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Voters' Assessment of Social Media Use for 2015 Electioneering Campaigns by the two Leading Political Parties in Nigeria

Edegoh, Leo O.N.
Department of Mass Communication
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli,
Anambra State, Nigeria
Phone: +2348062996196
E-mail: edegohleo@yahoo.com

Anunike, Ogonna W.
Department of Mass Communication,
Federal Polytechnic, Oko,
Anambra State, Nigeria
Phone: +2348134644488
E-mail: ogoanunike@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examined voters' assessment of social media use for the 2015 electioneering campaigns by the two leading political parties in Nigeria. The major objectives of the study were to determine the extent to which the two leading political parties in Nigeria (and their candidates) made use of the social

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media for their electioneering campaign activities and to ascertain the specific activities they purveyed through the social media. The study was anchored on the Agenda-setting theory of the mass media, adopted quantitative research approach, surveyed 105 respondents purposively drawn from Awka, Onitsha and Nnewi (the three main urban towns in Anambra State), and used the questionnaire as instrument of data collection. The percentage method was also used to analyse data. Findings of the study show that the two leading political parties in Nigeria did not use the social media much in the electioneering campaigns of the 2015 elections, that the candidates of the two leading political parties utilised the social media more than candidates of other political parties in the election, and that the activities they disseminated in the social media bordered mainly on announcement of party flag bearers, accusations and counter accusations of electoral fraud being strategised by the other political party or INEC's connivance with one party or the other to rig the election. The paper concluded that the two leading political parties scored below average in the use of the social media in the 2015 electioneering campaigns, though, their candidates performed better than candidates of the other political parties. The researchers recommended more proactive use of the social media platforms by the leading political parties and all registered parties in Nigeria.

Keywords: Voters, Assessment, Social Media, Use, 2015, Electioneering. Campaigns, Political parties, Anambra State, Nigeria

Introduction and Justification for the Study

The 21st century information and communication technologies have brought about significant revolution that has opened – up new media platforms unmatched in history in terms of interconnectivity, interactivity, multiplicity and accessibility (Mc Quail, 2005, cited in Edegoh and Samson, 2014, p. 203). As noted by Mojeed-Sanni (2015) social media are the collection of online communicators channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration: Mojeed-Sanni (2015) further avers that among the different types of social media presently used in social interaction include websites and applications dedicated to forums, micro-blogging, social networking, social book-marking, social curator, and wikis.

Social media are websites and applications that enable people to not only create but also share content or to participate in social networking. They are computer mediated tools that enable users to create, share or exchange

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information, ideas and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) assert that social media are 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. As noted by Kietzman and Hernkens (2011) social networking platforms depend on mobile and web-based techniques to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content.

The information and communication technologies available for everyday communication interaction of humans have so contracted our world that the world has become far less a global village (to borrow Marshal McLuhan's mantra) and has metamorphosed into a global family. Mojeed-Sanni (2015) notes that through the social media the world has moved from being a global village to a global parlour, wherein from the corners of a large room, far reaching mobilisation, decisions and annihilation are carried out re-vibrating national and global consequences.

Many social media platforms exist globally for communication and information sharing activities of mankind. These include Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, 2go, My Space, YouTube, Wikipedia, Google+, Linkedln, Ning, Flickr, StumbleUpon and Reddit, to name a few. A careful look at the Nigerian internet world shows that Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, 2go, YouTube, Google+, Path and Linkedln are the most popular (Mojeed-Sanni, 2015). These social media platforms are utilised by different individuals and organisations for several purposes - business, academic, social, political, religious, and a host of others.

Political parties and candidates, the world over, carry out their political activities through different forums and platforms such as the use of modern media of communication (radio, television, newspaper and magazine), and the use of political campaign rallies to disseminate all kinds of information to electorates as a way of swaying voters' voting decision to their favour. The modern media have been in use for all types of political communicating for a long time and have been adjudged effective in communicating political ideas, issues, candidates, manifesto, etc., to the intended audience. However, the advent of the social media has introduced a new dimension to political communication wherein electioneering campaigns and scouting for votes by

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political office-seekers and political parties are done by utilising the vast opportunities provided by the social media to not only register their political interest and ambition but also persuasively appeal to be voted for.

The political theatre for most successful electioneering campaigns in today's world is located in the social media and most electoral battles, nowadays, are fought and won through the social media. Access to social media is easy and could be done anywhere, in ones' office, home, while waiting in the car, in the comfort of people's bedroom, etc., using smart phones, laptops, and other forms of communication devices at the disposal of people (Edegoh and Samson, 2014). With these devices voters could access any candidate that is online and obtain the needed information about the candidate.

The Nigerian 2015 general elections witnessed so many political parties participating in what has been adjudged as free and fair elections (not minding minor hitches here and there). Nigeria practices multi-party system. However, two political parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) were and are still the leading political parties in Nigeria in terms of national outlook, availability of party structure in all states of the Federation, number of party card-carrying members, number of party members occupying elective offices in the land, such as the senators, members of the House of Representative, state governors, etc. These two political parties went into the 2015 elections as the super parties, as the parties to beat while all other political parties in the land were seen as underdogs.

The extent of the utilisation of social media in the 2015 electioneering campaigns by the PDP and APC, as political institutions with the primary responsibility of participating in and winning elections form the thrust of this study. The study is important in that it investigated electioneering campaign activities of political parties in Nigeria with a view to ascertaining how the major political parties performed in their use of social media platforms in 2015 general elections, as it is often said that election is a major test of a nation's democracy.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objectives of the study were to ascertain the extent to which the two leading political parties in Nigeria (and their candidates) used the social media for their 2015 electioneering campaign activities and to determine the

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specific activities they purveyed through the social media. The specific objectives of the paper were to:

i. Ascertain the extent to which the two leading political parties in Nigeria and their candidates used the social media for their electioneering campaign activities.
ii. Determine the social media platforms that the two leading political parties and their candidates mostly used.
iii. Find out the specific activities that they purveyed through the social media.
iv. Assess voters' level of confidence in the political messages purveyed through the social media by the two leading political parties.

Research Questions

In line with the objectives raised, the following questions were posed to guide the conduct of the study:

i. What is the extent to which the two leading political parties in Nigeria and their candidates used the social media for their electioneering campaign activities?
ii. What social media platforms do the two leading political parties and their candidates mostly used?
iii. What are the specific activities they purveyed through the social media?
iv. What is the level of confidence of the voters in the political messages purveyed through the social media by the two leading political parties?

Theoretical Underpinning

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

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writing in 1972 that in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality (Asemah, 2011; Edegoh and Asemah, 2014).

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

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

Review of Literature

a. Conceptualising Electioneering Campaign

As noted by Asemah, Nwamuo and Edegoh (2014) a political campaign is an organised effort which seeks to influence the decision making process within a specific group. In political or electoral campaigns representatives are chosen or referendums are decided. In modern politics, the highest profile political campaigns are focused on candidates for the head of state or head of government, usually a President or Prime Minister. The campaign messages often contain the issues that the candidate intends to share with the electorates. The messages which often centre on policy issues, summarise the main ideas of the campaign, and are often frequently repeated to create a lasting impression in the minds of voters (Asemah, Nwamuo and Edegoh, 2014). Most campaign messages are detailed in order to attract the largest number of voters possible.

Electioneering campaign is the practical manifestation of ‘politicking’ in the electoral process (Okoye, 1996, cited in Okoli and Iortyer, 2014). It involves an effort to persuade or dissuade prospective voters in an attempt to gain partisan advantage in the electoral process (Bassey, 2013). The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) (2014), otherwise known as the McCain-Feingold law defines electioneering communications as

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- broadcast ads (television and radio)
- airing within 30 days of a primary election or 60 days of a general election
- that mention or refer to a federal candidate
- and are aimed at 50,000 or more members of the electorate of the office the candidate is seeking

It therefore implies that electioneering campaign like election itself is highly regulated in most democracies in the world. Chile (2011, p.151) notes that campaigns refer to "a systematic effort in coordinating all relevant activities over a long period of time, to obtain a specific all-encompassing objective". In agreement with this position, Okoli and Iortyer (2014, p.1) brilliantly opine that electioneering campaigns mean "the sum total of activities by which politically interested actors seek to canvass and win votes for a preferred candidate or political party. It also involves the partisan activities of the opposition party or parties dedicated towards wrestling power from the incumbent party through strategic campaigns and mobilisation". This means that electioneering campaign has to do with political parties engaging in purposeful activities geared towards winning both the confidence and votes of voters in an election.

Brian (2009) contends that "campaigns are the purchase and use of advertising space, paid for advertisements or commercial rates in order to transmit political messages to a mass audience" (as cited in Alom, 2013, p. 155). The point that is being made here is that political campaigns are organised to sell political candidates and political parties to the electorates. The overriding objective of all electioneering campaigns is to win the loyalty and support of the largest number of voters possible so that they will ultimately vote that candidate or political party campaigning in an election. So, as Alom (2013) rightly observes electioneering campaign provides political parties and candidates with the avenue to present to the electorate more information about the manifestoes and qualities of candidates, thereby placing them in a better position to assess the programmes of the parties and candidates and hence make a better choice**.**

b. Social Media and Electioneering Campaigns

The social media are both accessible and inexpensive to all users, be they, in the case of electioneering campaign, the candidate that will contest in an election or the electorates. This explains why Dhuraj (2013) opines that

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social media refer to the many relatively inexpensive and widely accessible electronic tools that enable any one to publish and access information, collaborate on a common effort, or build relationships. These platforms provide 24hours access to anyone who owns an account with any of the many social networking sites. The use of social media to scout for votes is much more inexpensive compared with using newspapers or the electronic media of television or radio since the candidate does not need to pay a dime to reach his/her supporters. Social media could also be accessed at anytime and anywhere using all kinds of hand-held devices at the disposal of users of internet such as smart phones. It is also very easy for the candidate to respond to queries from political followers as quickly as possible using social media than any other media. Social media are therefore much more useful to politicians for electioneering campaign purposes in terms of reach, cost, accessibility, convenience, and so forth. However, there is a large body of research-based evidence that social media are particularly suited for reaching young people especially in political communication; that social media may not be effective in reaching other categories of people in a given national population (Essential Media Poll 2012; Chen and Vromen, 2012).

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

The prominent position which social media is currently occupying among media of electioneering campaigns was a product of the 2008 presidential election of the United States of America in which Barrack Obama took the world by surprise through effective use of social media platforms for his political campaigns. Since then social media took the centre stage in political

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campaign activities. Ufen (2014) brilliantly identifies the three stages of campaigning and their features that could be discerned from the Western world:

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

With the emergence of social media and their revolutionary impact on electioneering campaign and other forms of human communication, the metamorphosis is still on. However, one thing is clear; the changing nature of the media of political campaign and, indeed all forms of human social communication has greatly improved.

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c. Related Empirical Studies

Edegoh and Asemah (2014) conducted a study titled *Social media use among students of private universities in Anambra State, Nigera* in which they surveyed 600 students using the questionnaire to find out the most frequently visited social medium by students, among others. Finding of their study revealed that the most visited social medium by students of privately owned universities in Anambra State is Facebook {291(50%)}. Edegoh and Asemah (2014) also reported that other social media used by the students they investigated include Wikipedia {150(26%)}, YouTube {53(9%)}, Twitter {35(6%)}, and Myspace {41(7%)}.

The study of Tsegyu and Danjuma (2014) titled *Impact of social media networks on the academic performance of mass communication students of Ibrahim Babangida university, Lapai Nigeria* which aimed at ascertaining the preferred social media networks of the students investigated reported that the preferred social media networks were Facebook {110(39.3%)}, Twitter {70(25%)}, Google and My Space {35(12.5%)} each, and YouTube {30(10.7%)}.

The outcome of the Essential Media Poll 2012, a study done in Australia, which asked respondents what kinds of sites they visited online and used at least once a week showed that Google was the most popular site: Google – 89%, Facebook – 67%, News websites – 55%, Blogs – 21%, Social and political campaign websites – 18%, Twitter – 15%.

Essential Media also found that Facebook is used more by women (53% daily), those aged 18-24 and 25-34 (82% and 60% daily respectively). Blogs are used more by those aged 25-34 (38% at least once a week), Greens voters (45% at least once a week), and income $1,600+ pw (28% at least once a week). Campaign websites are used more by those aged 25-34 (31% as least once a week), and Greens voters (40% at least once a week). Twitter is used more by that aged18-24 and 25 -34 (24% and 25 respectively at least once a week). The study therefore showed the patterns of social media use based mainly on age group, gender and partisanship, showing that young people, women or a greens voter are important factors in social media use among Australian population.

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Method

This study adopted the survey research method. This research method depends on a sample of respondents drawn from the population and considered representative of that population (Baran, 2009). Survey is the "most appropriate method for gathering and measuring data relating to demographics, attitude, opinion and perception" (Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo and Okpanachi, 2012, p. 109). The study used the survey method of social scientific investigation to elicit the opinion of voters in Anambra State on social media use for the 2015 electioneering campaigns by the two leading political parties in Nigeria.

The population of this study consisted of all the registered, card-carrying voters in Anambra State for the 2015 general elections. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), cited in Salu (2015), Anambra State registered 1,963,173 voters for the 2015 elections. This figure was adopted as the population for this study. However, a manageable sample size of 105 respondents was used because of time constraint. The purposive sampling technique was adopted in order to ensure that only voters that satisfy the criteria of owning an active account with one or more of the major social media networks and were registered, card carrying citizens were selected for study. However, adequate care was taken to ensure that the three senatorial districts in Anambra State (Anambra Central, Anambra North and Anambra South) were equitably represented in the sample. So, Awka (from Anambra Central), Onitsha (from Anambra North) and Nnewi (from Anambra South) were allotted 35 respondents each.

Eighteen-item, multi-choice, close-ended questionnaire was used to collect data. The instrument had two sections; while section A with 6 items was designed to obtain respondents' demographic data, section B with 12 items was designed to generate data to answer the study's research questions. The percentage method and frequency tables were employed as analytical tools.

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Data Presentation

Table 1: Return rate of the questionnaire

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Returned and found usable	100	95.2
Not usable	2	1.9
Not returned	3	2.9
Total	105	100

Table 1 shows that the return rate of the questionnaire was 95% (n =100) while the mortality rate was 5% (n =5). The return rate is higher than the mortality rate. The mortality rate of 5% does not affect the study because it is insignificant compared with the return rate of 95%. Thus, the copies were considered good enough to represent the population. The presentation and analysis of data obtained from the questionnaire was based on the one hundred (100) copies of the questionnaire that was returned and found usable.

Table 2: Sex of respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	60	60
Female	40	40
Total	100	100

Table 2 on sex of the respondents reveal that 60% of the respondents were males and 40% were females. The reason for the disparity in the male-female participants' ratio in the study was because more number of men participate in politics thus, men are more politically enlightened than the women.

Table 3: Age of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 25 years	24	24
26 – 35 years	32	32
36 – 45 years	31	31
46 years and above	13	13
Total	100	100

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Table 3 on the age characteristics of the participants in the study indicate that 32% were aged between 26 – 35 years, 31% were within 36 – 45 years, 24% indicated that they were within 18 – 25 years' category while 13% were in the "46 years and above" age bracket.

Table 4: Respondents' marital status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	62	62
Single	38	38
Total	100	100

Table 4 shows data obtained to establish the marital status of the participants in the study. The table reveals that 62% of the respondents were married while 38% were single. The participants in the study were therefore, made up of more married men and women.

Data in table 5 below on respondents' occupation show that majority of the participants in the study were traders (40%), followed by students (26%), civil servants (18%), the self-employed (8%), the unemployed (5%), and "others" response category (3%). Traders, civil servants and students made up the bulk of participants in the study.

Table 5: Respondents' Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Traders	40	40
Civil Servants	18	18
Students	26	26
Self-employed	8	8
Unemployed	5	5
Others	3	3
Total	100	100

Data on occupational distribution of the respondents indicate that 60% had secondary school training, 23% were trained in tertiary institutions, 10% had primary education training only while 7% were trained beyond first degree. The majority of respondents had post primary school academic training (See table below).

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Table 6: Respondents academic training

Academic training	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	10	10
Secondary school	60	60
Tertiary institution	23	23
Post degree	7	7
Total	100	100

Data on respondents' town of residence show that respondents from Awka and Onitsha were 35 (for each town) while those from Nnewi were 30. This shows that Nnewi had a short fall of 5 respondents due to non-return of questionnaire copies and not filling the instrument as demanded (table 7).

Table 7: Respondents' town of residence

Town	Frequency	Percentage
Awka	35	35
Onitsha	35	35
Nnewi	30	30
Total	100	100

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question One: What is the extent to which the two leading political parties in Nigeria and their candidates use the social media for their electioneering campaign activities?

Table 8: Extent of social media use for electioneering campaigns by the leading parties

Response	PDP	APC		
To a very high extent	18	15	33	(16.5%)
To a high extent	23	20	43	(21.5%)
To a low extent	36	38	74	(37%)
T the two a very low extent	23	27	50	(25%)
Total	100	100		(100%)

In order to answer research question one, respondents were asked to tick two times (one for each party) to indicate their opinion on the extent of social media use by the two leading political parties (PDP and APC) for electioneering

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campaigns of the 2015 general elections, using the variables "to a very high extent", to a high extent", "to a low extent", and "to a very low extent". As could be gleaned from table 8, 37% of the participants indicated that the two leading parties used the social media for electioneering campaigns to a low extent, 25% of the respondents chose "to a very low extent" option, 21.5% of the participants indicated "to a high extent" to the question while 16.5% chose the response option "to a very high extent" as their answer to the question.

The inference that could be made from data in table 8 is that majority of the respondents (62%) believed that the two leading political parties in Nigeria did not utilise the social media to an appreciable extent in the last electioneering campaign period.

Table 9: Extent of social media use by candidates of the two leading political parties

Response	PDP candidates	APC candidates		
To a very high extent	22	21	43	(21.5%)
To a high extent	38	34	72	(36%)
To a low extent	23	25	48	(24%)
To a very low extent	17	20	37	(18.5%)
Total	100	100		(100%)

As shown in the table above, 36% of the participants believed that the candidates of the PDP and APC utilised the social media to a high extent in the electioneering campaigns of the 2015 general elections and 21.5% indicated that the candidates used the social media to a very high extent for the same purpose. However, 24% disagreed, stating that the use of the social media for the stated purpose by the candidates of the two leading parties was to a low extent, and 18.5% felt that the utilisation was to a very low extent.

We could deduce from data in table 9 that the majority of social media users in Anambra State are of the opinion that the candidates of PDP and APC made more use of the social media for political communication in the electioneering period of the 2015 general elections than their political parties did.

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Table 10: Respondents responses on whether PDP and APC candidates made use of the social media more than the candidates of other political parties

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	58	58
No	42	42
Total	100	100

Data in table 10 were obtained to determine whether the candidates of the two leading political parties made use of the social media more than the candidates of other political parties. Data indicate that 58% of the respondents said "Yes" while 42% disagreed by saying "No". By implication, the majority of respondents indicated that candidates of PDP and APC performed better than candidates of other political parties in the use of social media platforms for dissemination of political campaign messages as long as the 2015 electioneering campaigns were the issues.

Research Question Two: What social media platforms do the leading political parties and their candidates mostly use?

Table 11: Social media platforms mostly used

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	31	31
Twitter	26	26
Whatsapp	19	19
2go	10	10
Others	14	14
Total	100	100

Data in table 11 were obtained to answer research question two. As shown in table 11, facebook was the most used social media platform by the two leading political parties and their candidates in the electioneering campaigns of the 2015 general elections (31%), followed closely by Twitter (26%) and Whatsapp (19%). Others were 2go which got 10% and others such as YouTube, Google+, Path, Linkedln, and Revoda, etc, obtained 14%.

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We infer from the answer to research question two that the social media networks mostly used by the leading political parties in Nigeria and their flag bearers are facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and 2go.

Research Question Three: What are the specific activities they purveyed through the social media?

Table 12: Specific activities purveyed

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Announcement of party flag bearers	34	34
Accusations and counter accessions against one another	30	30
Accusations against INEC	24	24
Issue – oriented campaign messages	12	12
Don't know	2	2
Total	100	100

Table 12 contains data obtained to provide answer to research question three which sought to determine the specific activities the leading political parties disseminated through the social media. Responses from participants as shown in table 12 indicate that such activities include announcement of the parties' flag bearers (34%), accusations and counter accusations against each other (30%), accusations of connivance against INEC (24%), and issue-oriented campaign messages (10%). However, 2% respondents returned the "don't know" verdict.

It is therefore, evident that the respondents felt the two leading political parties' political machinery were directed more against one another and against INEC in pointless accusations rather than on issue-oriented campaign messages in the social media.

Research Question Four: What is the level of confidence of the voters in the political messages purveyed by the two leading political parties through the social media?

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Table 13: Respondents' level of confidence

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	19	19
High	26	26
Neutral	8	8
Low	26	26
Very low	21	21
Total	100	100

Research question four was designed to ascertain the level of confidence which respondents had in the political messages purveyed by the two leading political parties through the social media. As indicated in table 13, the level of confidence of the respondents to such messages were low "high" (26%), "very high" (19%), "low" (26%), very low (21%), and "neutral" (8%). It could be inferred from data available for research question four that opinion was divided as to whether the respondents attached high or low confidence to political messages, disseminated on social media in the 2015 electioneering campaigns by the two main political parties in Nigeria, as about half of them indicated high and half indicated low.

Discussion

Findings from the first research question of the study indicate that the two leading political parties in Nigeria did not utilise the social media platforms adequately in the last electioneering campaign activities in their capacity as political parties. That is, on political party level, the two parties' performances were below average. However, findings show that the candidates of the two major political parties made more effective use of the social media networking sites than their political parties did. Findings further indicate that candidates of the PDP and APC performed better than candidates of other political parties that contested the elections in the use of social media technology to disseminate political activities.

Findings from the second research question reveal that the social media mostly used for the 2015 electioneering campaigns by the leading political parties and their candidates include: Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and 2go (in descending order of preference). This means that these four social media networks provided voters in Anambra State (in particular) and Nigerians (in

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general) with the electioneering campaign activities of candidates of the leading parties, thereby enabled the citizens to make informed political decisions in the elections of 2015. The medium is indeed the message!

This finding is in tandem with the position of Edegoh and Asemah (2014) who reported that the most visited social medium by students of privately owned universities in Anambra State is Facebook {291(50%)}. Edegoh and Asemah (2014) also reported that other social media used by the students they investigated include Wikipedia {150(26%)}, YouTube {53(9%)}, Twitter {35(6%)}, and Myspace {41(7%)}. The finding also reinforces the position of Tsegyu and Danjuma (2014) who in their study titled *Impact of social media networks on the academic performance of mass communication students of Ibrahim Babangida university, Lapai Nigeria* reported that the preferred social media networks for the students investigated are Facebook {110(39.3%)}, Twitter {70(25%)}, Google and My Space {35(12.5%)} each, and YouTube {30(10.7%)}. The outcome of this study is a confirmation of the result of the Australian study done by the Essential Media Poll 2012 which showed that the popular social networking sites often used by Australians include: Google – 89%, Facebook – 67%, News websites – 55%, Blogs – 21%, Social and political campaign websites – 18%, Twitter – 15%.

The position of this study further upholds the submissions of Bruns (2005), and Marical (2012), cited in Chen and Vromen (2012). Specifically, Bruns asserts that social media platforms such as Twitter have demonstrated to be active spaces for elite-public interaction and "talking back" to sites of power (political, economic, media); others such as Tumblr and Pinterest have shown themselves as valuable places for "gate watching": the scrutiny and citizen-centric curatorship of media content. Marical avers that Facebook and other similar social networks have been very important sites for micro-activism.

On the third research question which sought to determine the specific activities which the parties purveyed through the online media, the researchers found that apart from announcement of party flag bearers, the two leading political parties' political machinery were directed more on accusations and counter accusations against one another and against INEC (that profited no one) rather than on issue-oriented campaign messages, in the social media. The parties ought to have concentrated on using the social media to disseminate

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issue-oriented campaign programmes that would have enabled citizens be at home with the many national issues that were begging for attention.

Findings made in research question four indicate divided opinion regarding the level of confidence that voters had in the political messages disseminated through the social media by the main political parties in Nigeria. Findings show that half of the respondents demonstrated high confidence in such messages and half displayed low confidence in the messages. It is therefore, not in doubt that the conflicting information that emanated from the party structures of the two frontline parties, particularly their accusations against one another and against the electoral umpire (INEC) eroded voters' confidence in PDP and APC party structures as their source credibility could not be trusted. This explains why voters in Anambra State turned their attention to individuals contesting the elections and voted on the basis of merit of the candidates, not minding party affiliation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper titled *Voters' assessment of social media use for 2015 electioneering campaigns by the two leading political parties in Nigeria* was carried out to ascertain the extent to which the two main political parties and their candidates used the social media for their electioneering campaign activities, to determine the social media platforms that the two leading political parties and their candidates mostly used, and to find out the specific activities they disseminated through the social media. The study surveyed 100 voters in Anambra State, used purposive sampling technique, adopted the questionnaire to collect data, and employed the percentage method to analyse data collected. Findings of the study show that the two leading political parties did not use the social media much, that the candidates of two parties made more and effective use of the social media than other political parties in the election, and that the activities disseminated by the two political parties bordered on announcement of party flag bearers for different positions in the elections, accusations and counter accusations against themselves rather than focusing on issue-oriented political campaign messages.

The study therefore concluded that the two main political parties in Nigeria performed below average in their use of the social media in the 2015 electioneering campaigns but their candidates utilised the online media more than the candidates of other political parties that took part in the elections. Based

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on the conclusion of the study, the researchers made the following recommendations.

- The two leading political parties and indeed, all registered political parties in Nigeria should, as political institutions established to contest election and scout for votes, commit substantial time, energy and resources in the use of social media for electioneering purposes, rather than leaving social media use for political campaign and other activities solely to contesting candidates.
- Candidates of other political parties and indeed, all political office-seekers should make good use of the opportunities made available by social media networking sites in canvassing for votes and other electioneering activities.
- Political institutions and parties should avoid unsubstantiated accusations intended to embarrass other political parties, their candidates or the electoral umpire as such accusations, most times, confuse electorates.
- Government/INEC should put in place well-articulated guidelines (regulatory framework) on how political parties should use the online media networks for electioneering campaigns and other political activities to stem the ugly tide of utilisation of the platforms for selfish reasons.

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