therefore, the theory presupposes that since there are other countervailing factors that restrain and shape the effect or influence of new media, the latter perspective of this theory is more appropriate in this study.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Social Media

Social media is the collective of online communication channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, micro blogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, and wikis are among the different types of social media. Social media can be defined as a collection of internet-based applications that expand the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that permit the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social networking sites are the interface between people and social media, and for many the "Internet" is synonymous with social networking sites (Hinton & Hjorth, 2013). One of the most interesting characteristics of social media is represented by the term "user-generated content", which refers to different forms of media content, publicly available and created by end users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

4.1 A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A POLITICAL PLATFORM IN NIGERIA

The emergence of social media has changed the way in which political communication takes place in most countries of the world, including Nigeria. Political institutions such as politicians, political parties, foundations, institutions, and political think tanks are using social media, Facebook and Twitter, as a new way of communicating with

voters. Individuals and politicians alike are able to voice their opinions, engage with their network, and connect with other likeminded individuals (Kearney, 2013).

However, the active participation of social media users has been documented as an increasingly important element in political communication, especially during political elections (Eli & Arne, 2015). Users are able to connect directly to politicians and campaigns and engage in political activities in new ways. By simply pressing the like button on Facebook or by following someone on Twitter, users have the ability to connect in new ways. Thus, the option for users to share, like, or retweet political messages instantaneously has opened up a new avenue for politicians to reach out to voters. Politicians in their bid to use social media for elections were mindful of the developments and the new vista of consciousness in the practice of citizen journalism in Nigeria. In the last decade, the rise of Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Blogs and other social networking sites has witnessed citizen journalists armed with video camera and beginning to show up everywhere. Following this, politicians wanted to check the negative publicity that may come from any of the networks by reaching out to sites and blogs that can affect their prospects (Eledan, 2011). The former Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan joined the fray when at the 26th convocation ceremony of the University of Port Harcourt, he promised that he would open a Facebook Page to interact with millions of Nigerians and also said: As I said on that day, there is an unchangeable power of good in the Nigerian nation and her youth and through this medium. I ... want Nigerians to give me the privilege of relating with them without the trappings of office.

To achieve this dream of reaching out without the bureaucracies associated with his office, he set up the web page (www.goodluckjonathanfor2011.com) that is similar to Facebook on September 15, 2010 and thereafter declared his interest to contest for the number one person in the country. President Jonathan, apparently aware of the tremendous impact of social networking sites, chose to bid his electoral fortune through digital interface. The former Governor of Lagos State, Raji Fashola was also one of the social media savvies. His Facebook page draws a lot of accolades on his performances, and points out things Lagosians want to see or change. Other candidates like Nuhu Ribadu of ACN and some Governors joined the bandwagon with varying degrees of impact. Whereas dependence on the traditional media for political campaigns will certainly be noticeable and cannot be completely discarded, modern trends of the New Media seem to be eroding the gains of the traditional media. As the new media gradually reshapes the advance phase of political strategists and marketing experts are quick to wonder whether newspapers, TV, Radio and other traditional media forms still command the degree of relevance that made them indispensable in the years past for developing credible form of political communication. Nigeria with a population put at over 150 million and about 60 million active young voters, near 43 million internet users and approaching 80 million mobile connections, political campaign managers are sure to have tested their abilities in finding new media methods to get their political message out faster, easier, cheaper and stronger (Eledan, 2011). The new media is useful not only for mobilizing voters, but also in integrating all other facets of campaigns, including rally, organizing and delivering campaign messages to potential voters on a consistent basis, at relatively low or no cost to them. However, Facebook, Twitter and other social networks

reinforce political messages and build online and offline support that will help drive interesting debates about any politicians and the party. The new media according to Flew (2008) was also to a large extent useful to the electoral umpire - INEC, numerous international and local observers, the traditional media operators and ordinary people who monitored the election and in checking electoral fraud. It also provides easy access to needed evidence by the Tribunals. The participatory nature of social media encourages contributions from everybody, provides opportunity for feedback from every interested person, it blurs the line between the media and the audience, changing the shape from MEDIA to "WEDIA" (p.4).

More so, the use of social media in 2011 elections apart from its merits also witnessed varying degrees of abuses ranging from outright deception to ignoring of people's questions on both Facebook and Twitter by the candidates and their representatives. The unlimited freedom the social media permits led to flagrant abuses in form of hate messages and unethical practices. Close to election date, text messages purportedly written by some candidates were flying indiscriminately to people's mobile phones.

4.2 THE CHALLENGES IN THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A POLITICAL PLATFORM IN NIGERIA

In spite of the numerous advantages of social media advantages in fostering politics, democracy and good governance in Nigeria, they equally have their challenges. No doubt, social media platforms can be misused in disseminating unfiltered/unverified information, hate messages and rumours which are inimical to strengthening democracy. The increasing use of social media and other online tools has indeed led to greater privacy, monitoring as well as regulation challenges (Ekwe, *et al*, 2011 as cited in Ajayi & Adesote, 2015). For instance, a viral video of immoral conduct or lurid sex photo can instantly infect a political campaign or career, dooming it to untimely termination. Anonymity of sources makes it difficult for strict regulation, monitoring and prosecution of illicit acts. This makes it a vulnerable instrument for perpetuating fraudulent acts. It also promotes piracy. This is partly because the question of copyright and intellectual property are more complex and difficult to define and even more difficult to regulate online. Similarly, images and sounds can be digitally manipulated, so truth and reality are difficult to ascertain. Social media is addictive in nature, making work/life balance hard to achieve. With the new technologies, users get more than they bargain for because of their information overload and social network overload. Kidafa, Odoemelam and Elechi (2011) observe that "regulating traditional media in the face of issues like obscenity, copyright, right to privacy, was upheaval (sic), but have become more difficult with the emergence of social media". How to effect censorship without being seen as abridging rights and derailing democracy is a dilemma for the politicians and government officials. It is also important to reflect on the ways that ICTs are actually being used to counter democratic processes, because so doing can help develop understanding of the policies that need to be in place to resist such actions. There is increasing understanding that it is not just companies and governments that can use social media for negative purposes, and that individuals and small groups could use it for bullying, digital monsterring, or violent actions, not to talk of fraudulent or criminal activities (419 in local parlance). Another challenge is the issue of relatively low penetration and

access in the country. Writing on penetration of new media in Africa, Osuala in Adibe and Odoemelam (2011) notes that: The diffusion of new technologies in Africa is still at a snail speed such that the gap between the information reached by developed countries and African countries continue to increase everyday..... Africa has 13% of world population but only 2% of the world telephone lines and 1% internet connectivity. Consequently, most African countries have not been able to reap the abundant benefits of the global information revolution in many areas of life.

4.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL OF COMMUNICATION FOR POLITICAL CANDIDATES

Social media offers a variety of avenues through which political candidates can communicate with people. In fact, social media is known to have been used widely by politicians to either create awareness or to make people see them as accessible and credible (Austin, 2008). Over the last 30 years the nature of communication has undergone a substantial change and it is still changing. Email has had a profound effect on the way people keep in touch. Politicians in recent times have used this means to reach out to their audience, creating impressions which they believe would be favourable to them. Using emails, communications are shorter and more frequent than when letters were the norm and response time has greatly diminished. Instant messaging has created another method of interaction, one where the length of messages is shorter and the style of the interaction is more conversational (Goldstein and Freedman, 2002).

Broadcast technologies like Twitter transform these short bursts of communication from one-on-one conversations to little news (or trivia) programs: which we can tune in whenever we want an update or have something to say. Online communication tools also have the potential to increase our awareness of the movements of our professional or social contacts. Twitter, for instance, offers us an update of things people we know happen to be doing at a particular point of time. This phenomenon has been referred as social proprioception by Thompson (2007), named after the physical quality of proprioception that tells a creature where its extremities are by the reception of stimuli produced within the organism. Social proprioception tells us where the nodes of our community are and provides a sense of connectedness to and awareness of others without direct communication. Internet is the third place where people connect with friends, build a sense of togetherness. Increasingly, a computer with an Internet connection is the locus of a range of interactions in a variety of media and a gateway to an array of social spaces for work and play.

Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace and virtual environments like Second Life and World of War craft have become online meeting spaces where users – members, residents, or players – can interact and express themselves. They offer a way to keep in touch with existing communities that users belong to offline, such as social and professional groups. They also make it possible for people who would not normally communicate more than a few times a year to keep in touch – politicians could interact with their teeming supporters on a daily basis, giving their supporters a sense of belonging through the online community itself. Sites like YouTube and Flickr represent another forum for online communication that is centered on sharing, preference, and popular culture. Whether it is as simple as checking back to see what

other comments have been added to yours or as involved as attending a workshop or presentation in a virtual world, the nature of the attraction lies in the connections between people that these online spaces afford.

4.4 THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

The internet platforms that are collectively called social media have created virtual communities by employing communication technology that allows for brief, targeted, and instantaneous messaging. Although social media is tremendously popular and widely used, it is not new to the Internet. With the widespread adoption of personal computers in the mid-1990s, services such as chat rooms, newsgroups, and instant messaging were among the early attractions for users of the World Wide Web (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004). What is new, however, is the attention that has been given to expanding forms of social media – YouTube, Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter – as a means of not only creating virtual communities, but as a way of instantly communicating and moving to action members of these communities. Previously, messages on these sites have been considered trivial by providing a means of either marketing to targeted groups or posting statements describing ordinary personal activities. Social media in the second decade of the 21st century, however, it has evolved to delivering not just frivolity, but serious social and political messages, giving calls to action that have aroused both protest and revolution.

Senator Barack Obama's successful 2008 presidential campaign established social media as an integral part of the campaign toolbox. (Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sander & Welp, 2012). Facebook, YouTube and especially Twitter were used to let Obama supporters know how he felt about important issues. These social network sites have become significant virtual communities in his campaign, being used frequently and giving legitimacy to their influence in the political arena.

4.5 SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTIONEERING CAMPAIGNS

The social media are both accessible and inexpensive to all users, be they, in the case of electioneering campaign, the candidate that will contest in an election or the electorates. This explains why Dhuraj (2013) opines that social media refer to the many relatively inexpensive and widely accessible electronic tools that enable any one to publish and access information, collaborate on a common effort, or build relationships. These platforms provide 24hours access to anyone who owns an account with any of the many social networking sites. The use of social media to scout for votes is much more inexpensive compared with using newspapers or the electronic media of television or radio since the candidate does not need to pay a dime to reach his/her supporters. Social media could also be accessed at anytime and anywhere using all kinds of hand-held devices at the disposal of users of internet such as smart phones. It is also very easy for the candidate to respond to queries from political followers as quickly as possible using social media than any other media. Social media are therefore much more useful to politicians for electioneering campaign purposes in terms of reach, cost, accessibility, convenience, and so forth. However, there is a large body of research-based evidence that social media are particularly suited for reaching young people especially in political communication;

that social media may not be effective in reaching other categories of people in a given national population (Essential Media Poll 2012; Chen and Vromen, 2012).

Chen and Vromen (2012) submit that social media function to facilitate increased access to opinion sharing online, greater demonstration of media selectivity through the reposting of materials online and the democratisation of editorial behaviour through social filtering. In line with this submission, Bruns (2005) asserts that social media platforms such as Twitter have demonstrated to be active spaces for elite-public interaction and “talking back” to sites of power (political, economic, media); others such as Tumblr and Pinterest have shown themselves as valuable places for “gate watching”: the scrutiny and citizen-centric curatorship of media content. Facebook and others have been very important sites for micro-activism (Marical, 2012, cited in Chen and Vromen, 2012) and the formation of alternative spaces or counter publics for democratic discussion (Dahlberg, 2011). For these reasons and many more, politicians have turned to social media in their quest to reach electorates.

The prominent position which social media is currently occupying among media of electioneering campaigns was a product of the 2008 presidential election of the United States of America in which Barrack Obama took the world by surprise through effective use of social media platforms for his political campaigns. Since then social media took the centre stage in political campaign activities. Ufen (2014) brilliantly identifies the three stages of campaigning and their features that could be discerned from the Western world:

In the West, three stages of campaigning can be discerned, and these have depended—inter alia—on the phase of technological evolution. Initially campaigning was characterised by mass events, rallies, and face-to-face communication among party members and voters. Consultants were not important in comparison with canvassers and other party activities. In the second phase, mass media, especially television, played a decisive role. Large-scale opinion polls were sources of feedback, specialist consultants were gaining prominence, and campaigns were organised nationally by the central party apparatus with party-based salaried professionals. TV debates, press conference, and ‘pseudo-events’ were central to campaigning. During this second, modern stage, catch-all parties trying to mobilise voters across all categories replaced the mass-integration or mass-class parties of stage one. The ties between citizens and parties were weaker in the second stage, and party activities at the grass-roots level lost their previous importance. At the same time, charismatic personalities and the central party apparatus in general became focal points for voter mobilisation. The current, third stage, of campaigning began in the late 1980s and early 1990s and refers to post-modern or ‘American style’ electioneering. In this stage, parties use new communication technologies such as the internet and public relations consultants who base their findings on sophisticated opinion polls and focus-group interviews. Campaigning is much more targeted and business-like. Consultants are quite independent from the traditional party leadership. The so-called electoral-professional parties are said to be the typical organisational outgrowth of these developments.

With the emergence of social media and their revolutionary impact on electioneering campaign and other forms of human communication, the metamorphosis is still on.

However, one thing is clear; the changing nature of the media of political campaign and, indeed all forms of human social communication has greatly improved.

4.6 THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS

The civil society deployed the arsenal of social media effectively to disseminate information during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. According to Elegbede (2015), during the period of campaign, tweetmeets and hangouts were the in-thing within Nigerian online socio-political networks. Hashtags such as #MeetGej, #FeBuhari, #MarchoutJonathan, #WhyiwillvoteGEJ, #MarchforBuhari, #GMB15, #LagosForYou and #IHavedecided were promoted by politicians and their supporters; while #NigeriaDecides, #Nigeria2015, #iPledgeToVote, #MyPVCnow, #GoVote, #VoteNoFight, etc were promoted by civil society groups to increase citizens' awareness and participation (see also Suntai and Targema 2015).

During the voting process, pictures and videos floated on Facebook and Whatsapp accounts of party agents who were caught in the act of buying voters with money and some other grants as well as the issue of underage voting in some states, prompting immediate action by INEC. Similarly, during the collation of results, citizen journalists and the civil society never spared any effort to update the public on the nature of results in the various states across the federation (Oseni 2015).

5. METHODOLOGY

The survey research design method was used to execute the study. The study utilized the instrument of the questionnaire to collect data for the study. In collecting data for the study, primary and secondary sources were used. For the primary data, the questionnaire was used as an instrument to elicit response from the respondent.

The study population is made up of Mass communication Department, students of Interlink Polytechnic, Ijebu Jesa, Osun state. The study considered only students in HND I and II level and this formed the sample frame and it was purposively selected for the study. The decision was influenced by two reasons, the department is communication based and communication- oriented. So students of the department are presumed to be familiar with the tools of communication and the different social networks.

The simple random sampling techniques was used in the administration of questionnaires to respondents. A total of 150 respondents were given copies of the questionnaires to fill across the levels, i.e 50 respondents were selected in each level. The instrument had three sections; while section A with 6 items was designed to obtain respondents' demographic data, section B and C with 26 items was designed to generate data to answer the study's research questions. The percentage method and frequency tables were employed as analytical tools

6. DATA PRESENTATION

Table 1: Sex of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	67	44.7
Female	83	55.3
Total	100	100%

Table 1 on sex of the respondents reveal that 44.7% of the respondents were males and 55.3% were females. The reason for the disparity in the male-female participants' ratio in the study was because a greater number of females have passion for the profession and eager to be a partisan in politics thus, male students are more politically enlightened than the female.

Table 2: Age of respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20 years	45	30%
21 – 30 years	67	44.7%
31 – 40 years	23	15.3%
41 – 50 years	9	6%
51 years and above	6	4%
Total	100	100%

Table 2 on the age characteristics of the participants in the study indicate that 30% were aged below 20years , 44.7% were between 21-30years, 15.3% were within the age bracket 31-40years, 6% indicated that they were within 41 – 50 year' category while 4% were in the 51 years and above" age bracket.

Table 3: Respondents' marital status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	135	90%
Married	15	10%
Total	150	100%

Table 3 shows data obtained to establish the marital status of the participants in the study. The table reveals that 90% of the respondents were single while 10% were married. The participants in the study were therefore, made up of more Male students than Female Students.

Table 4: Respondents' Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Traders	8	5.3%
Civil Servants	17	11.3%
Students	103	68.7%
Self-employed	22	14.7%
Total	150	100%

Data in table below on respondents' occupation show that majority of the participants in the study were students (68.7%), followed by self-employed (14.7%), civil servants (11.3%), the trader (5.3%), while students made up the bulk of participants in the study.

Table 5: Respondents academic qualification

Academic qualification	Frequency	Percentage
WAEC	50	33.3%
OND	100	66.7%
Total	150	100%

Data on academic qualification of the respondents indicate that 33.3% had secondary school, while 66.7% has OND. The majority of respondents had post-secondary school academic

6.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ONE:

Does the social media influence electorates choices of political party Presidential candidates' during 2015 general election in Nigeria?

TABLE 6

ITEMS	YES	%	NO	%	UNDECIDED	%
Was your choice of president Goodluck Jonathan/General Muhamadu Buhari during the 2015 presidential election influenced by the use of social media	92	61.3	36	24	22	14.7
Was your voting pattern during the 2015 presidential election influenced by social media usage	46	30.7	75	50	29	19.3
	Radio	%	Television	%	Facebook/WhatsApp	
Which of the media has influence the electorate decision in voting in 2015 presidential election	67	44.7	44	29.3	39	26

As shown in the table above, 61.3% of the respondents believed that the choice of their presidential candidates was influence by the high extent of usage of social media during the electioneering campaigns of the 2015 general elections and 24% indicated that they were not agreed to that position However, 14.7% were undecided. Also, on the voting pattern of the electorate during the presidential election, 30.7% agreed that electorates were influenced in their voting behaviour, while 50% did not agree, only 19.3 % of the respondents could not ascertain their position. Lastly, it was indicated that 44.7% of the respondents still believe that social media still influence the decision of the electorate during 2015, 29.3 believe electorate decision in voting were still influenced by television and 26% indicated that social media also influenced the electorate voting decision. We could deduce from data in table 9 that the majority of social media users in Anambra State are of the opinion that the candidates of PDP and

APC made more use of the social media for political communication in the electioneering period of the 2015 general elections than their political parties did.

6.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS TWO:

Was the popularity of presidential candidates during the 2015 presidential election influence by their social media usage?

TABLE 7

ITEMS	YES	%	NO	%	UNDECIDED	%
Do you think that the two presidential aspirants were popular because they utilized social media in their political campaign	73	48.7	57	38	20	13.3

Data in table 10 were obtained to determine whether the popularity of presidential candidates during the 2015 presidential election influence by their social media usage. Data indicate that 48.7% of the respondents said “Yes” while 42% disagreed by saying “No”, while 13.3 were undecided. By implication, the majority of respondents indicated that social media influence the popularity of presidential candidates during 2015 presidential election

6.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS THREE:

Does social media influence behavioural changes of electorates during 2015 presidential election in Nigeria?

TABLE 8

ITEMS	YES	%	NO	%	UNDECIDED	%
Does social media platforms mostly used by electorates for political participation	121	80.7	15	10	14	9.7
Does the social media influence behavioural changes of electorate decision in voting in 2015 presidential election	56	37.3	72	48	22	14.7

Data in table 8 were obtained to answer research question three. As shown in the table social media has not really influence behavioural changes of the electorates during 2015 general elections (37.3%), say yes (48%) indicated No and only 14.7% were undecided.

6.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOUR:

How does political campaign messages on social media influence Nigerian electorates’ choice of votes?

TABLE 6

ITEMS	YES	%	NO	%	UNDECIDED	%
Does the message received through social media	52	34.7	77	51.3	21	14

influence your behaviour of a preferred candidate voted for						
Has the understanding of political messages on social media influence your choice of preferred candidates voted for	81	54	54	36	15	10
How many Nigerian youths ever sent/received information through social media	73	48.7	6	4	71	47.3

Research question four was designed to ascertain the level of message received through social media how it has influenced electorate's behaviour of a preferred candidate voted for. As indicated in table 6, the respondents posited that 34.7% says yes while 51.3% did not agreed and 14% were undecided. It could be inferred from data available for research question four that the message received through social media has not really influence behaviour of the electorates of a preferred candidate voted for during 2015 presidential elections.

7. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of study revealed the following;

1. Social media influence electorates choice of political party presidential candidates during presidential election of 2015.
2. Relatively, usage of social media increased the popularity of the presidential candidates during 2015 presidential election.
3. The findings also established that social media did not have a large influence on behavioural changes of electorates' voting pattern.
4. Campaign messages received through social media has not really influence the electorates choice of voting pattern.

8. CONCLUSION

The fact has been established that, social media will continue to integrate people's daily lives and that it is fervently used by electorates, politicians, political parties and people worldwide, and it has played a significant impact on voting behavior of the Nigeria electorates. Overall, the discrepancy in the findings exploring the relationship between social media use and political participation, together with the interesting characteristics of the Nigerian presidential elections of 2015, given the unprecedented extensive use of social media in the political realm of the country, represented the motivation of exploring this topic in depth.

The study found that the conversation on forum allows the electorates to follow the political candidates on Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp actively engage in political discussion by expressing their views and opinion. As some researchers argue that the

reasons why people use media (for news or for entertainment purposes) are very important in explaining political participation, the authors of the paper further proposed, that given social media's interactive nature, the activity levels related to political issues (social media use for political activities) are even more influential. As social media remains a relatively new and unexplored field, there is a need for further research on its implications for the political arena. All things considered, shortly put, the findings of this report show that social media use had a relative impact on Nigerian electorates' political participation, during the presidential elections of 2015, and despite the paper's limitations, the results bring a contribution to existing research in political communication.

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