THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY GENERAL MUHAMMADU BUHARI AND GOODLUCK EBELE JONATHAN IN THE 2015 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS

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ABSTRACT
Starting from 2011, the Nigerian political landscape has witnessed a remarkable use of social media for political campaigns. In 2015, this trend increased where both presidential candidates Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and General Muhammadu Buhari now (President Muhammadu Buhari} of the opposition party utilised social media platform to reach out to voters. Facebook groups were created twitter handles and blogs became avenues for sharing political campaign information and programmes. This paper attempts to look at issues discussed by the two presidential candidates on social media. The paper use content analysis to analyse their statuses and updates on both Facebook and Twitter to see the issues that dominated their campaigns and the pattern of the use of social media by the two leading presidential candidates during the 2015 elections campaign. Findings show that both candidates utilised Facebook and Twitter in their campaigns. The issue that dominated the campaigns was security, however, their personal information and feelings formed part of the campaign.

Introduction
Increase access to internet-ready smart phones and the proliferation of internet and its accessibility have increased the use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube for political campaigns in Nigeria's 2015 General Elections. Social media became a vibrant tool that was used to engage voters during the election campaigns. In many parts of the world today, individuals, groups, organizations and even nations are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by social media and other e-media platforms to mobilize millions of people to support and advance their course. In the political sphere, it has become a veritable tool for mobilizing citizens towards active participation in the political process and democratic projects.

According to Eddings (2015), the 2015 election campaigns were decided, dominated and directed by social media. It was a game changer and it served as watchdog in keeping the integrity of the process. Even though social media does not win elections, but it moulds opinion, helps create viral campaigns, checkmates irregularities, locks down results. This was evident during the campaigns, the elections and when the Independent National Electoral Commission finally announced the results. Because of its participatory power and immediacy, it eliminated the oligarchy of the conventional media and the old non-interactive internet (Fauad, 2011) making it democratic. Unlike the traditional or conventional media where the contents were reckless, inaccurate and irresponsible (Eddings, 2015), social media platforms were seen as media in the hands of people. They give the electorate the chance to interact with both presidential candidates directly. Consequently, electorates received their campaign messages directly. This paper is an attempt to examine how the two candidates, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Alhaji Muhammadu Buhari use of social media for their political campaigns in the Nigerian 2015 General Elections.

Statement of the Problem

There was an increasing interest in the study of the use of social media for political campaigns in Nigeria since the general elections of 2011. This followed the 2008 presidential elections in the United States of America. According to Abubakar (2011:99), Nigerian politicians, especially the three leading presidential candidates in the 2011 elections were visible on social media expressing "their political manifestoes on pressing issues". This study focused on examining the emergence of social media in enhancing citizen participation and involvement in the democratic process. In the 2015 elections, politicians at various levels use the opportunity offered by the social media - low cost and immediacy to reach their supporters.

Thus, this study tries to analyse the use of social media for the campaign by the two main presidential candidates in 2015 presidential elections using Facebook and twitter. The paper looks at the issues that occupied their Facebook and twitter space. It assesses the information posted by the candidates and issues discussed on their pages. There were complaints in the conventional media on the pattern the campaigns took with mudsling from the supporters of the two candidates, therefore, their social media platform are analysed to examine what they post on the pages and see the pattern.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to analyse the use of social media by the two leading presidential candidates in the Nigeria's 2015 elections in terms of volume and frequency. By specifically

1. Exploring the utilization of social media by the candidate of PDF, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and APC candidate, Muhammadu Buhari in the 2015 presidential campaigns;
2. Find out how the issues were discussed during the 2015 presidential campaigns by Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari.

Social Media and Political Campaigns

The use of social media in Nigeria gained popular acceptance in 2008-2010 (Olaiton, 2014). Studies have shown that when Nigerians go online, they spend much of their time on social media. Young people are mostly the users of social media, including social networks and SMS text messaging. Young (2011) reports that, when young people access mainstream media, they are most likely to do so via online editions. This means that the traditional media communication strategies aimed at increasing citizen participation in elections are increasingly going to miss those age groups with the lowest participation levels. These made politicians to look for new ways to engage voters and address their concern in what researchers refer to as the 'democratic deficit' (Couldry, 2010; Curran, 2011).

Political campaigns have gone through three or four stages in Nigeria and today, political scientists and media scholars have understood that the arrival of new technologies have prompted a shift or changes in the way campaigns are conducted. As in other democracies around the world, political campaigns have moved from campaign rallies stage, radio and television campaigns stages, to the digital political campaigns. The campaign rallies and newspaper campaigns were characterise by strong ties between parties and voters. Communication tended to be through the party controlled newspapers, mass rallies and canvassing and it was aimed mostly towards mobilizing voters. The parties and the politicians

were in charge of the campaign, and there was minimal use of agencies and consultants (Karlsen, 2010).Television on the other hand introduced a new type of election campaign referred to as the second stage. Specialist campaign committees laid careful campaign preparations long in advance of the election. With television almost everyone consumed the same news, thus the number of people who received political information increased considerably.

However, the advent of social media has changed politics and election campaigns all over the world. From the biggest democracy in the world - India to United States and Nigeria, politicians are using social media for election campaigns. They mobilise supporters through social media or try to convince the uncommitted or undecided to vote for them. For instance, the Indian 2014 parliamentary elections saw all political parties and candidates extensively utilizing the social media in order to mobilize voters (Narasimhamurthy, 2014). In Australia, there was an increase in the use of social media for political campaigns in 2007, 2010 and 2013 (Macnamara & Kenning, 2013). The trend of using social media for political campaign in Nigeria was remarkable especially in 2011. This is because of the opportunities offered by social media to connect with voters. The opportunity to enjoy user-to-user interaction distinguishes social media from the traditional media which is characterized by top-down news dissemination arrangement (Clark and Aufderheide 2009). Another attribute of the social media which distinguishes it from the traditional media is the choice it accords to its users. Choice enables people to access the information they like to learn about through the social media, eliminating the gatekeeper role of traditional media.

In 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan had nearly 500,000 people who liked and followed what he was doing on his Facebook page. He had made enormous use of the Internet in several policy processes. He informed, consulted, responded to questions, reported, evaluated, and even conducted polls to measure his popularity using his Twitter handle and Facebook page. The average citizen feedback to his posts revolved around 2000. And on his twitter handle ©JGoodlucktweets he acquired 7000 followers. By 2015, the followership had grown to over 90,OOO.His main challenger, Muhammadu Buhari, became visible on social media during the 2015 presidential campaigns and his Facebook page had over 700 thousand likes and his Twitter handle had more than 179, 000 followers.

Social Media Tools and 2015 Presidential Campaign in Nigeria

Social media encompass a range of information and communication technologies used for sharing information and opinions, often through explicit connections with other people or groups. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:59) defined social media as "a group 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". They 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. Central to the understanding social media are participation and contribution. The ability to participate and contribute in an interactive way is what differentiates social media and other forms of mass media. According to Fuchs (2014), social media, specifically Twitter, has open a new space for political communication.

All over the world politicians have seen the value of social media for mobilisation and reach therefore utilise it for political campaigns. In the view of some scholars (Abubakar, 2012; Nanyelugo & Nwafor, 2013), one of the main changes in Nigeria's 2015 Presidential election was the use of social media's online capabilities by the leading presidential candidates to communicate to the electorates. The events before, during and after the elections has completely changed. There is shift from the old order where campaigns were "all about power moguls and media brokers" (Omojuwa, 2014). The social media has widened the space for all the political candidates, their supporters and the society at large by"granting many people the chance to participate actively and get involved in the political sphere by adding their voices in a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral manner on issues of natural, social, economic and political relevance" (Abubakar, 2011:111).

Social media's democratic potential is made possible given the limited cost of Internet communication, and the decentralized and interactive characteristics of the medium. This led to a more open and hence more democratic exchange of political information and political participation (Vissers & Stole, 2012).When a candidate is unable to amass reach using traditional media, social media campaigns can make up lost ground. Using Facebook or Twitter, for example, a politician could use other individuals with large social followings to share a political message that serves as his or her campaign ad. A candidate can send a message about an upcoming event, and encourage supporters to spread the message so that others will attend.

However, critics argue that these online activities are too easy, simple, not costly enough, and just address certain concerns with a mouse click thus insinuating the idea that important political problems have been addressed and solved (Gladwell, 2010; Barney, 2010). They are also being criticised for their privacy issues, constraints of their software, and the exploitation of user generated content (Stumpel, 2010).

Internet use in Nigeria has increased from 24 million users in 2009 to 48,366,179 in 2013 (Treggon, 2013), Over 3 million were on Facebook in 2011, while 60,000 were on Twitter (Asuni& Farris, 2011). By 2014, the figure increased to 11 million users of Facebook and more than 2 million users of twitter. A study in 2011 by Portland Communications, a Kenyan-based public relations agency and Tweet minster a media platform, says Nigerians are the third most active Twitter users in Africa.

Theoretical Framework

The theory used for this study is the Public Sphere theory. The theory was propounded by Jurgen Herbamas in 1962 to describe the realm of social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed, where access is guaranteed to all citizens. Herbamas (1989) argues that the public sphere is a space where individuals assemble to form a body, where everyone in the gathering has freedom of assembly and association and discussions are public, not restricted by state bureaucracy to discuss matters of public interest. He explains further that:

> "A domain of our social life where such a thing as public opinion can be formed [where] citizens . . . deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion . . . [to] express and publicize their views". (Habermas, 1997:105)

The advent of the internet has given citizens more opportunity to "express and publish their opinions about matters of general interest" (Habermas, 1964:49). Nowhere this is guaranteed like the social media, which "serve as an arena where citizens come together, exchange opinions regarding public affairs". Social media in this sense are seen as platforms that expand the discursive and public spheres in liberal democracies (Mare, 2016).

Comparing Social Media and its applications in facilitating the modern day public sphere, the advocates of this theory see the internet as a means for the expansion of citizen deliberation leading to the formation of rational public opinion. Drawing from Habermas (1962), these scholars argue that public sphere discourse has technological orientations to it (Mutsvairo, 2016). Some studies have even shown that the two work hand-in-hand (Kedzi, 1997; Best and Wade,2009).The public sphere reveals the "intimate connection between a web of free, informal personal communications and the foundations of democratic society"(Rheingold, 2007), and this idea of the Public Sphere as a place for debate provides researchers with a concept that helps explain the importance of social media studies.

Method

Content analysis was used as a research method in this study. It is a means of sorting messages into different categories according to some set of classification criteria (Rosenberry and Vicker, 2009). The methodology was an effective way of analysing Twitter and Facebook user accounts, sorting through the user's mass amounts of posts, and organizing them in a clear, concise manner. The aim of using a content analysis approach in this paper was to attain an understanding of the phenomenon by looking at the underlying concepts or categories describing the phenomenon (Elo and Kyngas, 2007). It is one of efficient coding methodology in mass media research that allows for a swift analysis of information.

The study used Facebook groups and pages as well as Twitter handle of the two leading Presidential candidates in the 2015 General Elections Alhaji Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress and Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party. The two social networking sites are considered the most popular in Nigeria and used by most politicians to advance their programmes. The survey was conducted using the posts and updates on the pages of these leading Presidential candidates from January - March 2015. This is the peak of the political campaigns.

The researcher identified fifty groups, Facebook pages and Twitter handles opened to promote the presidential ambition of the two candidates. However, out of these, only 17 Facebook pages and groups for each candidate and 4 Twitter handles were analysed. The groups and pages were selected using multi-stage random sampling by dividing the groups into clusters. Those groups with 1000 followers, 1000+ and handles, pages and groups with more than 10000 followers were clustered. The groups were selected by numbering all the groups identified in the clusters and selecting four groups in each of the clusters randomly and one group was added to each cluster to make it 17. The same procedure was used to select the handles in twitter.

Results of the Study

The study focused on exploring the utilisation of social media by the two leading Presidential candidates in Nigeria's 2015 General Elections on Facebook and Twitter and the issues discussed by the two candidates. The major issues identified by this paper that dominated the 2015 presidential campaign on twitter and Facebook were security, infrastructural development, personality attack and attack on opponent's policies. The period covered the last four weeks of the 2015 Presidential campaign i.e. from 1st March, 2015 to 27th March, 2015. Overall, we recorded 9,907 tweets for People's Democratic Party candidate Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ) during the period and 10,321 tweets for All Progressives Congress, General Muhammadu Buhari(GMB).

Table I: Visibility of the Presidential candidates on twitter and issues discussed7

Politician	**GEJ**	**(%)**	**GMB**	**(%)**
Party	PDP		APC	
No. Of tweets	9,907		10,321	
Coding Categories				
Security	2,678	27%	3,965	38.4%
Infrastructural Development	3,790	38%	2,645	25.6%
Attack on Opponent	814	8.2%	516	5%
Attack on Opponent's policy	147	1.4%	984	10%
Personal Information or feelings	2,478	25%	2,211	21.4%

The above table tries to look at the number of tweets each candidate posted in the various groups analysed, which gave an idea of their utilisation of social media for the campaigns. It also loos at the issues discussed by the candidates. Four Twitter handles each for the two leading Presidential candidates were analysed. These are handles that formed the group of handles created for that purpose and followed by more than 1000 people. During the period, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the candidate for the Peoples' Democratic Party had a total of 9,907 tweets over the period under study, while his biggest challenger, Muhammadu Buhari tweeted 10,321 times. Issue of security, personal information and feelings were what dominated their tweets during the period under study. Buhari talked more on security with 38.4% above his rival with 27% of their total conversations. But we observed that most personal attacks were not posted by the candidates themselves but by supporters. For instance:



But since it was allowed on the timelines, it means it got their endorsements. One can see clearly also how their personal information and feelings dominated the campaigns. But it is clear attacks on personality of the candidates formed just 8.2% of the conversation on GEJ handle, while it took just 5% of Buhari's conversation.

Table II: Visibility of the Presidential candidates on Facebook and issues discussed

Politician	GEJ	(%)	GMB	(%)
Party	PDP		APC	
No. Of updates	12,889		11,160	
Coding Categories				
Security	2,978	23.1%	4,268	38.2%
Infrastructural Development	4,028	31%	2,376	21.2%
Attack on Opponent	1,007	7.8%	643	5.7%
Attack on Opponent's policy	197	1.5%	997	8.9%
Personal Information or feelings	4,679	36.3%	2,876	25.8%

The situation of Facebook is slightly different, especially in terms of posts on infrastructural development. Only personal information and feelings (36.3%) had more posts than infrastructural development (31%). However, there were more personal attack from the GEJ camp on Facebook (7.8%) compared to Buhari's (5.7%).

Discussions

The objective of this paper is to explore the utilisation of social media by Nigeria's Presidential candidate in the 2015 elections. The candidate of PDP, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and APC candidate, Muhammadu Buhari. The paper examined the issues discussed by the two candidates on the social media. The paper did that by looking at the issues raised by each of the candidates on their Twitter and Facebook pages from January - March 2015. Content analysis was employed as a the method of data analysis.

The major issues identified by the paper which dominated the social media pages within the period under study were security, infrastructural development, personality attack, and attack on opponent's policy. The findings show that both candidates utilised the social media in their campaigns, considering the number of post GEJ 9,907 and GMB 10, 321 tweets between the period and over 10,000 Facebook post. This is good especially for an opposition candidate, who has limited resources given the limited cost of Internet communication, and the decentralized and interactive characteristics of the medium. Unlike conventional media, where information passes through gatekeepers, social media offer candidates free access to transmit information to wide audiences.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, the paper therefore concludes that both the PDF and APC Presidential candidates in the 2015 General Elections utilised the Social Media in their campaigns. From the findings, security issue was central to the campaigns, however, the Presidential candidates' personal information and feelings dominated both the Facebook and Twitter pages. The paper therefore recommends that political candidates in Nigeria should use the social media to connect to young voters and advance their political campaign programmes. Further studies should be conducted to see the connection between candidates' social media campaign and voters' decision about electing a particular candidate.

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