# Social Media and Electioneering Campaign in the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria: A Study of Facebook and Twitter

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## Abstract

The paper sought to examine social media and electioneering campaign in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria: a study of Facebook and Twitter. To achieve this, three research questions and three objectives were set out to guide the study. The research instrument used was the questionnaire. One hundred and sixty (160) copies of questionnaire were administered to the sampled population who were residents of Calabar. The paper employed two theories to back up its views, the theories were uses and gratification and the social impact theories. The findings reveal that social media played both positive and negative roles during the 2015 presidential campaigns in Nigeria, determined the outcome of the 2015 presidential election in the sense that, electorate preferred and voted for the candidate who campaigned and interacted with them on social media especially, Facebook and Twitter. The study concluded that the people depended so much on the social media for information and news update during the campaigns and eventually, the election. Also, The social media played both positive and negative roles during the presidential campaign ahead of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. In contemporary time, the social media can determine the outcome of any election considering the heavy reliance of people on social media to meet their information, educational, entertainment and other needs. The study therefore recommended that politicians and their supporters should be properly guided in their choice of words and the messages they communicate to the people during political campaigns and elections.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Media, Electioneering Campaign, Election Facebook And Tweeter.

## Introduction

If the social network was a country, it would now be the most populous in the world-even bigger than China, considering the huge population of people who log into the various social

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media as active users daily. For instance, according to recent studies and observations, about 1.32 billion people log into *Facebook* daily, as active users. For others; *Instagram*: 400,000,000 million users, *Twitter*: 320, 000,000, *LinkedIn*: 100,000,000 users. Indeed, the social media command a huge traffic (Stenovec, 2017).

The Social Media have become contemporary Media. They are the Media of the present times. If you do not have a presence in any of the social media, it could be assumed that you do not belong to the contemporary age. Also, business people use the media to ply their trade. They have found social media as progressive tools in the expansion and advancement of their businesses. Similarly, Journalists sometimes, rely on the social media for breaking news and view them as news sources even though some Journalists hold the opinion that not all news from the social media are authentic.

The social media have played a role for political movements in different parts of the world Shirky, (2011).During electioneering campaigns, contemporary politicians and political parties seem to adopt the social media platforms to sell their programme, proposed policies and projects. Nigerian politicians and political parties are no exceptions.

A cardinal factor of election is the electioneering campaign. This entails the practice of working actively to secure votes for a candidate in an election. (Uzonwanne, 2016 ). In the 21$^{st}$ century, electioneering seems to be a sophisticated mechanic with targeted social media messages and big data collection. Currently, usage of social media, focus groups and extensive polling is standard procedure and far from a cutting edge phenomenon in practices of modern political campaigning Mamaghani, (2016).

Nigeria is a country located in West Africa along the Atlantic Ocean's gulf of Guinea. (Britney 2017) posits that its land borders are with Benin to the west, Cameroon and Chad to the east and Niger to the north. Nigeria's main ethnic groups are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. She is the most populous country in Africa and her economy is considered one of the fastest growing in the world (Britney, 2017). Nigeria is known for being the regional centre of West Africa.

It is on note that throughout the colonial era, the military rule and until latest times, the Nigerian Media industry remains very vibrant and dynamic. Similarly, the social media are seemingly popular in Nigeria and among Nigerians. In recent times, Some Nigerian politicians have come to realize the amazing influence of social media and have so utilized them to reach potential voters and eventually won elections. For instance, Goodluck Jonathan, former Nigeria's President, had set up an official Twitter account (@presgoodluck) in May 2011, in which he used to relate with thousands of followers and subsequently won the presidential election of that year. However, the same Jonathan abandoned his twitter account shortly after and the account was left unverified and unused during the presidential campaigns ahead of the 2015 presidential election which he ran and sought for a second term (Johnson, 2016).

Fortunately, for Muhammadu Buhari, Jonathan's strongest opponent in the race, who only joined *Twitter* in December 2014, Buhari actively used his account (@ThisisBuhari) in the lead up to the election. With tweets personally drafted by him, signed with his initials, the account attracted thousands of followers who engaged him in conversations. Muhammadu Buhari, ultimately won the election. In a landslide victory, Muhammadu Buhari scored 54% of 29 million votes cast. While Goodluck Jonathan, then incumbent President, had 45% Johnson, (2016). The election which was the most keenly contested in the democratic history of the country had the opposition unseat the incumbent, in an unprecedented manner.

Ahead of that election, Buhari's running mate and vice presidential candidate of the then opposition All Progressive Congress,Yemi Osinbajo, had also opened a *twitter* account (@profosinbajo) and they established their presence, had direct communication with young people, monitored what was happening in the public sphere as well as campaigned vigorously. Several issues were raised and the candidates were able to sell their programmes and policies directly to those who mattered most. Posts were favourited and retweeted by thousands (Johnson, 2017).

While the then ruling People's Democratic Party were spending so much money to buy spaces on newspapers and airtime on various television and radio channels to campaign, the then opposition party, All Progressive Congress had realized that many Nigerians mostly, young people now spent most of their time on social media. And so, they captured the social media to sell their party's manifestoes to the people. The broad scope, low cost, high speed and other strong advantages of the social media worked in favour of the All Progressive Candidate and contributed immensely to the victory of their presidential candidates as well as the Governors who contested on the platform of the party and won the elections in most states of Nigeria (Omojuwa, 2015).

Around the globe, people are turning to *Facebook* to find, follow and connect with candidates and elected officials. And government officials are using *Facebook* to reach citizens directly and personally. A popular, free social networking website, *Facebook* was founded by Mark Zuckerberg while studying Psychology at Harvard University Rouse, (2014). In February, 2004 Mr. Zuckerberg launched the *Facebook* as it was originally known; the name taken from the sheets of paper distributed to freshmen, profiling students and staff. Within 24 hours, 1,200 Harvard students had signed up, and after one month, over half of the undergraduate population had a profile. As of September, 2006 the network was extended beyond educational institutions to anyone with a registered e-mail address (Phillips, 2007).

Similarly, *Twitter* has evolved to become one of the biggest social media platforms, in terms of the active user base. No one in the world, even the renowned world leaders can afford to ignore it. Some leaders use *twitter* to run their countries including announcing changes in the government policies and even proposing constitutional changes. Founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone and Evan Williams (Sagolla, 2009), *Twitter* is one of the best

social media platforms for conveying political messages in bite-size pieces to an electorate (Moore, 2015). *Twitter* has changed the media, business and politics Qualman, (2018).

Furthermore, a political candidate can bypass broadcast and print media to reach his potential voters through social media (Halbrooks, 2011). A *Facebook* page can show he has 20,000 fans, offer his entire news conference and most importantly, allow him a total unfiltered way to speak. One of President Buhari's posts on his *Facebook* page during the campaign periods, attracted 10, 640 likes and 10,639 followers Lufkens, (2016). President Obama who pioneered political campaigns on cyber space, had a successful web strategy that helped him win the 2008 presidential campaign (Halbrooks, 2017). As a result, Obama emerged as the first African American President of the United States in 2008 (Bogost, 2017).

## Statement of the Problem

In ordinary circumstances, political campaigns should be issues-based and not attacks on personalities. Besides, the social media which are public platforms for free speeches should be guided by decency, principles and ethics of good communication especially, in organized societies. But that was not the case during the 2015 presidential campaigns in Nigeria. During that period, abuses, attacks on personalities, hate speeches, rumours, falsehood and propaganda characterized the social media.

The social media which played out at the time was lack of censorship. Anyone could post anything at anytime no matter how offensive it might be. Again, 'truth' which is the pillar of the Journalism profession, seems to have been sacrificed with the advent of the proliferation of the social media. Information posted on the various social online platforms is hardly verified. Before this age, Editors and Reporters who were the major ''gatekeepers'' in the newsroom would hardly publish or broadcast information or any message that was not confirmed to be true.

For instance, ahead of the 2015 general election, the social media communicated to the public a lot of information that could have caused unrest in some volatile nations. For example, the social media gave other reasons for the postponement of the election from February 14, 2015 to March 28, 2015, aside from the unpreparedness of Independent National Electoral Commission. Reasons that made the public believed that the postponement was to the advantage of the ruling party as it would provide the opportunity for the ruling party to manipulate the election in such a way that the power of the electorate would amount to nothing. This sort of report could cause anarchy in some volatile countries that are not stable.

This research therefore seems to solve the puzzle: How best can the social media be deployed for effective issues-based rather than an uncensored and propaganda driven political campaign?

## Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to:

i. Find out the roles played by social media during the campaigns to the build-up of the 2015 presidential election.
ii. Determine the level of influence of social media on the outcome of the 2015 presidential election.
iii. Find out the factors that motivated politicians and their supporters to opt for social media platforms (*Facebook* and *Twitte*r) to drive their campaigns.

## Research Questions

i. What were the roles played by the social media during the campaigns to the build-up of the 2015 presidential election?
ii. What extent did the social media influence the outcome of the 2015 presidential election?
iii. Why did politicians and their supporters opt for the social media especially, *Facebook* and *Twitter* for their campaigns?

## Literature Review

### Social Media

Scott and Jacka (2015), found that there is no single recognized definition of social media. For many people, well known social network sites such as *Facebook* and twitter typify social media. The sites have become enormously popular across demographics of race, age and gender, and have hundreds of million users.

Scott and Jacka (2015), contend that it can be said that social media are the set of web-based broadcast technologies that enable the democratization of content, giving people the ability to emerge from consumers' content to Publishers. (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), developed their own technical definition of social media stating that Social media constitute groups of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2:0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content.

### Advantages of Social Media

➢ The ability of users to conveniently stay in touch with friends and family who live faraway, connect with like-minded people and expand business contacts, usually for free.
➢ Social media have also been used to increase awareness of social and political issues and organize demonstrations.
➢ The Speed and efficiency which it allows communication between two people. For example, in the 2013 protests which took place in Turkey, social media played a vital role in communication. Many of the protesters were young men and women, students, and

they organized the protests using social media. The plans of where and how the protests would take place spread through social media accounts rapidly, staging some of the biggest protest that Turkish people had witnessed in the Country's history. Hutchinson, (2013).

➢ Social media can be used for change and for public mobilization. A typical example as Girma (2005), points out, was during the Arab spring.

➢ The social media also serve as unifying factor for advocacy. Social media have given people especially, the new generation which is very computer savvy, a new and effective instrument to come together for issues they believe in.

➢ Connectivity- The biggest advantage of social media is its power to connect people. They have become popular ways for family and friends who live far away from one another (sometimes internationally) to keep up with what is going on in each other's lives, without the expensive cost of distance calling. And it is not limited to geography.

➢ Information Updates. This is one of the main advantages of the social media. With them, you can update yourself with the latest happenings in the world.

## Disadvantages of Social Media

➢ Lacks a personal touch; inability to connect in person (McCray, 2016).

For instance, you cannot feel/touch who is on the other side. Sometimes, you are not really sure of whom you are chatting with and so it is difficult to know if the person you are chatting with is true. How can you trust your local politician you cannot see in person yet he expects you to believe all his messages on social media? This becomes an illusion.

➢ Lack of privacy (once posted others have access to that information).
➢ Open to security issues (hacking, viruses, etc.)
➢ Requires constant commitment to maintain social media presence.
➢ Takes time away from other things
➢ Less face-to-face communication.
➢ Lack of censorship: Vicious comments, fake pages and derogatory memes are all adding to the stress of public life for the state's politicians (Benuik, 2017).There is hardly any check or control of speeches over the social media. This makes the game of politics uninteresting.

Most of the children have become victims of the cyber bullying over the years. Since anyone can create a fake account and do anything without being traced, it has become quite easy for anyone to bully on the internet.

Hacking- Personal data and privacy can easily be hacked and shared on the internet, which Beaver et al (2015), say can make financial losses and loss to personal life. Several personal *Twitter* and *Facebook* accounts have been hacked in the past and the hacker had posted materials that have affected the individuals' personal lives.

Addiction- The addictive part of the social media is very bad and can disturb personal lives as well. The teenagers are the most affected by the addiction of social media. They get involved very extensively and are eventually cut off from the society.

Cheating and relationship issues constitute some of the problems of the social media. Most of the people have used the social media platform to propose and marry each other. However, after sometime, they turn to be wrong in their decision and part ways. Similarly, couples have cheated each other by showing fake feelings and incorrect information.

## Utilization of *Facebook* for Political Purposes

Facebook has become the place where leaders can reach out to their citizens and have conversations in more than the 140-character limit allowed on Twitter Sagolla, (2014). With their publications on Facebook, world leaders can now reach an audience of millions of users worldwide, regardless of the number of likes on their respective pages. Engaging Facebook posts often make headlines in mainstream media and have long become more powerful and effective than traditional press releases.

➤ According to *Facebook*'s latest figures, 1.5 billion people have registered an account on the platform, of which 1 billion people are active on the social network every day. In 2015, the number of users on *Facebook* has become even greater than the population of China, the most populous country on earth (Loesche, 2017). Given this global audience, it comes as no surprise that governments and leaders of 87% of the 193 United Nations member countries now have a presence on the social network. The 512 pages analyzed in this study, conducted by strategic communications and global PR firm Burson-Marsteller, represent 169 governments and have a combined total of 230,489,257 likes. According to the Burson-Marsteller study conducted in early January 2016, 87 heads of state, 82 prime ministers and 51 foreign ministers maintain personal pages on *Facebook*. Barack Obama was the first world leader to set up a Facebook page in late 2007, while still a Senator in Illinois. He is still the most popular world leader with more than 46 million likes on his 'campaign page', which is not managed by the White House administration or the U.S. president himself Lufkens, (2016).

➤ In November 2015, the Obama U.S. administration created an official institutional page for the President of the United States (POTUS) which has attracted 1.3 million likes in less than two months and is now among the 30 most popular pages of world leaders .

Barack Obama is closely followed by Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, with more than 31 million likes on his personal page and 10.1 million likes on his institutional Prime Minister of India page, which is in third position. Turkish President RecepTayyipErdoğan, Indonesian President JokoWidodo and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi complete the top 5 list of the most popular leaders with more than 5 million likes each. 36 world leaders can boast more than a million likes on their respective pages. However, not everyone has

such large communities and the median average of the 512 pages analyzed stands at 30,954 likes Lufkens, (2016).

The *Facebook* page of the Presidency of the Dominican Republic is the most prolific page, with an average of more than 27 posts per day in 2015. The governments of Botswana and the Philippines are almost as active, with more than 20 posts per day, making their pages much like a governmental news service. However, the posting frenzy doesn't necessarily translate into greater engagement, or more likes on their respective pages, and the median average posting rate stands at one post per day Lufkens, (2016).

Indian Prime Minister NarendraModi is undoubtedly the most effective world leader on Facebook, with an average of 186,000 interactions on each post in 2015. The Turkish President is second, followed by the institutional page of the Indian prime minister. Interestingly the 2-month-old POTUS page has almost as many interactions per average post as the much older and much larger Barack Obama campaign page. The POTUS page is characterized by having only a few posts, all 11 of which had a massive impact with his community in 2015 Coleman ( 2015).

**Below are Some of Nigeria's *Facebook* Politicians:**

Muhammadu Buhari - 695, 746 fans

Atiku Abubakar - 605,858 fans

Goodluck Jonathan - 2,268 966 fans

Akinwumi Ambode - 499,045 fans

Abubakar Bukola Saraki - 444, 892 fans

(Machunga, 2016).

*Facebook* is the largest social networking site in the world, with over 750+ million active users, as of July, 2011. It is a social networking site that makes it easy for one to connect and share with family and friends online. Originally designed for College students, *Facebook* was created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg while he was enrolled at Harvard University. By 2006, anyone over the age of 13 with a valid email address could join *Facebook*. Phillips (2007).

Today, *Facebook* is the world's largest social network with more than 1 billion users worldwide. *Facebook* allows you to send messages and post status updates to keep in touch with your friends and family. You can also share different types of content like photos and links. But sharing something on *Facebook* is a bit different from other types of online communication. Unlike email or instant messaging, which are relatively private the things you share on *Facebook* are more public, which means they will usually be seen by many other people Rouse (2014).

While *Facebook* offers privacy tools to help you limit who can see the things you share, it is important to understand that *Facebook* is designed to be and more open and social than traditional communication tools.

## Utilization of *Twitter* for Political Purposes

*Twitter* was created in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone and Evan Williams and lunched in July of that year. The service rapidly gained worldwide popularity Sagolla, (2009). Conversely, *Twitter* is also about discovering interesting people online and following their burst messages for as long as they are interesting. In addition to its relative novelty, Crum (2011) believes that *Twitter*'s big appeal is how rapid and scan-friendly it is. You can track hundreds of interesting tweeters, and read their content with a glance. To receive twitter feeds, you simply find someone interesting (celebrities included) and follow them to subscribe to their tweet micro-blogs. Once a person becomes uninteresting, you simply unfollow them. You then choose to read your daily twitter feeds through any of various twitter readers Stone (2009).

*Twitter* is a form of amateur news reporting. This is one interesting aspect of *Twitter*. Among other things, Ryan (2009) says that *Twitter* is a way to learn about the world through another person's eyes. Tweets from people in Thailand as their cities become flooded, tweets from your soldier cousin in Afghanistan who describes his war experiences, tweets from your travelling sister in Europe who shares her daily discoveries online, tweets from a rugby friend at the Rugby world cup...these micro bloggers are all mini-Journalists in their own way. And *twitter* lets them send you a constant stream of updates right from their laptops and smart phones.

In 2012, more than 100 million users posted 340 million tweets, a day, and the service handled an average of 1.6 billion search queries per day. In 2013, it was one of the ten most visited websites and has been described as ''the SMS of the internet (Swant, 2016). As of 2016, *twitter* had more than 319 million monthly active users. *Twitter* and *Tweeting* is about broadcasting daily short burst messages to the world with the hope that your messages are useful and interesting to someone. In other words, micro-blogging. For instance, in 2016, on the day of the U.S presidential election, an online article available on titled: "How social media has changed politics" reports that: *Twitter* proved to be the largest source of breaking news with 40 million election related tweets. During the Arab Spring in early 2011, the number of hash tags mentioning the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt increased.

A study by the Dubai School of Government found that only 0.26percent of the Egyptian population, 0. 1percent of the Tunisian population and 0.4 percent of the Syrian population are active on *Twitter*. World leaders and their diplomats have taken note of *Twitter*'s rapid expansion and have been increasingly utilizing *twitter* diplomacy, the use of *twitter* to engage with foreign publics and their own citizens. United States Ambassador to Russia, Michael A.

McFaul has been attributed as a pioneer of international Twitter diplomacy. He used *twitter* after becoming an Ambassador in 2011, posting in English and Russian. On October 24, 2014, Queen Elizabeth II sent her first tweet to mark the opening of the London Science Museum's Information Age Exhibition. A 2012 study of Twiplomacy found that 153 of the 193 countries represented at the United Nations had established government *twitter* accounts. The same study also found that those accounts amounted to 505 *twitter* handlers used by world leaders and their foreign Ministers, with their tweets were able to reach a combined audience of over 106 million followers.

According to an analysis of accounts, the heads of state of 125 countries and 139 other leading politicians have *twitter* accounts that have between them sent more than 350,000 tweets and have almost 52 million followers (Michele, 2014).

**Below are some Nigeria's *twitter* politicians:**

Muhammadu Buhari (@mbuhari)

Goodluck Jonathan (@gejonathan)

Oluwarotimi Odunayo Akeredolu (@oandalegal)

Senator Ben Murray-Bruce (@benmurraybruce)

Senator Shehu Sani (@ShehuSani)

Atiku Abubakar(@atiku)

Machunga (2016)

## Review of studies

### Social media and political campaigns

This study ascertains the extent to which social media can be used in political campaigns with specific reference to the presidential campaigns in the United States, over the years, especially during the presidential election of 2008 that produced Barack Obama as the President of the United States at the time.

The inspiration for the research, according to the researcher, emanates from studies in both Journalism and Political Science at the University of Tennessee and personal observation of social media trends in the past few years.

The researcher notes that during the 2008 presidential election in the United States, Barack Obama who won the election had a large social media presence. Furthermore, in subsequent years after the election, many other candidates for the political office created a presence on

social media as well. This therefore, establishes a link between social media and political presence.

The following questions instigated the need for the research.

➢ How has social media been utilized in previous political campaigns specifically, the 2008 presidential campaign?
➢ Did the utilization of social media affect the outcome of the 2008 presidential election? If so, which social media platform were the most advantageous?
➢ How has the use of social media changed in subsequent political campaigns?
➢ Have there been any negative effects or new problems created because of social media?
➢ What is the predicted future of social media use in political campaigns particularly in the 2012 campaigns for president?

This research gathered that social media have played and will continue to play a vital role in political campaigns and elections across the world. For instance, the research attributes the success of President Barack Obama at the poll to the reasonable use of the social media in the 2008 presidential campaign. The study reveals that his widespread use of social media seemed to be a major factor in his victory over John McCain. After the emergence of Obama and his eventual swearing-in as the President of the United States, many Politicians have found in social media, tools for advocacy and campaigns to promote political interests.

In spite of the beauty of the social media, there are challenges that accompany them. This study believes that some of the challenges that characterize the social media stem from the nascent technologies and ignorance of the supposed users. However, the challenges are not overwhelming that they cannot be surmounted.

The Researcher foresees that the future of politicians is tied to the social media especially in contemporary times. The social media shall remain relevant and indispensable in the political world. No matter how politicians use social media in their campaigns, it will continue to be an important part of the campaign process. The study also identifies *Facebook, Twitter* and *You Tube* as ready means which Politicians deploy to reach their supporters. This study is relevant to this research because they both expound on the utilization of social media for political campaigns by Politicians. However, the population and geographical locations of both studies differ. While the study reviews the United States Presidential political campaigns, the emphasis of this research is on Nigeria presidential political campaigns. Also, the period of study differs for both studies. While the study was conducted in 2015 and examined the presidential election that was held in 2008, in the United States, this ongoing (2017) research is reviewing the presidential election that was held in 2015 in Nigeria.

It is interesting to note that the two countries under study adopt and practice the presidential system of government. It therefore means that the results from respective studies would be relevant to both countries - United States of America and Nigeria.

## The growing use of social media in political campaigns: How to use *facebook, twitter* and *you tube* to create an effective social media campaign

This study draws the attention of enlightened minds to the increasing influence of social media in many aspects of our lives. The study notes that the huge population of users of social media has attracted companies to include internet advertising in their marketing plans, due to social media's targeting capabilities and considering its less cost as compared to the electronic or print advertising.

The researcher in this study reveals that companies are not the only ones who realized the advertising and networking advantages of social media and its affiliate sites. This study points out that during the 2004 election cycle, political campaigns began to explore the benefits of these sites and in 2008, the United States presidential political campaigns began to fully understand the use of these sites.

The principal objective of this study was to examine the effect of social media in political and advertising campaigns. The study establishes that political campaigns have come a long way with the utilization of the social media. From the beginning where there were simple speeches on soap boxes, to a point where radio and television and finally, the internet and social media have formed an entirely new platform for campaigning.

The researcher ascribes the change in the structure of the political campaigns to the grass root capabilities of social media which has not only amplified the voice of the people in the campaign but can be usefully applied as the candidates they elect settle into their office and listen to the relationships they have built during the campaigns.

According to this study, this creates a better dialogue and ultimately a better democracy as social media and the internet have connected citizens and humanized government. *Facebook, Twitter* and *Youtube* have been acknowledged by this researcher as three of the most popular social media sites that politicians use to connect their constituents. The study mentions that *Facebook* particularly, offers targeted ad and promotional capabilities to help reach more constituents with while *Twitter* allows candidates and campaigns to keep users up-to-date with short messages, which humanizes the candidates and offers another way for citizens to get involved and connect in democracy. The study further says: Social media may have changed the way news breaks, but you tube has changed the way a culture hears the news, providing a platform to post and watch videos over and over again. Candidates can again connect to voters and by-pass the traditional media with their own announcements that can directly reach their subscribers.

This study is reasonably relevant to this research because like this research, it addresses the positive contributions of the social media to the political world. Both studies draw the attentions of political stakeholders and concerned minds to the overwhelming benefits of utilizing the social media for political interests. In both studies, for instance one can see that it

is cheaper or less cost effective in using the social media for campaigns than the legacy media.

Also, both studies reveal the wider reach of social media and connectivity to target audience as compared to the legacy media. Though the geographical locations of the studies differ (United States and Nigeria), both countries practice the Presidential system of government. In other words, results of both studies can be relevant to their citizens, respectively.

## Theoretical Framework

### Uses and Gratification Theory

George Gebner is one of the advocates of the Uses and Gratification theory. This theory stresses on the role of the receiver/ consumer and user of media in any communication process. Herbert Blumer and Elihu Katz (1974) were the first to introduce this theory.

This theory expounds on the Uses and functions of the media for individuals, groups, and society in general. According to (Katz 1974,p.2) in Uses and gratification, framework, the question is not "what do the media do to people?" But rather, "what do people do with the media?" According to this theory, people access media contents and use the media content that is relative to their needs and purposes.

There are three objectives in developing Uses and Gratification theory:

1. To explain how individuals use media communication to gratify their needs. ''What do people do with the media?''
2. To discover underlying motives for individuals' media use.
3. To identify the positive and the negative consequences of individual media use. At the core of Uses and Gratification theory lays the assumption that audience members actively seek out the mass media to satisfy individual needs.

Rosengren (1974) admits the acceptance and use of new and old media content according to the needs of the users / receivers. This theory is relevant to this study in the sense that a lot of young adults in recent times use the media to satisfy their educational, entertainment and information needs.

According to a study conducted by Pew Research Centre Journalism and Media in 2016, a majority of US adults, 62%, get news on social media and 18% do so often. In other words, they rely on the social media for their information needs.

This theory is quite relevant to this research because it reveals to us how social media users actively seek the various social media and if such media gratify their political needs. Levy and Windahl (1984, p. 51) notes that Uses and Gratification is a "receiver oriented concept", supposing an "active audience."

Some contemporary politicians have decided to adopt the social media for their political campaigns because they gratify their needs; the need to send out messages at lower cost as compared to the mainstream media, the need to reach out to a wide audience at a very high speed, the need to interact freely with the electorate through the various social media platforms particularly, *facebook* and *twitter* and get instant feedback, the need to campaign, express their views and opinions without restrictions or imposed regulations, and so on. Likewise, the electorate uses the social media because they gratify their needs such as; Get political news and updates as they break, interact freely with politicians, subscribe at very low cost, express their views and opinions without hindrances, and so on. This is the hallmark of Uses and Gratification Theory. The theory summarily states that people adopt media contents that gratify their needs and purposes.

## The Social impact theory

This theory was propounded in 1981, long before the social media existed by Bibb Latane, a renowned Psychologist of Ohio State University. After conducting a series of experiments, Bibb Latané coined the social impact theory to validate his hypothesis about how influence works.

Three factors make up social impact within his theory:

- **Strength:** How important is the influencing group to the target of the influence?
- **Immediacy:** How close in proximity in time is the influencing group to the target of the influence?
- **Number:** How many people are in the influencing group?

Latané's three rules of influence are based on these factors:

- Impact is a function of strength and immediacy and number of sources.
- The greater the number of sources, the greater the impact.
- The most significant impact occurs between 0 sources and 1 source.

## The relevance of the theory to social media

Admitted, the theory was created in a time when there were no social networks. But the principles become vastly more powerful in the context of social media. For example, look at how a network like *Facebook* or *Twitter* applies to Latané's theory.

- Social media provide strength in the form of friends, colleagues, and family: the people you have relationships with and whose opinions matter to you. In most cases, some of those friends are met and the friendship formed through the social media. Such people will not only turn out as supporters for their politician-friends but will also help in spreading their campaign messages by tagging other friends say, on their *Facebook* pages.

> Social media provide immediacy–both temporally and virtually: the people you are connected to are never more than a mobile device away.
> Social media provides enormous opportunity for the number of people in the influencing group. We had earlier noted that politics is a game of number. The more people that are attracted into the party, the wider the chances of victory at the polls.

How does this theory apply to political campaign? First, the social media can be used to create more friends. It provides a vast network for the expansion of friendship. In other words, campaign team. The number of friends, fans or supporters is what gives strength to any Political party and popularity to any politician. Furthermore, you can have an impact on how deeply embedded you are in your audience's/ supporters community. The more people who are aware of your campaign, the more deeply you are entrenched in that community, and the more impact you will have by way of the third part of Latané's theory.

## Methodology

According to Onwukwe (2011), survey research is concerned with the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting certain conditions, beliefs, attitudes, etc. The purpose is usually to describe systematically the facts, qualities or characteristics of a given population, events or areas of interest concerning the problem under investigation.

The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. Four (4) questions were given to assess the role of the social media during the 2015 presidential campaign in Nigeria. One hundred and seventy (170) copies of the questionnaires were distributed to students, some of who also volunteered in the distribution. One hundred and sixty (160) copies were successful returned. The researcher also participated in the distribution and collection of the said instruments.

**Table 1.The social media were used to campaign ahead of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria**

| Opinion | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|---------|--------------------|------------|
| SA | 70 | 43.8% |
| A | 40 | 25 % |
| SD | 5 | 3% |
| D | 20 | 12.5% |
| N | 25 | 15.7% |
| **Total** | **160** | **100%** |

Source: Field Survey, 2018

The table shows that averages of 43.8% of the respondents under study strongly agreed. Those that agreed with the concept were 25%. While an average of 15.7% was neutral respondents 3% strongly disagreed. Meanwhile, 12.5% of the respondents disagreed.

**Table 2.The social media were used to informed and update the people on political happenings during the campaign ahead of 2015 presidential election**

| Opinion | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|---------|--------------------|-----------|
| SA | 35 | 21.8% |
| A | 80 | 50% |
| SD | 10 | 6.2% |
| D | 5 | 3.2% |
| N | 30 | 18.8% |
| **Total** | **160** | **100%** |

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

The averages of 50% of the respondents agreed. Those that strongly agreed were 21.8%. While averages of 18.8% were neutral, those that strongly disagreed were 6.2% and 3.2% of the respondent disagreed.

**Table 3.The Social media influenced the outcome of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria**

| Opinion | No. of Respondents | Percentage |
|---------|--------------------|-----------|
| SA | 20 | 12.5% |
| A | 50 | 31.3% |
| SD | 15 | 9.3% |
| D | 5 | 3.1% |
| N | 70 | 43.8% |
| **Total** | **160** | **100%** |

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

This table indicates that 43.8% of the respondents under study assumed a neutral stand. Those with an average percentage of 31.3% agreed, those who strongly agreed among the respondents 12.5% that Social media influenced the outcome of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria and strongly disagreed 9.3% and disagreed, 3.1%.

## Discussion of Findings

### Answer to the Research Question

**Research Question One: What role did the social media play during the campaign, to the build-up of the presidential election in Nigeria?**

In the course of the research, data were gathered, presented and analyzed. From the study, it was apparent that the social media played both positive and negative roles during the 2015 presidential campaign in Nigeria.

## Positive Roles

> ### Social media as sources of information

Based on the data collected from the field, it was obvious that the usage of the social media was for greater access to information. (Rosey 2011), observed that social media provides greater access to information and information sources. In other words, the social media played a vital role of informing the people about the politician (presidential aspirants), political parties as well as the scheme of things in the polity during the campaign to the build-up of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria.

Table 1 expands our scope of understanding of the role of the social media as a source of information during the 2015 presidential campaign by revealing that out of the 160 respondents of this study to whom 70 made available their data, The table shows that averages of 43.8% of the respondents under study strongly agreed. Those that agreed with the concept were 25%. that the social media were used to inform and update the electorate on political happenings during the 2015 presidential campaign in Nigeria.

> ### Social Media As a platforms for public Debate and Discourse

A lot of people learn and get information on certain subject matters from public debates and discourse.

Though it is pertinent to advise that one needs to apply caution in this regard as (Brogan 2012) warns, the nature of the use of social media can be questionable since it is a matter of engagement.

> ### Social media as platform for political campaign

Noted for its low cost, high speed and very wide reach, the social media were effectively utilized for political campaign by both the politician and their supporters. Besides, Johnson (2017) states that Muhammadu Buhari, a presidential candidate of All Progressive Congress in the 2015 election, actively used his twitter account(@ThisisBuhari) to campaign and his tweets which were personally drafted by him attracted thousands of followers who engaged him in conversations.

All of the stated positive roles of the social media underscore the importance of the social media during electioneering campaign in recent times. In view of this, both the politicians and electorate subscribe to the social media during political campaigns ahead of elections because they fulfill their needs. This highlights the relevance of the Uses and Gratification theory.

## Negative Roles

➢ **Social Media As a Misleading Source of Information**

Payne (2001) accepts that though new technologies permit us to communicate with more people, the world has been made smaller, communication more rapid, and access easiest, it has created a new set of problems and new issues.

Admitted, anyone can post anything on social media platform. This is the reason some people are careful not to believe every message they read on their social media platforms like *facebook* and *twitter* which are the focus of this study. If you get your news from social media, as most Americans do, you are exposed to a daily dose of hoaxes, rumours, conspiracy theories, and misleading news. When it is all mixed in with reliable information from honest sources, the truth can be very hard to discern.

The social media an observer say, though had helped in democratizing information during the 2015 presidential campaign but would also go down as one that had the most unethical campaign messages Taiwo (2015).

In line with the thesis of the uses and gratification theory, people adopted the social media during the presidential campaign/election era, to fulfill their need for information. People need information to become aware of what is happening around them. The social media platforms have proved effective in this regard. Though it is obvious that some people use the social media for negative reasons, the positive sides can and should never be ruled out. Many people as discovered in the study subscribed to the social media for political news, updates and information about the political process at the time. Such information was helpful for decision taking and awareness about the electoral process. Information is key to the success of any electoral system in any part of the world. Every organization needs information to fulfill its mandate to its public. During that time, a case of underage voting was discovered, the suspect snapped with phone camera and the picture went viral in a matter of minutes which provoked INEC quick intervention and investigation.

In other words, individuals and organizations in order to gratify their need for information and advocacy did use the social media. This points to the relevance of the Uses and Gratification theory in this regard.

The social impact theory also played out as the impact of the social media was felt in the number of people who were active on the *facebook* and *twitter* platforms. Number is a vital factor of the social impact theory and remains a great strength for politicians and political parties who thrive and win elections on numbers. The numerical strength of Nigerian youths, who access the social media more often that the adults, was vital enough to determine who wins the presidential election at that time, in Nigeria.

**Research Question Two: What extent did the social media influenced the outcome of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria?**

Table 2 reflects that social media were used to informed and update the people on political happenings during the campaign ahead of 2015 presidential election. And the analysis shows that, out of 160 who responded on the questionnaire, about an averages of 50% of the respondents agreed. Social media were used to informed and update the people on political happenings during the campaign ahead of 2015 presidential election. Those that strongly agreed were 21.8%. This corresponds with (Careless, 2012, p.12) view that social media provide the opportunity for people to interact online effectively.

The All Progressive Congress (APC) understood early enough the need to involve the youths of Nigeria. Prior to the election the presidential and vice presidential candidate of the party, Muhammadu Buhari and Yemi Osibanjo respectively, opened *twitter* accounts and made their presence known on social media in which they engaged directly with the young people. But Goodluck Jonathan, the presidential candidate of the People Democratic party who had an official twitter account abandoned it during the campaign; Johnson (2017).

With a landslide history, Muhammadu Buhari scored 54% of 29 million votes cast while Goodluck Jonathan, then president had 45%. The former was declared the winner of the most keenly contested poll.

This implies that social media really influenced the outcome of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. Social media does not win elections. Yet, it moulded opinions, helped created viral campaigns, checkmated irregularities and locked down results Taiwo (2015). The social media are also capable of influencing a politician's identity, for good or bad. Media content can influence a candidate's identity as politicians have used both traditional and new media to create a public image (Mughan, 2000).

The numeric strength which the social media provide by creating more contacts of electorate for politicians and political parties magnify the relevance of the Social Impact theory in this regard. Recall that one of the key aspects of this theory is number.

The politicians and the political parties also used the social media for engagements. This went a long way to gratify their need of discussing and selling their manifestoes, propose programmes, policies and projects to woo more electorate on their side. If the social media offered no benefit, politicians would not use them. This explains the main concept of the uses and gratification theory- people only subscribe to the media that gratify their needs. To a large extent, the social media were so used by politicians and political parties to influence the outcome of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria.

**Research Question Three: Why did politicians and their supporters opt for the social media especially,** *Facebook* **and** *Twitter* **for their campaigns?**

Table 3 indicate that out of the 160 respondents of this study, about This table indicates that 43.8% of the respondents under study assumed a neutral stand. Those with an average percentage of 31.3% agreed, those who strongly agreed among the respondents 12.5% were with the view that Social media influenced the outcome of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria.

This therefore, implies that, there is a high level of satisfaction derived by both the politicians and the electorate in using *Facebook* and *Twitter*. This is the core of the uses and Gratification theory. According to the theory, individual attention to media contents and the uses the media content is relative to the needs and the purpose for which they said individuals is inclined to such is the case with the social media. Those who indulge in social media interactions will certainly become more and more attracted and addicted to it, because of the gratifications they derive. Specifically, *Facebook* and *Twitter* meet politicians and electorate desire to communicate easily, speedily and more effectively. These days, more and more politicians use platform such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* to share their views with the public Atkinson (2017).

The immediacy the social media platforms offer especially, *facebook* and *twitter* underline one of the key aspects of the social impact theory. Posts on *facebook* on tweets on twitter handles get immediate feedback. This makes interaction engaging, dynamic and progressive.

## Conclusion

The findings reveal that social media played both positive and negative roles during the 2015 presidential campaigns in Nigeria, determined the outcome of the 2015 presidential election in the sense that, electorate preferred and voted for the candidate who campaigned and interacted with them on social media especially, *Facebook* and *Twitter*. The result also showed that electorate believed the contents of *Facebook* and *Twitter* more than what the general public say. Similarly, the social media democratized information. The people depended so much on the social media for information and news update during the campaigns and eventually, the election. Good as it may be, there was also a dangerous dimension to it as people so believed the comments they read on social media without cross-checking the facts. For the electorate, the usage of the social media was for greater access to information. Moreover, it was obvious in the study that the social media also engaged people in public debates and discourse.

The research also found out that the social media were characterized with abuses, foul languages, hate speeches, propaganda, and attack on personalities by both the Politicians and their supporters. The social media were also seen as drivers of wrong information, wrong spellings, inaccurate grammar and other defects of proper communication. Some of the

messages that were posted during the campaigns as the study revealed, were anonymous and could not be traced to a source.

i.   The social media played both positive and negative roles during the presidential campaign ahead of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria.
ii.  That in contemporary time, the social media can determine the outcome of any election considering the heavy reliance of people on social media to meet their information, educational, entertainment and other needs.
iii. That a lot can be achieved with the use of the social media if its content is being censored, considering its huge benefits of low cost, high speed and wide reach.

## Recommendations

1.  In order to restrain abuses, unguarded utterances, spread of propaganda, wrong information, attacks on personalities and other negative uses of the social media, serious public sensitization and awareness should be carried out by governments of various countries of the world and there should be legislations or laws enacted to regulate the use of the social media.
2.  Politicians and their supporters should be properly guided in their choice of words and the messages they communicate to the people during political campaigns and elections.
3.  Schools and institutions of learning at all levels should incorporate technology education or social media use into their curriculum to help the students who are future leaders on how to handle the applications and the challenges associated with them.
4.  Politicians should deploy the social media for their campaigns considering its low    cost and wide reach as compared to the main stream media.

Finally, one will recommend that further research into this area should focus on the comparative assessment of utilization of social and mainstream media for electioneering campaign in recent times.

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