Social Media Use Pattern and Political Participation in the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria

Chike Emma Onwe,

Abstract
Social media has become the most accessible source of information and its use as platform for civic engagement has continued to grow and expand. Since the Obama experiment in 2008, politicians and political candidates the world over have come to embrace the use of social media for political purpose, especially in mobilizing support and engaging potential voters towards active participation in the political and electoral process. Nigeria as a player in the global arena had the first test of social media use for civic engagement during the 2011 general elections, but it was in 2015 that the countries witness the unleashing of the potentials of the new media in the political environment. This study examines the impact of social media in engendering political engagement between the citizens and the political actors during the 2015 presidential election. The study was premised on the social shaping of technology theoretical construct. The survey method was employed and the questionnaire was administered to respondents drawn from three selected tertiary institutions from Ebonyi State, Cross River State and Lagos State. Findings show that the participants in the study were not only aware but were actively involved in the 2015 electioneering campaigns through the social media. The consequence of the findings is the fact that the social media has enriched our political culture through the introduction of a form of revolution in political engagement. The work recommends that political actors should embrace the social media regime as an eternal phenomenon and find ways of making it part of their campaigns and governance, while regulating authorities should improve on the operational, legal and technical aspects of the social media for it to serve the desired purpose.

Key words: Social media, political participation, 2015 presidential election

Introduction
In a democracy, the authority of the government derives from the consent of the governed (Adibe, Odoemelam and Chibuwe, 2012). Elections are generally accepted as key component of representative democracy through which individuals are chosen to represent a body or community in a larger entity or government is one of the cardinal features of democracy (Nnadozie, 2007). The political stability and development of any political system is a function of the awareness and positive involvement of the citizens in civic and political matters. The confidence of the citizens in the electoral system and their participation in the electoral process are requisites for the enthronement of responsible and democratic leaders. Appadorai (2004) posits that democracy demands from the common man a certain level of ability and character: rational conduct and active participation in the government. The level and pattern of political participation of the citizens determine, to some extent, the success of the political system. It follows that the success of any country’s election depends largely on how transparent and participatory the electoral process is.

In Nigeria, like in most developing nations of the world, where politics is seen by a number of people as a dirty game which must be avoided, largely as a result of some undemocratic tendencies, deception, violence and uncertainties that characterize the political system. But that seems to have changed. Today, election campaigns in Nigeria are increasingly becoming complex and robust. More and more people are getting involved and interested in the process, made possible by some agencies in the society. Media play significant role in the formation of public opinion by reflecting issues of the greatest concern to a particular society. With the increasing role of the media in shaping public opinion, it has become more commercialized on one side and has experienced more limitations and restrictions on the other. However, the emergency and proliferation of social media otherwise known as citizen media has reshaped political education and mobilization in Nigeria. It offers platform for political debates, cyber activism, political campaign and political mobilization. In the present political dispensation, office holders and seekers, politicians now have and manage social media account such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.
The rise of the Internet has democratized the development of web-based communication and participation. Digital platforms have been on the rise in number, strength and presence in the last decade, facilitating the exchange of information. Social media has established new ways of communicating and creating perceptions between persons, businesses and consumers, organizations and their audiences, political office seekers and their electorate, political office holders and their constituents. Online content has transformed from being a source of cold data to become an interactive tool, enabling members of the public to exchange ideas, share knowledge and canvass opinions on various issues, making the consumers of information also creators as well. People with common interests organize online groups and societies in which every participant contribute through such online tools such as social networks, videos, blogs and photo-blogging to establish common ground.

With social media, persuading the public and influencing opinions have become more achievable and, yet, more uncontrollable. With the new social media, the old limiting factors – time, distance, nationality, and ideology – are gone. If public opinion can be influenced, so can societies. Content presented through social media does not have to have approval to be published, which is positive in the sense that it can contravene censorship and control. On the other hand, this freedom creates new issues for the governmental affairs area of public relations. Social media platforms have thus become autonomous participants in building and influencing democratic processes. Everyone can be engaged in the decision-making process.

Prior to the arrival of the new media, the conventional media, namely broadcast (radio, television) and print (newspapers, magazines) held sway. Due to scarcity of space and airtime given by the conventional media to the citizens to have their say in politics and governance, they regulated popular participation in the electoral process. Some critics of the conventional media such as Graber (1976), Fallows (1996), Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) cited in Abubakar (2011) cited in Adibe, Odoemelam and Chibuwe, (2012) argue that voters were left with paid political propaganda containing only meaningless slogans, making them disinterested and cynical about politics. They further argue that there is absence of serious debate in the conventional media that could make people to learn the substance of issues and policies proposals as well as related arguments, insisting that such scenario hardly allow citizens to participate in political discourse effectively.

The most significant feature of the social media is its interactivity. They belong to the new genre of media that focus on social networking, allowing users to express themselves, coordinating interaction with boundary, share personal information, as well as publish their own views on the internet. The ubiquitous nature of these online devices no doubt, has democratizing effects as they offer citizens opportunities for more engagement in the political process, making citizens active consumers and creators of digital messages. Kuhus (2011) in his paper “Life in the Age of Self-Assembling message” cited in Adibe, Odoemelam and Chibuwe (2012) observes that:

> The value of the communication experience has undergone a sea-change; from the need to share it, to the need to share in it. Technology and social media in particular have brought power back to the people; with such technologies, established authorities are now undermined and users are now the experts.

The implication is that people now consume media as wanted and needed rather than allowing media producers to schedule consumption time and content. An individual can now communicate to another individual anywhere from any place at any time. Equally, the social media is also comparatively less expensive than the outrageous political advertisements rates on the older media. The new media is flexible, accessible and affordable. They promote democratisation of media, alter the meaning of geographic distance, and allow for increase in the volume and speed of communication. They are portable due to the mobile nature; they are interactive and open to all (Adibe, Odoemelam and Chibuwe, 2012).

Despite the fact that there is huge debate on ‘digital divide’ among countries of the world; the most vulnerable being the so-called ‘Third world’ countries, there are still advances in the widespread of the internet development in such nations. In addition, Nigeria is a country that is considered as the largest, which is why it is nick-named as ‘Giant of Africa.’ Nigeria therefore, is doing well in terms of media including the social media since their debut. Therefore, like the conventional media, the social media are also used to achieve so many objectives, socially, culturally, and politically.
Nigeria first used this technology for political engagement during the 2011 general elections. The platform gave voice to many Nigerian politicians and electorate alike to make their voice heard in the electoral process. In the last couple of years, Nigeria has witnessed the presence of the new media wherein individuals, organizations and governments have made effort to enhance their online presence. Almost all ministries and agencies have online communication sites. Governmental online sites evolved from being online news services and data providers to becoming sources with active content. In sum, online services created what is now called e-government. With growing social media consumption, e-governments enhanced their communication with the public through blogs, social networks and other online software. Another positive development is the existence of personal blogs by governmental officials, which receive widespread support and penetration. When citizens have issues or concerns, they have a way of making direct contact with those responsible. This kind of direct contact help society in various ways: decreasing corruption through transparency, increasing convenience along with reducing costs or preventing the misuse of public funds. Thus, social media “socialises” the government by changing its image from being something ephemeral to something more concrete and human.

Statement of Research Problem

It has consistently been reported and argued that people who are more exposed to news media have a greater probability of being more engaged in the civic and political affairs of a given people. Okoro and Adibe (2013:13) observe that ‘the use of social media as a formidable force for social engineering and political electioneering has continued to grow. The technology is participatory, interactive and cost-effective. This has made it the medium of the moment as far as political communication and participation are concerned.’ The Obama presidential campaigns in 2008 and 2012 and the Arab Spring in 2011 catalyzed interest in networked digital connectivity and political action, but the data remain far from conclusive. It was in 2011 general elections however that Nigeria first tested the waters of social media use for political engagement.

In their study, Okoro and Adibe (2013) found that social media was used for political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections, noting that vital lessons could be learnt from the social media use experiment during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, among which is that social media offer participatory democracy at its best, the technology promotes transparency and greater accuracy in the political process, they facilitate speedy release of election results, among others.

The media in general face new era of diversification and multi-platform pattern that requires more research as a way of coming out with more ideas on the issues bordering on the influence of emerging trends. The 2015 general elections was expected to witness an improvement on the positive reports on the 2011 experiment regarding the place of the social media in Nigerian political system. It is empirically expedient that a follow up study be done in this area to ascertain the extent to which the social media actually have expanded the Nigerian political space as experienced in the last election. In an era when the public’s time and attention is increasingly directed toward platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and online publication, scholars are seeking to evaluate the still-emerging relationship between social media use and political and civic engagement. The researcher is in strong belief that a study of this nature is necessary to facilitate understanding of the growing importance of the social media in Nigerian political firmament.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to examine the impacts of social media in promoting political engagement with particular reference to the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. The central objective of this study is to examine the extent to which the social media provided opportunity for social media users in some selected institutions in Ebonyi, Cross River and Lagos States to send, receive and share messages relating to politics of issues, parties and candidates in the last general election and the significance of such engagement. Specifically, the study is meant to:

i. Determine the extent to which the social media created political awareness of the campaign issues, parties and candidates in the 2015 Presidential election among the youth population in the Southern part of Nigeria?

ii. Determine the extent to which the social media created platform for political participation in the campaigns for 2015 Presidential election among the youth population in the Southern part of Nigeria?

Research Questions
Two research questions were raised in the study, measuring the level of political awareness and participation in the 2015 Presidential elections in Nigeria by users of the social media.

1. Will users of the social media demonstrate high level of political awareness of the campaign issues, parties and candidates in the 2015 Presidential election?
2. Will users of the social media show evidence of political participation in the social media campaigns in the 2015 Presidential election?

Scope of the Study

As a knowledge and attitude study, the researcher did not veer into the party affiliation of the participants in the exercise nor did it delve into the more complex area of their voting pattern and behaviour. The study was also limited to the youth elements in the campaign process, as represented by the population of students drawn from the three institutions used for the study. It was also not the concern of the study to verify the nature of engagement on the social media or the content of the messages exchanged in the course of their online political interaction.

Review of Relevant Literature

Social Media

The social media phenomenon has attracted many conceptual underpinnings from different disciplines. However, on a general note, social media, according to Suomen Toivo–Think Tank (2012), are new information network and information technology using a form of interactive communication skills, where users produce the content of information and interpersonal relationships are established and maintained in the process. In the same vein, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), defines social media as a group of Internet-based application that are built upon the ideology and technology of web 2.0 and allows the generation and exchange of its content. A typical social media services could be content sharing, web communities, or an Internet forum (Sanastokeskus, 2010).

Okoro and Adibe (2013) observe that the social media are the Internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute, and search for information online. In other words, the social media are interactive web-based media platforms that offer citizens opportunity and place to connect, share opinions, experiences, views, contacts, knowledge, expertise, as well as other things like job and career tips. They belong to a new genre of media that focuses on social networking allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends and share information with greater freedom as well as publish their views on issues on the World Wide Web.

From the works of Eysenbach (2008:10) and Suomen Toivo-Think Tank (2012) at least five major features of the social media are easy to identify. They include social networking and social interaction, participation, the use of different providers (e.g. search engines, blog spaces, etc.), openness and collaboration (between both users and user groups). These features are linked to the six classifications of social media. There classifications are: Social Networks (Facebook, Google+, Myspace, LinkedIn), Media Products Community (Youtube, Flickr, Slideshare), Blog Services (wordpress, blogger, Twitter), Information Community (Wikipedia and Wikispaces), which is also referred to as Collaborative Project (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2012), Virtual Community also called Virtual Game Worlds PLAC (Second Life and World of Warcraft), Link Sharing Services (Digg and Diigo). From the classification above, it can be deduced that the social media is a part of the whole body of activities consisting of Internet communication and online interactions (Suomen Toivo- Think Tank, 2012). As such, on the social media, several things are communicated: songs, videos, tweets, comic, blogs, stories and others. Such information is most commonly communicated on blogs, Twitter, Wiki, Youtube and Facebook. Apart from these websites, these applications are even more accessible to users on smartphones, androids and tablets. The BBM is an example, with BBM channels, where news and other information are created, broadcasted, and even modified. There is also WhatsApp application that facilitates the formulation and dissemination of information. These social media have peculiar uses and many at times, the uses blend together. Users operate Twitter and Facebook for example from Blackberry Messenger application (BBM) and with ease, users can upload videos from smart phones on to Youtube.

Mayfield (2008) describes these media as “online platforms that promote participation, openness, conversation and connectedness.” Nation (2010) sees them as “social instruments of communication which are different from the conventional instruments like newspapers or magazines. They are online content, created by
people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies to disseminate information across geographical boundaries, providing interaction among people (Adibe, Odoemelam and Orji 2012). They support democratisation of knowledge and information, thereby making the people both information producers and consumers. Social media emerged with the advent of the internet and the World Wide Web. They are usually associated with the term “web 2.0” which is used to describe websites that provide opportunity for a user to interact with the sender of a message. Nwabueze (2012) observes that “Web 2.0” refers to the state of the web from 2004 till date; a period when interactive websites emerged as opposed to “web 1.0” which describes the state of the web prior to 2004. Web-based communities, social networking sites video-sharing sites, Wikis, and blogs, are among examples of web 2.0 sites (Allen, Ekwugha & Chukwulete 2011).

All the social media sites and applications have interactive options that facilitate sharing, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of information. Unlike the Television, Radio, and Newspaper, social media users are not passive; rather they are active in the formation and exchange of information (Sweetser and Laricsy, 2008). Information that emanated from a member of a particular forum might become topical and even go viral. In social media, the gate keeping role of traditional media is eliminated. Information that emanated from a member of the forum might become topical and even spread beyond where it was first discussed. Chatora (2012) observes that it is this interactive or collaborative nature of these tools that makes them social.

There are four types of online news producers:

- Professional – institutional actors: These include the BBC, CNN, Al-Jazeera, Channels, AIT, Sahara Reporters, Premium Times and other satellite broadcasters, newspaper websites, national broadcasters;
- Professional – individual actors: these include Linda Ikeji, Andrew Sullivan, Glenn Reynolds;
- Non-professional – institutional actors: including government agencies, the electoral bodies, NGOs, political parties, campaigning and lobby groups; and
- Non-professional-individual: actors or private bloggers, numbering in their millions

**Political Participation**

Okoro and Adibe (2012) write that political involvement implies the awareness and participation of the citizens in the political system. Political participation is citizens’ involvement in the acts, events or activities that influence the selection of and/or the actions taken by political representatives. It refers to the various mechanisms through which the public express their political views and, and/or exercise their influence on the political process (Chatora, 2012) as cited in (Adibe, Odoemelam and Chibuwe, 2012). They further cite Abubakar (2011) as saying that it is the involvement of people, (not necessarily active) in any political process before a collective decision is arrived.

Akamare (2003) concurs that political participation is an aspect of political behaviour and it focuses on the way in which individuals take part in politics. It is a voluntary activity and one may participate directly or indirectly. The various ways by which the people can be involved in the political system include selection or election of political leaders, formulation of policies, community activities and other civic engagements.

People differ in the extent to which they participate in the political system. Falade (2008) identified six levels of political participants and they are:

i. The inactive take no part in any political activity

ii. The voting specialists get eagerly engaged only in voting. They are not concerned about other political activities, except to cast their votes on Election Day.

iii. The parochial participants participate or get involved in politics or political activities only when it affects their personal interest.

iv. The communalist get engaged in voting regularly and also get involved in community affairs but they are not involved in political campaign activities

v. The campaigners are actively involved in political campaign but inactive in other community affairs.

vi. The complete activists are highly involved in all political activities. They participate actively in voting, political campaign, community activities and make contact with public officials.

From the above description, it can be inferred that political participation entails citizens’ engagement in the discourse of socio-political and economic issues and ranges from passive participation to active involvement. It may also include relating to and assessing the capabilities of the office holders and seekers and advocating strategies for good governance for a more prosperous society. Political participation include such
activities like political discourse, political campaigns, voter registration, the actual voting, writing and signing of petitions, attending of civil protests, joining interest groups that engage in lobbying, political advocacy, monitoring and reporting of cases of violation of the electoral process such as frauds, rigging, intimidation, violence, monetary inducements, underage voting, etc (Okoro and Adibe, 2013). As noted by Eakin cited in Adelekan (2010) described political participation as the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life of his society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. Political participation is one of the fundamental requirements of democratic governance. Adelekan (2010) emphasized that ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that involves one’s life. Arowolo and Aluko (2010: 581-593), notes that “the essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and to influence decision making. In a democratic system, there is the necessity for the citizenry to be fully involved in the democratic procedures of the choice of rulers and effective communication of the public policies and attitudes. Any claim to democratic state must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, and enjoyment of civic and political liberties and political participation that involves all groups of the society (Arowolo and Aluko, 2010). Political participation is a means through which citizen contribute their quota in the enriching the political system and to the overall development of the nation.

Studies have shown that the level of political awareness as well as the measure of confidence in the political process determines the extent to which the citizens participate in the political system. In Nigeria, politics is influenced by money, ethnic and religious factors. Since independence in 1960, religious and ethnic politics characterize electioneering process in Nigeria. Deceit and unfulfilled promises by political leaders discouraged a number of Nigerians from participating in election process and other political activities in the past. Falade (2008) argued that politicians make series of promises during election campaign. Most of these promises are not fulfilled after they had been voted in to power. As a result of this, some voters lose interest in election.

Social Media and Political Participation

Since the emergence of the first social media networks some two decades ago, social media has continued to evolve and offer consumers around the world new and meaningful ways to engage with the people, events and brands. Now, social media has become an integral part of our daily lives. Social networking is now truly a global phenomenon. Abubakar (2011) notes that the coming of social media in the last few years is fast changing the situation as we now have online platforms that serve as a new “political capital” where people now resort to and participate in political discourse. The author citing Kweon and Kim (2011) maintains that social media have become a main source of personal orientation, anonymous interactivities and social community on variety of issues that involve politics and political discourse. Mayfield (2010) attribute the social media capacity of boosting participation to its connectedness and textual/audio-visual characteristics appeal. For one, the Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, the 2go, GSM-SMS/calls, blackberries services, etc, have made political participation much easier, faster and even more cost effective than ever before.

Before the advent of the new media, political campaigns and other electioneering activities blossomed in the traditional media. Olajide (2002) cited in Onwukwe (2011) notes that prior to this period, political rallies, personal contacts and speeches were popularly used for mobilising electorates’ support on political issues, and that this was greatly propelled by the mass media force. At that time, political participation was more risky, expensive and required a great deal of investments from individuals willing to engage in political activities. The process was quite demanding as far as time, money, knowledge and information are concerned. The endemic poverty in Africa prevented citizens from attending political meetings, and sometimes, from travelling to exercise their voting rights. In the past, there seemed to be apathy among Nigerians when it comes to political involvement. The INEC noted that Nigerians’ participation during the last general election in the 2011 was low. Only 35% of the 70 million registered voters took part in the election. The Friedrich Elbert Stiffig Foundation conducted a research on the 2011 election and identified lack of transparent elections, election violence and politicians’ noncommittal to their campaign promises as major reasons for voters’ apathy in the country (Odebode, 2011).

Collin (2011) highlights the benefits of the social media to include media literacy, education, creativity, individual identity and self expression, strengthening of interpersonal relationships, sense of belongingness, and collective identity, strengthening and building of communities, civic engagement and
political participation and well being. With the social media, the gate keeping role of traditional media is eliminated. More people are switching to this new media for information as they spend more time in the virtual platform (Nielsen, 2012).

The arrival of social media has greatly enhanced all aspects of human communication. The new technology due to the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature has barely made everyone who can use it a mass communicator. This brings to fruition the prediction of Marshal McLuhan in 1964 that the world would someday become a “global village” where what happens in one part of the world would be known instantly and simultaneously worldwide. Today, one can stay right in his bedroom and access information, entertainment, events and enjoy full interaction with the world just by processing a button. Writing on this development, Adibe and Odoemelam (2010) observe that the new media of communication have in no small measure helped human society to be aware of each other. This agrees with the submissions of Baran (1998) that:

… as the media shrink the world, people will become increasingly involved in one another’s lives, and as people come to know more about others who were hitherto separated from them by distance, they will form new beneficial relationships.

Baran’s argument is relevant to this discourse as it draws attention to what social media is doing in the area of human communication today, especially as it concerns the fostering of relations and interaction among people. In many parts of the world today, individuals, groups, organisations and even nations are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by social media and other e-media platforms to mobilise millions of people to support and advance their course. In the political sphere it has become a veritable tool for interacting and mobilising citizens towards active participation in the political process and democratic projects. This agrees with the submissions of Okoro and Dirim (2009) that it is through the media that people are able to participate freely in discussions relevant to public good. Adelabu (2011) notes that the success of President Obama’s Presidential campaigns in 2008 and his eventual emergence as first black president of the United States was largely credited to his active use of facebook to mobilise millions of volunteers, and voters (Okoro and Adibe, 2013).

Politics has indeed greatly evolved in recent decade with the advent of the new technology. With it, information sharing has greatly improved, allowing citizens to discuss ideas, post news, ask questions and share links. With social media, politicians reach the masses with the aim of assessing the political atmosphere even before venturing into the campaign. Some even argue that the social media is perhaps the best tool to assess the popularity of a candidate especially by the young people. Social media also provides a politician with the opportunity to be informally free with the public. This free connection through social media helps politicians to communicate their humour, indicating their approachability and accessibility to the public. With social media, politicians appeal to citizens; this makes them seem more personable and gives them advantage of keeping in constant contact with their supporters. Social media grants many people the chance to participate actively and get involved fully in the political discourse by adding their voices on issues posted on the social media sites. Thus, advancing the tenets of participatory democracy that sees media as a debate avenue and aids tremendously in actualising public-sphere journalism. It affords electorates a friendlier avenue of assessing candidates for political offices and promoting transparency in governance.

Table 1: Internet Usage and Population Growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Users</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Pen.</th>
<th>Usage Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>142,895,600</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>ITU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>45,039,711</td>
<td>155,215,573</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>ITU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>93,400,000</td>
<td>183,523,432</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>NCC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of mobile Internet users in Nigeria has further increased to 93.4 million, according to a new report on Internet status in the country. The report obtained by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), the telecoms industry regulator, indicated the country has recorded about 14 per cent growth in mobile internet subscriptions between January and end of July. According to the data, which shows that Nigeria’s
mobile Internet ecosystem is gaining momentum, telecoms networks collectively boosted mobile Internet subscriptions on their networks from 81.8 million in January to 93.4 million in July, 2015. In 2014, mobile Internet subscriptions increased marginally from 64 million in January to 67.1 million at the end of June, representing a growth of 4.8 per cent.

**Social Media in 2015 General Elections**

The 2015 General Elections in Nigeria was a major trending topic on social media. Under Twitter hashtag #NigeriaDecides and #Nigeria2015, hundreds of Nigerians were posting about the issues affecting the country. Politicians actively utilized social media in their campaigns. They sent bulk text and voice messages in unprecedented scale. They made massive use of Facebook pages and other social media platforms to win supports and canvass for votes. In 2011, Goodluck Jonathan declared his intention to run for the presidency on Facebook and subsequently became the second most “liked” head of state in the world after US President Barack Obama (fanpagelist.com). since then, the social media has continued to generate political heat as witnessed in the 2015 general elections.

**The 2015 Scenario**

The amazing advantage the various social media platforms have over the traditional means is the certainty of reach. Apart from the Obama phenomenon, another recent example on the growing importance of the social media is the Indian 2014 presidential elections where the elected president was months before election declared the Facebook and Twitter President. He was quoted as saying: ‘Losing the fact the social media is an extended and special version of the campaign is to spell doom; Social media is not about some jobless young people talking about fashion, politics, and football or wasting away their lives on frivolities but concerned people talking about serious things.’ A single tweet or status update has the capability of reaching millions of people at the same time at cheaper costs.

With the growing number of internet users in Nigeria (more than a half of the population), Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the most popular social media platforms, the social media was readily one of the most critical tools used to persuade and manipulate the voting public on who to vote and not to vote for during the lead up to the 2015 presidential election was the Social Media. In fact, the 2015 general elections will write itself in history as the year Nigerians politicians knew the latest social platforms, displaying the importance of social media platforms in determining who wins or lose an election. The social media platforms were extensively used during the campaigns and elections of 2015. The focus of this analysis would be on the two dominant parties as they were – the PDP and the APC.

Several websites were also developed to amass volunteers for the party candidates. While APC was early into the game, the PDP played catch-up by also launching a volunteering signup website, gejites.com. These volunteers helped in spreading Facebook status updates, WhatsApp and BBM broadcasts to fuel propagandas, spread manifestos and refute accusations of the opposing party. The APC and its candidate were so visible on the social media to the point that it was said that they had a special partnership with Google Advertising Platform, Adwords. Almost all adverts showed on AdSense and affiliated parties were that of the APC Presidential Candidate, Gen (Rd.) Muhammad Buhari. Although they came late to the game with the official Twitter handle @ThisIsBuhari account opened in December, 2014, the @ThisIsBuhari account now boast of 96,000 followers. Opened in 2011, the PDP candidate’s Twitter account @presgoodluck had just 24.7K followers. The twitter handle of Osinbajo (@ProfOsinbajo), the APC vice-presidential candidate had 61.9K followers. With over a million Nigerian Users, Twitter boasts of having the attention of many Nigerian youths and the educated elites and it seems.

The 2015 elections saw the introduction of online campaign donation innovation in our polity. After declaring that he had to borrow from the bank to buy his party’s presidential form, Muhammad Buhari and his campaign team swung into action by introducing an online donation platform - basically crowdfunding, an innovation that is largely new in Nigeria and will slightly reduce the influence of amazingly wealthy businessmen and politicians who are ready to make “highly profitable investments.” The PDP Presidential campaign team also generated a PDP Social Media Group with the same goal to drive online donations worth #500M to achieve the aspirations of Goodluck Jonathan.

**Theoretical Premise**

It can be argued that since the dawn of time, humankind has been making tools to facilitate task completion. When we talk about technology today we rarely, if ever, think about our arrows, spearheads, and
cooking pots and pans, stove, refrigerator, or shelving system. What comes to mind are those items that are newest to our lives or make regular headlines: flat-panel (or even 3D) TVs, the internet, smart phones, and iPads. This is because we have accepted the former into our lives; we no longer question their presence or impact. These cases are examples of the domestication of technology, a concept that was first developed in the 1990s. Visions of the new technology in popular discourse have leaned towards technological determinism, and are particularly evident when a technology is new and not yet understood.

As an outgrowth of this vision, technological determinism, coined by Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929), argues that we don’t domesticate technologies - they domesticate us. This postulation tends to refute human agency, seeing technologies as causal agents that change us without us having much control over that transformation. Social construction of technology is a response to the concept of the ‘ruling machines’ of technological determinism. It affirms that people have agency - not machines. Humans are the designers, engineers, programmers, writers, and thinkers behind these technologies; and the way we create and use them is influenced by our social contexts. This reinforcing loop gives the society the ultimate power over what is produced, what succeeds, and how it is used. Domestication is a conceptual and methodological approach that can be adapted to changing scenarios and contexts. Domestication research has shown that technology that was developed with certain functionalities in mind at times see a change in what they are used for. The internet and the mobile phone are now used for many other purposes than what they were originally designed to be used for. Technology has also broken away geographical boundaries with the internet creating a global citizen.

The combination of Technological determinism and Domestication theory give perspective to this study, resulting in what is known as social shaping of technology, which basically states that although the need of the society influences which machines and technology are developed and how they are perceived and used, machines do have an impact on society and can have a very profound influence on our history, identity and operations. This gives rise to the concept of domestication, which refers to how technologies are ‘tamed’, or integrated into our everyday lives. Grounded in the social shaping of technology, domestication focuses on the processes through which technological devices move from being viewed as dangerous objects we may allow on the outskirts of our lives, to being acceptable and harmless – how they become part of the life and conduct. Political actors and users of the social media have already adjusted to the realities of the new technology and utilizing its platforms for political engagement.

Methodology

The study used survey research design, employing quantitative approach for the purposes of data collection. Onwukwe (2011) notes that, “survey research is concerned with the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting a certain condition, practice, beliefs, attitudes, etc,” purpose being to describe systematically the facts, qualities or characteristics of a given population, events, or areas of interest concerning the problem under investigation (Okoro and Adibe, 2011).

The Research Population

This study focused on Nigerian youths who, from available record, constitute more than 40% of active users of the social media Nigeria (Internet users’ statistics, 2015). The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines ‘youth’, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by member states. The Nigeria National Youth Policy (2001) defines youths as “all young persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.” For the purposes of the study, the researcher adopted the age bracket of 15 to 35 as middle course between the two definitions. It is projected that over a third of the Nigeria population from the 2006 census figure fall between this age group. The choice of this segment of the population was also informed by the fact that in order to use social media, one requires some certain degree of literacy, and majority of the youths boast of this (Okoro and Adibe, 2013). The researcher selected one institution from each of the three geo-political zones in the southern part of Nigeria. The selected institutions are Ebonyi State University (South East), University of Calabar (South South) and University of Lagos (South West).

Sampling

Sampling works on the premise that a given population is too large for any researcher to realistically observe all the elements therein (Nwodu, 2006). This was the case in this study as studying all the users of social media in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections was practically impossible. Hence, selection of samples became necessary. In doing so, the stratified and simple random sampling techniques, to enable the
researcher reflect the three geo-political zones and at the same time give all elements of each subset of the population equal chance of being selected. The three institutions were treated as a single population, from which a sample size of 384 respondents were drawn using the sample size determination table by Cozby (2004) which states that at + or – 5% error margin, a population of over 10,000 would have a sample size of 384.

**Instrument of Data Collection**

A questionnaire, titled, Political Participation Attitude Scale (PPAS), was designed as the measuring instrument with twelve items made the address the issues of social media use and awareness and participation in the campaign process. The first section (questions 1-3) was on the status of the respondents; the second section (questions 4-8) was on political awareness of social media users, while the third section (questions 9-12) was directly on political participation of social media users in the online campaigns.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

The data collected were analyzed using simple frequency distribution chart and percentages. The data obtained in this study are analyzed on the basis of the research questions. The return rate of the questionnaire was 100%. This is the result of the personal approach adopted by the research assistants as well as the simple nature of the measuring instrument.

**Section 1: Status of the Respondents**

**Chart 1: Sex of Respondents**

![Chart 1: Sex of Respondents](chart1.png)

Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015)

Chart 1 above shows that in all the institutions studied, there were more male respondents than female respondents in the sample. The average percentage of the male respondents in the three institutions was 71.6% while the female was 28.4%.

**Chart 2: Age of Respondents**

![Chart 2: Age of Respondents](chart2.png)
Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015)

Chart 2 shows that respondents between the ages of 20 and 30 numbering two hundred and forty-five (245) representing an average percentage of 64.5% dominated the study in the three institutions sampled. Those below the age of 20 were ninety eight (98) representing an average of 25.8%, while those above the age of 30 were thirty-seven (37) representing 9.7%.

Chart 3: Knowledge and use of the social media during the 2015 electioneering campaigns

Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015):

Chart 3 shows that an overwhelming three hundred (300) number representing an average of 78.9% of the respondents in the three institutions studied indicated that they know about and actually used the social media during the 2015 electioneering campaigns, while 18.2% knew about the social media but did not use them during the campaigns. Only eleven (11) respondents representing 2.9% of the sample indicated that they neither know about nor used the social media.

Section 2: Social Media and Political Awareness of the Respondents

Chart 4: Planned exposure to Political information on Social Networking Sites

Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015):
Chart 4 shows that of the three hundred respondents that indicated they know about and actually used the social media during the campaigns, two hundred and fifty nine (259) representing an average of 86.3% of the respondents deliberately planned to use the social media to assess information on political candidates and parties and to follow the presidential campaigns, while thirty six (36) representing 12% had coincidental exposure to political information on the social media during the campaigns. Five respondents representing 1.7% of the sample had no opinion on the matter.

**Chart 5: SNS mostly used by the Respondents**

![Chart 5: SNS mostly used by the Respondents](image)

Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015):

Chart 5 shows that one hundred and seventy four (174) representing an average of 58% of the respondents used the facebook more than any other SNS during the campaigns, fifty four (54) representing 18% relied more on Twitter, while twenty representing 6.7% used the websites more than any other. Only twenty one representing 7% of the respondent indicated that they used blogs while thirty one representing 10.3% used other social media platforms other than the ones listed in the study.

**Chart 6: Reliance on SNS for Political news and updates**

![Chart 6: Reliance on SNS for Political news and updates](image)

Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015):

Chart 6 shows that two hundred and forty four (244) representing 81.3% of the respondents always relied on the social media for political news and updates while fifty one (51) representing 17% did occasionally. Five respondents representing 1.7% of the sample had no opinion on the matter.
Chart 7: Interest in the campaigns through information from SNS

Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015):

Chart 7 shows that two hundred and thirty four (234) representing 78% of the respondents became interested in the campaign issues as a result of the online interactions, fifty two (52) representing 17.3% did occasionally. Only fourteen (14) representing 4.7% of the respondent were indifferent to the online political campaigns.

Chart 8: Increased Knowledge of campaign issues and candidates through posts on SNS

Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015):

Chart 8 shows that whereas two hundred and thirty three (233) representing 77.7% of the sample used social networking sites (SNS) indicated that their knowledge about key campaign issues increased through the use of the social media, only fifty four (54) representing 18% stated otherwise. Thirteen respondents representing 4.3% of the sample had no opinion on the matter.

Section 3: Social Media and Political Participation

On the level of participation in 2015 presidential election campaigns through the social media, a number of units of analysis were used to measure depth of engagement by social media users. The result of the survey indicates that majority of users of the social media were actively involved in the online campaigns.
Chart 9: Belonged to an SNS group involved in political discourse

Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015):

Chart 9 shows that one hundred and seventy two (172) representing 57.3% of the respondents belonged to more than one social media group that was involved in election and campaign matters. Eighty one (81) respondents representing 27% belonged to at least one social media group. Forty seven (47) representing 15.7% indicated they do not belong to any social media group.

Chart 10: Commented on posts made on social media

Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015):

Chart 10 shows that two hundred and sixty three (263) representing 90% of the made posts and commented on posts received on SNS in election and campaign matters. Twenty five (25) respondents representing 8.3% belonged to at least one social media group. Five (5) respondents representing 1.7% indicated they never commented on any political or campaign related post on the social media.

Chart 11: Posted campaign items on the social media
Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015):

Chart 11 shows that two hundred and sixty three (212) representing 70.7% of the made posts and commented on posts received on SNS in election and campaign matters. Forty eight (48) respondents representing 16% belonged to at least one social media group. Forty (40) respondents representing 13.3% indicated they never made any political or campaign related post on the social media.

**Chart 12: Took a stand on campaigns issues trending on the social media**

Source: Field work (Onwe, 2015):

Chart 12 shows that two hundred and fifty (250) representing 83.3% of the respondents always took stand on campaigns issues trending on the social media during the electioneering, while forty eight (48) respondents representing 16% do but occasionally. Forty (40) respondents representing 13.3% indicated they never took stand on campaigns issues trending on the social media.

**Discussion of Findings**

The data generated in this study provide insight to the lapses and lessons of social media use during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. In conducting the study, the researchers deemed it necessary to begin with the demographic variables of the respondents; this decision was aimed at determining how the differences and diversities among the various geopolitical zones of the country influenced their social media use for political participation during the period under review.
The gender distribution shows that the male respondents outnumber their female counterpart in all the states studied; however, the gap was wider in the northern states than in the south. The data also show that students, especially those between the age range of 20-30 constitute the highest users of social media among the respondents.

Research Question 1: The issue borders on the level of political awareness of the campaign issues and candidates in the 2015 Presidential election. The information on Charts 4-8 provides answer to the research question one. The cumulative data generated show that a high percentage of the respondents actually made deliberate plan to access political information and election updates on the social media platforms because they relied on them for news and updates on the electoral process. The findings also show that users of the social media generated interest in the campaigns and their knowledge of the candidates and the campaign issues were increased as a result of exposure to social media sites. The most popular social media platform is the facebook.

Research question 2: The question borders on the level of political participation in campaign process during the 2015 Presidential election, and information on Charts 9-12 provides answer. The indicators of online participation in the campaigns include membership of an SNS group involved in political discourse, commenting on posts made on social media, posting campaign items on the social media and taking stand on campaigns issues trending on the social media. On the basis of these indicators, the findings show that the respondents participated actively in the online campaigns during the 2015 presidential election campaigns.

Conclusion
Social media is a unique global phenomenon whose true reach and potential to affect not only short term, but also long term change can only be understood better as time progresses. This study has shown that social media created awareness and was actually used as platform for participation in the campaigns leading to the 2015 general elections. It showed that most people used it deliberating to search for information by making . Among all of the factors examined, a significant proportion of the sample studied indicated a positive relationship between SNS use and some form of civic or political engagement or participation. What is left is to determine its statistical significance using parametric methods. The strongest effects could be seen in studies that randomly sampled youth populations. The relationship between social-media use and election-campaign participation and by extension civic engagement is generally strong.

Some people canvass the view that the social media does not win an election. Others argue that social media is over hyped in-respect to an election. Going by the outcome and revelations from the 2015 election, nothing can be farther from the truth. Given viral nature and real time information available on the online sites, the social media is actually a real game changer. The era of employing thugs and using them to intimidate people to act against their will is gone, the knowledge era and digital age has come. The political environment has been infected by the bug of the power of social media.

The study has shown that social networking is a very strong political tool and can be a mighty weapon in changing the opinions. It shows that Nigerian politics have become embroiled in the political landscape of the Web and have discovered how affective the Internet can be. The World Wide Web has allowed politically minded people of Nigeria to converse about politics within their country and influence the views and opinions of the people who have yet to be swayed by one view or another. Not only will Nigerians be influenced by media outlets who report the news, but by each other while conversing on the current political climate through social networking sites and forums. This may lead to not only a greater influence from Cyberpolitics, but an increased rise in Internet Activism.

Recommendations
From the findings, the following recommendations are made:

i. The growing presence of political parties and political figures on social media is evidence that political parties are “approaching and speaking to the people on their level. Political parties and candidates should officially inculcate the social media in their political drive if they hope to maintain a float in the in the face of the current realitiescampaign super highway. Those with political ambitions will develop a platform such as a blog or a page on a social networking site for delivering their political message and agenda to people.

ii. Social media as a platform is none partisan; it is a neuter. Political actors and stakeholders who intend to use them for political purposes, especially to engage the voters and to make campaigns more
effective, need not to show pride on social media because the platform doesn't care about positions or what you earn. One can use it to ones advantage, or ignore it to ones peril.

iii. Government agencies and civil society groups should intensify public enlightenment on the use of social media platforms for political purpose especially among the youths.

iv. Regulatory bodies should dedicate effort in monitoring and moderation to ensure that all technical issues involved in the operations and use of the new media technologies are addressed in order to minimize the obvious weaknesses and maximize the intrinsic values of the technology in the political process without appearing to infringe on the right of users. Politicians and political parties, as well as their supporters should be cautioned on using social media to post/tweet dysfunctional messages. Government or the electoral body should consider enacting laws that regulate the use of social media for campaigns to avoid abuse.

References


Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2012) Social Media and the 2011 Elections in Nigeria. PLAC
