Influence of the social media on political engagement with the electorate during the 2015 presidential election campaign in Nigeria

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Abstract

The emergence, popularity and ubiquity of the social media have created enormous potential and impact in many spheres of life in Nigeria. This has been amply demonstrated in all the stages of the 2015 elections in Nigeria. This study focused on the influence of the social media on political engagement with the electorate during 2015 Nigerian presidential election campaign. The research design adopted is survey through 2304 questionnaires distributed across the selected city, in each state and in each of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, while 2054 copies, representing 89.1% are found usable. The sampling techniques used are multi-stage sampling and simple random sampling techniques. One of the key findings of the research is that the respondents through the social media engagement with the two leading candidates and their respective political president Goodluck Jonathan (PDP) and General Muhammadu Buhari (APC), rated them on some core campaign issues like corruption, insecurity, education, health, and infrastructure, among others. The study however recommends that presidential candidates and their respective political parties should hire experts in marketing communication who can manage their social media accounts so that political engagement on the social media should not degenerate to personality attacks, as was evident during the campaign.

Keywords: *Social Media, Political Engagement, Electorate, 2015 Presidential Election, Nigeria.*

Introduction

The emergence and popularity of the social media as veritable platforms for creating political awareness and networking with the electorate and even engendering transparency in the voting process first became noticeable during the 2011 presidential election campaign in Nigeria. The then Acting President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan of the

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People's Democratic Party (PDP), on September 15, 2010, informed his 217,000 Facebook fans about his aspiration to contest the 2011 presidential election. Just within 24 hours, over 4000 fans joined his page and on the day of the elections on April 16, 2011, he garnered over 500,000 fans. Other contestants for the presidency, such as Mallam Nuhu Ribadu of the defunct Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau of the defunct All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP), also registered their presence on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. In addition to the use of social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, other election stakeholders were also involved in the 2011 elections such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, the media, and civil society organizations to engage the electorate on their civic rights and responsibilities (Nnaane, 2013; Okoro & Nwafor, 2013).

It is imperative to note however, that the inspiration to exploit the potential of the social media to engage with the Nigerian electorate, especially the youth, came from the 2008 presidential election campaign of the then Senator Barack Obama who reached five million Americans on 15 different social media platforms, to the extent that as at November 2008, Obama had approximately 2.5 million Facebook supporters; 115,000 followers on Twitter and 50 million viewers of his YouTube Videos (Igbinidu, 2011). Now with the rising use of the social media among Nigerians, especially the youth, candidates and their respective political parties during the 2015 presidential election campaign, left nothing to chance just to get and sustain the attention of this teeming number of the electorate on the social media not only to sell their programs and policies, but also to get their votes.

 With over 11 million Nigerians on Facebook, over three million on Twitter, as well as over a million on Blackberry Messenger and

WhatsApp each, the battle for the votes of the electorate moved from podiums and the conventional mass media to the social media, where a good number of these electorate, particularly the youth, have transformed to their own public sphere to debate on the right candidate and political party, and even hauling insults and abuses in the process on the candidate/party they do not like.

Asehinde (2014) underscores the place of the social media in election campaigns as follows:

> In 2008, President Obama victory to become the president of the United States of America was digitally driven with integrated Facebook, Twitter, and Google Plus into his campaign strategies and has continued to connect with the constituents on social media well, after winning the elections. This was also experienced in India 2014 elections where social media were pivotal in the sweeping victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). I believe it is time for political aspirants, in Nigeria, to really understand the importance of social media to their campaign successes. It's no secret that the campaign website is the hub of a campaign's online activity, but social media are important supporting casts that can drive valuable traffic to the site and engage voters on a more personal level. Social Media have rapidly grown in importance as for political activism in their different forms. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube provide new ways to stimulate citizen engagement in political life, where elections and electoral campaigns have a central role. Personal communication

via social media brings politicians and parties closer to their potential voters. The process allows politicians to communicate faster and reach citizens in a more targeted manner and vice versa, without the intermediate role of mass media (p.1).

It is instructive to note that although Nigeria has 26 registered political parties, out of this number, only 11 fielded candidates for the presidential election. But out of these 11 candidates, the 2015 presidential election was a two-horse race and a straight fight between the incumbent, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the main challenger and veteran presidential candidate, retired General Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC), who contested and lost the 2003, 2007 and the 2011 presidential elections under different political parties. Both of them were the two leading presidential candidates. However, General Buhari defeated the incumbent, Dr. Jonathan, in the presidential election of 2015, by garnering 15,424,921 votes to Dr. Jonathan of the PDP- 12,853,162 votes. Concerning the place of the social media in the 2015 presidential campaign, President Jonathan had over 1,700,000 fans on Facebook and 90,500 followers on Twitter; retired General Buhari had over 101,401 fans on Facebook and over 70,000 followers on Twitter. Also, President Jonathan's party- PDP had 60,000 followers on Facebook and over 28,000 followers on Twitter; while retired General Buhari's party- APC had 97,400 followers on Twitter and over 100,000 Facebook fans (Alagbe, 2015; www.cp-africa.com and www.saharareporters.com).

It follows therefore that the two leading presidential candidates and their respective parties were constantly engaged with the

electorate, selling their candidatures, programs and policies in order to secure their votes. For instance, the APC tweeted more than 8,000 times, seeking the votes of the electorate, while also attacking the PDP in the process, while Dr. Jonathan wrote on his Facebook page, telling the electorate that "I will never let you down even as I promise to build on the progress already made" (Alagbe, 2015). The campaign of President Jonathan and his party was anchored on "continuity/transformation"; while that of Buhari and his party was woven around "change". The focus of this research therefore is to evaluate the influence of the social media on political engagement with the electorate by the two leading presidential candidates and their respective parties in the 2015 presidential election campaign.

Before the advent of the social media, the conventional mass media of newspapers, magazines, radio and television, were often used by politicians and their respective political parties to reach out to the electorate. But because of the elitist nature of these media, equal access and participation by the electorate, especially by the youth was often restricted. But with the emergence and popularity of the social media, with certain distinct characteristics like interactivity, networking, sharing and collaboration, the electorate are no longer at the mercy of the propaganda of politicians during campaign, as the social media have made them to be stakeholders in the public sphere and in the political process. In addition, politicians have also discovered the social media to be reliable platforms for campaigning, particularly to approach youth, who are very active on the social media.

In the light of the above, the question comes to the mind that to what extent has the social media campaign of President Jonathan and retired General Buhari and their respective political parties been able to sell their candidatures and manifestoes to the Nigerian youth; how do

the Nigeria youth perceive the candidatures of President Jonathan and their respective political parties through the social media engagement; and what is the extent of impact of the social media engagement (if any) on the Nigerian youth by President Jonathan and retired General Buhari and their respective political parties.

Objectives of the study

In broad terms, this research seeks to evaluate the influence of the social media on political engagement with the electorate in the 2015 presidential election campaign in Nigeria, but specifically it is to:

1. Determine how the Nigerian electorate perceives the social media engagement of President Jonathan and retired General Buhari as well as their respective political parties in the 2015 presidential election campaign.

2. Ascertain the extent to which the social media engagement of President Jonathan and retired General Buhari and their respective political parties centered on their manifestoes than on petty issues.

3. Find out the social media platforms which the Nigerian electorate got engaged more with President Jonathan and retired General Buhari as well as their respective political parties.

The following are the research questions which will guide the study:

How does the electorate perceive the social media engagement of President Jonathan and retired General Buhari as well as their respective political parties in the 2015 presidential election campaign in Nigeria?

To what extent did the social media engagement of President Jonathan and retired General Buhari as well as their respective

political parties centre on their manifestoes than on petty
issues?

What were the social media platforms with which the Nigerian
electorate got engaged more with President Jonathan and
retired General Buhari and their respective political parties?

Literature review

The social media are web-enabled applications used for
networking, sharing, collaboration and linkage, among others.
According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), the social media are a group
of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and
technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and
exchange of User-Generated Content (UGC). They identify the 5Cs of
the social media to be conversation, contribution, collaboration,
connection and community. Similarly, Pavlik and McIntosh (2012),
identified their own 5Cs of the social media to include: choice,
conversation, curation, creation and collaboration.

According to Dominick (2011), the social media have
democratized communication and also mass communication, and that
with this revolution, the monopoly over communication by the
conventional media has been broken. This view is also shared by
Rodman (2010) and Biagi (2012). In the views of Akinola (2013), the
social media constitute important tools in the democratization process
and can also be effective in monitoring governance. According to Sen
(2012), the social media provide avenues for engagement between
politicians and the active citizens, instead of the vertical top-down
approach is seen in the mainstream mass media. In the views of
Ogwuche (2014), the emergence of the social media has provided
dynamic ways for the Nigerian youth to engage their leaders. She
argues that the social media have helped to boost Nigeria's democratic

values by bringing political parties and the leaders under scrutiny and also providing a more people-centric approach to governance; and that with the 2015 elections, political parties and their candidates are more engaged with youth on the social media.

Ebhota (2015), argues that the use of the social media in today's campaign is not only important, but also critical. He argues further that the political campaign done through the social media has helped politicians to connect with the electorate. He also avers that social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube provide new ways to stimulate citizen engagement in political life, where campaign and elections have a central role to play. In a study by Okoro and Nwafor (2013), they found out that Facebook and Twitter are among the social media tools used most during the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria; and that 86% of the respondents stated that the social media contributed greatly to their participation in the election.

Towner (2015), examines the influence of attention to specific forms of traditional and online media on young adults' online and offline political participation as well as voter turnout during the 2012 presidential election campaign in America. He found out that attention to traditional media did not increase offline and online political participation; instead, participation is heightened by attention to online sources like Facebook, Twitter, blogs and even the Websites of the presidential candidates. Tang and Lee (2013), examine how time spent on Facebook exposure to shared political information, network size, network structural heterogeneity and direct connection with public political actors relate to young people's online and offline political participation. Their study also revealed that participation is explained most prominently by direct connection with political actors and followed by exposure to shared political information. Furthermore,

they also noted that these two variables mediate the impact of other dimensions of Facebook use on political participation.

Baumgartner and Morris (2009), in their study, argue that although the social media are recognised by people, especially the youth as possible sources of news, this does not necessarily transform them to informed citizens or add to democratic discourse. They also noted that in spite of the promise the social media hold for increasing political interest and participation among the people, users are no more inclined to participate in politics than are users of other media. According to the Pew Research Center (2012a), 66% of social media users have employed the platforms to post their thoughts about civic and political issues, react to others' postings, press friends to act on issues and vote, follow candidates, "like" and link to others' content, and belong to groups formed on the social media. Again the Pew Research Center (2012b), also found out that campaign and policy-related materials on the social media play a modest role in influencing most users' views and political activities; that democrats and liberals are most likely to say the social media have impact and are important; and that the politically-engaged stand out in their use of the social media. Other scholars like Skoric, Pan and Poor (2012), as well as Narasimhamurthy (2014) have also studied the impact of the social media on election campaign.

From the literature reviewed so far, studies on the use of the social media during election campaign, especially in Nigeria, are actually scanty. This study will be a modest attempt at filling that gap.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchoring on two theoretical constructs- the Public Sphere Theory and the Technological Determinism Theory. The concept and theory of the public sphere is enunciated and popularized

by Jurgen Habermas. Habermas (1996), argues that the public sphere refers to a network of communicating information and viewpoints; that communication among diverse people in society in respect of political and social issues constitute a fundamental element of participatory democracy; and that freedom of expression and equality in opportunity are essential conditions for the functioning of the public sphere in society. Jacobs (2000), buttresses this by noting that the public sphere is a political space where members of the public come together to engage the state and political actors in mutual discourse over issues of common concern. It follows therefore because the social media are a part of the contemporary public sphere, in which communication is horizontal, the electorate can interrogate political actors and their political parties on their programs and policies.

The Technological Determinism theory on the other hand, traced to Marshall McLuhan, suggests that technology is shaping how individuals in the society think, feel, act, and how the society is moving from one technological epoch to another (tribal, literate/print, electronic and digital). Since the social media are products of the digital revolution, the patterns and dimensions of communication among some people in the society are also changing (McQuail, 2005 and Burton, 2010). In other words, technological devices are now driving socio-cultural and political change in the society. So the way politicians and their respective political parties engage with the electorate during campaign is also changing. So the ability of the social media as products of digital technology, to provide become veritable platforms for political engagement with the electorate during election campaigns can no longer be glossed over.

Research Methodology

The study uses the survey method of scientific inquiry. Survey is quite

appropriate in eliciting people's views on the issue. According to Babbie (2010), survey is an excellent method for the measurement of attitude and opinions of people within a large population. The population consists of educated, social media-literate and politically conscious across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. A sample of 384 individuals from the selected area of the study, in the selected state from each geopolitical zone is selected. This is based on Cozby (2004) sample size determination table, which states that at + or – 5 margin of error, a population of over 100,000 should have a sample size of 384. It follows therefore that a total sample from all the six geopolitical zones is derived by multiplying 384 by six, which gives 2304 respondents. The multi-stage sampling technique is used to divide Nigeria into six geopolitical zones, and then a state is selected from each of the zones, while the capital of the selected state formed the area of the study. This is represented in the table below:

Table 1: Areas of the Study by Geo-Political Zones, States and Capitals

S/N	Geopolitical zones	States	Capitals
1	North-Central	Plateau	Jos
2	North-East	Adamawa	Jalingo
3	North-West	Kaduna	Kaduna
4	South-East	Enugu	Enugu
5	South-South	Rivers	Port-Harcourt
6	South-West	Lagos	Ikeja

Data is collected through questionnaire, designed in a way that it is easily understood by the respondents. The first part of the questionnaire is on the demographics of the respondents, while the second part deals with the research questions. In this study, 2304 copies of questionnaire are distributed in the selected capitals in the selected states across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Out of this figure,

2054 copies, representing 89.1% are found useful. The response rate is very encouraging because according to Ohaja (2003), a response rate that is below 70% may render the research findings suspect. However, the number of copies returned and the percentages, according to geopolitical zones are shown in the table below:

Table 2: Number of copies of questionnaire returned by geo-political zone

South-East	South-South	South-West	North-Central	North-East	North-West
344	345	347	340	338	340 (88.5%)
(89.6%)	(89.8%)	(90.4%)	(88.5%)	(88.0%)	

Table 3: Sex of the Respondents by Geo-Political Zone

Sex	South-East	South-South	South-West	North-Central	North-East	North-West
Male	242 (70%)	231(70%)	217 (63%)	277 (81%)	285 (84%)	262 (77%)
Female	102 (30%)	114 (30%)	130 (37%)	63 (19%)	53 (16%)	78 (23%)
Total	344 (100%)	345 (100%)	347(100%)	340 (100%)	338 (100%)	340(100%)

Table 4: Age-Groups of the Respondents by Geo-Political Zone

Age-group	South-East	South-South	South-West	North-Central	North-East	North-West
18-22	66(19.2%)	58(16.8%)	72 (20.7%)	47 (13.8%)	27(27.8%)	34(10%)
23-27	98(28.5%)	101 (29.3%)	89 (25.6%)	93 (27.4%)	74(21.9%)	68(20%)
28-32	92(26.7%)	88 (25.5%)	92 (26.5%)	114 (33.5%)	118(34.9%)	107(31.5%)
33 & above	88(25.6%)	98 (28.4%)	94 (27.1%)	86 (25.3%)	119(35.2%)	131(38.5%)
Total	344 (100%)	345 (100%)	347 (100%)	340 (100%)	338 (100%)	344(100%)

Table 5: Educational Level of Respondents by Geo-Political Zone

Party Affiliation/Sympathy	**Respondent**	**Percentage**
APC	669	32.6%
PDP	621	30.2%
Others	232	11.3%
None	532	25.9%
Total	**2054**	**100**

Table 6: Party Affiliation/Sympathy of Respondents

Qualification	South-East	South-South	South-West	North-Central	North-East	North-West
Undergraduate	112 (32.6%)	131(38%)	120 (34.6%)	144(42.3%)	170(50.3%)	150(41.2%)
HND/BA/B.Sc/its equivalent	120 (34.9%)	122 (35.4%)	145 (41.8%)	147(43.2%)	137(40.5%)	149(43.8%)
MA/M.Sc/its equivalent	104 (30.2%)	85 (24.6%)	74 (21.3%)	47(13.8%)	30(8.9%)	40(11.8%)
Ph.D	4 (1.7%)	7 (2.0%)	8 (2.3%)	2(0.6%)	1(0.3%)	1(0.3%)
Total	344	345	347	340	338	340

In Table 6 above, 669 of the respondents, representing 32.6%, are either members of, or have sympathies for the All Progressives Congress (APC); 621 (30.2%), are either members of, or have sympathies for the People's Democratic Party (PDP); 232 (11.3%), belong to, or have sympathies for other political parties; while 532 (25.9%), do not belong to or have sympathies for any political party.

How does the electorate perceive the social media engagement of President Jonathan and retired General Buhari as well as their respective political parties in the 2015 presidential election campaign in Nigeria? Before going into this research question properly, some preliminary questions are asked. First of all, the respondents are asked if they followed the social media campaign of two leading candidates-President Jonathan (PDP) and General Buhari (APC) during the 2015 presidential election. All the respondents answered in the affirmative. The respondents are also asked how often they followed the social media of the two leading candidates. Below is the presentation of the results:

Table 7: Respondents' Frequency of Following the Social Media Campaign of Dr. Jonathan/PDP and General Buhari/APC during the 2015 Presidential Election

	Very often	**Often**	**Less often**
Dr. Jonathan/PDP	265 (12.9%)	575 (28%)	1214 (59.1%)
General Buhari/APC	1120 (54.5%)	720 (35.1%)	214 (10.4%)

In Table 7 above, 265 of the respondents, representing 12.9%, said they followed the social media campaign of President Jonathan/PDP, "Very often"; 575(28%), said "Often"; while 1214 (59.1%), said "Less often". On the other hand, 1120, representing 54.5%, said they followed the social media campaign of General Buhari/APC, "Very often"; 720 (35.1%), said "Often"; while 214 (10.4%), said "Less often".

In addition, the respondents were equally asked to assess the two leading candidates and their political parties- President Jonathan/PDP and General Buhari/APC on some fundamental campaign issues based on their social media engagement. Below is the presentation of the

results:

Table 8: Respondents' Assessment of the Social Media Engagements of President Jonathan/PDP on Some Core Campaign Issues

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Agriculture	998 (48.6%)	570 (27.8%)	341 (16.6%)	145 (7.1%)
Corruption	82 (4%)	121(5.9%)	207(10.1%)	1644(80.0%)
Education	341(16.7%)	450 (21.9%)	876 (42.6%)	387 (18.8%)
Health	321(15.6%)	440 (21.4%)	833 (40.6%)	460 (22.4%)
Infrastructure	420 (20.4%)	632 (30.8%)	889 (43.3%)	113 (5.5%)
Insecurity	55 (2.7%)	89 (4.3%)	344 (16.7%)	1566 (76.2%)
Women Empowerment	780 (38%)	233 (11.3%)	578 (28.1%)	563 (27.4%)

Table 9: Respondents' Assessment of the Social Media Engagements of General Buhari/APC on Some Core Campaign Issues

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Agriculture	956(46.5%)	700(34.1%)	325(15.8%)	73(3.6%)
Corruption	1678(81.7%)	376(18.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Education	1304(63.5%)	607(29.6%)	96(4.7%)	47(2.3%)
Health	1221(59.4%)	567(27.6%)	188(9.2%)	78(3.8%)
Infrastructure	1322 (64.4%)	499 (24.3%)	133 (6.5%)	100 (4.9%)
Insecurity	1670 (81.3%)	338 (16.5%)	46 (2.3%)	0 (0%)
Women Empowerment	537 (26.1%)	489 (23.8%)	672 (32.7%)	356 (17.3%)

In Table 9 above, based on the social media engagements during the campaign, 956 of the respondents, representing 46.5%, scored General Buhari/APC "Excellent" in Agriculture; 700(34.1%), scored "Good"; 325(15.8%), scored "Fair"; while 73(3.6%), scored "Poor". On Corruption, 1678(81.7%), scored "Excellent"; 376(18.3%), while "Fair" and "Poor" had nil (0%). On Education, 1304(63.5%), scored "Excellent"; 607(29.6%), scored "Good"; 96(4.7%), scored "Fair"; while 47(2.3%), scored "Poor". On Health, 1221(59.4%), scored "Excellent"; 567(27.6%), scored "Good"; 188(9.2%), scored "Fair"; while 78(3.8%), scored "Poor". On Infrastructure, 1322(64.4%), scored "Excellent"; 499(24.3%), scored "Good"; 133(6.5%), scored "Fair"; while 100(4.9%), scored "Poor". On Insecurity, 1670(81.3%), scored "Excellent"; 338(16.5%), scored "Good"; 46(2.3%), scored "Fair"; while "Poor" had nil (0%). On Women Empowerment, 537(26.1%), scored "Excellent"; 489(23.8%), scored "Good"; 672(32.7%), scored 'Fair"; while 356(17.3%), scored "Poor".

However, to answer the research question proper, the Charles Osgood semantic differential scale was used. The scale has a positive (+) and a Negative (-) side. Therefore to get the mean score for each opposed binary attitudinal values, the scores recorded under Strongly Agree (SA), Fairly Agree (FA) Agree(A), Neutral (N), Agree(A), Fairly Agree(FA) and Strongly Agree(SA) on both sides of the scale, were multiplied by their scale points- 7,6, 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1and then divided by the total score- 2054 copies of the questionnaire. The more the respondents ticked to the left or to the right, the more they strongly agreed with the values on either side of the scale. The number 4 position on the scale shows a "neutral" response.

The mean statistics was also employed to show the degree of

agreement with the opposed binary attitudinal values. To get the benchmark for gauging the responses, the total values (7+6+5+4+3+2+1) was divided by the number 7 thus:

$$\frac{7+6+5+4+3+2+1}{7} = \frac{28}{7} = 4$$

Therefore 4 is the cut-off point for this scale. It follows that any mean score that falls below 4 agrees more with the items on the negative (-) side of the scale concerning   the perception of the social media engagements of President Jonathan/PDP and General Buhari/APC, during the 2015 presidential election campaign.

Table 10: Respondents' Perception of the Social Engagement of President Jonathan/PDP During the 2015 Presidential Election Campaign in Nigeria

S/N	Items	SA	FA	A	N	A	FA	SA	Items	Mean Score
	+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	-	
1	Constructive	234	325	122	350	244	201	567	Not constructive	3.6
2	Enlightening	200	301	321	214	232	198	588	Not enlightening	3.6
3	Educative	202	305	322	186	244	196	599	Not educa	3.6

								tive	
4	Issues -based	89	256	344	378	478	332	177	Not iss ues - bas ed	2.9
5	Deep	85	250	340	389	456	422	112	Sha llo w	3.1
6	Capti vating	78	289	345	370	415	420	137	No t cap tiv ati ng	3.8

In Table 10 above, with the mean scores of all the items on the negative (-) side clearly below the benchmark of 4, it means that the respondents believed that the social media engagement of President Jonathan/PDP during the 2015 presidential election campaign was "Not constructive", "Not enlightening", "Not educative", "Not issues-based", "Shallow" and "Not captivating".

Table 11: Respondents' Perception of the Social Engagement of General Buhari/APC during the 2015 Presidential Election Campaign in Nigeria

S/N	Items	SA	FA	A	N	AF	SA	Items	Mean Score
	+	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	-	
1	Const ructiv e	478	455	40	289	175	194	63	Not constructi ve	5.0
2	Enlig hteni ng	448	47	40	27	20	101	14	Not enlighteni	5.0

	ng		2	4	7	0	1	2	ng	
3	Educative	432	4 7 7	4 0 1	2 7 5	2 0 2	1 1 5	1 5 3	Not educative	4.9
4	Issues-based	450	4 2 2	3 9 9	2 4 5	2 3 4	1 4 3	1 6 1	Not issues-based	4.8
5	Deep	300	4 0 2	3 9 9	4 4 5	2 1 2	1 5 6	1 4 0	Shallow	4.1
6	Captivating	427	4 0 5	3 8 9	4 1 1	2 0 2	1 2 3	5 7	Not captivating	4.8

In Table 11 above, with the mean scores of all the items on the positive (+) side clearly above the benchmark of 4, it means that the respondents believed that the social media engagement of General Buhari/APC during the 2015 presidential election campaign was " Constructive", "Enlightening", "Educative", "Issues-based", "Deep" and "Captivating".

Research Question 2: To what extent did the social media engagement of President Jonathan and retired General Buhari as well as their respective political parties centre on their manifestoes than on petty issues? The Likert Scale was used to elicit the views of the respondents on this research question. A benchmark of 3.0 was specified for the Likert Scale. It was used to determine the perception of the respondents on the use of negative or attack political advertisements by the two major political parties in the 2015 presidential election. This benchmark is arrived at by dividing the total values on the scale by 5 points, thus:

$\underline{5+4+3+2+1} = \underline{15} = 3.0$
  5   5

Therefore, if a statement has a mean value that equals or is greater than 3.0, then it is accepted, if otherwise, it is rejected. Therefore to get the mean score for each statement, the scores recorded under Strongly Agree (SA), Agree(A), Undecided(U), Disagree(D) and Strongly Disagree(SD) were multiplied by their scale points- 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1and then divided by the total score- 2091 copies of the question returned and found usable . It is important to note that "F" stands for "Frequency".

Table 12: Respondents' Perception of the Extent to which the Social Media Engagement of President Jonathan/PDP and General Buhari Centred on their Parties' Manifestoes, than on Petty Issue, During the 2015 Presidential Election Campaign

S/N	Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean Score	Decision
		F	F	F	F	F		
1	The social media engagements of President Jonathan/PDP focused more on party manifesto than on petty issues.	314	415	320	335	670	2.7	Rejected
2	The social media engagements of General Buhari/APC focused more on party manifesto than on petty issues.	775	745	303	102	129	4.7	Accepted
3	President Jonathan/PDP's campaign slogan of "transformation" was well received by the people.	306	405	310	355	678	2.7	Rejected

4	General Buhari/APC's campaign slogan of "change" was well received by the people.	800	767	288	101	98	4.8	Accepted

In Table 12 above, hypothetical statements 1 and 3 were invalid, because they were well below the benchmark of 3.0; while hypothetical statements 2 and 4 were valid because they were above the benchmark of 3.0.

Research Question 3: What are the social media platforms with which the Nigerian electorate got engaged more with President Jonathan and retired General Buhari and their respective political parties? This question became necessary in view of the penetration of the social media among Nigerians, especially the youths, and because of the realisation by politicians and their respective political parties of the potential of the social media in the country. Below is the presentation of the results:

Table 13: Most Used Social Media Platforms for Political engagements by the Electorate during the 2015 Presidential Election Campaign

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Twitter	808	39.3%
Facebook	789	38.4%
Blogs	372	18.1%
Others	85	4.2%
Total	2054	100%

In Table 13 above, 808 of the respondents, representing 39.3%, said they "Twitter" most; 789(38.4%), said "Facebook"; 372(18.1%), said "Blogs"; while 85(4.2%), said other social media platforms.

Discussion of Findings

The potential and impact of the social media in engaging with the electorate in a democracy can no longer be glossed over. Because of the

possibility of online perception translating to offline perception, political candidates and their respective parties now incorporate the social media in their campaign strategy. To underscore the interests shown in the 2015 presidential elections, with the attendant tension and anxiety it generated, all the respondents said they were following the social media engagements of the two leading candidates and their parties. However, the study showed that more people-1120, representing 54.5%, engaged very often with General Buhari/APC on the social media, compared with 265(12.9%), who engaged with President Jonathan. This could be as a result of the cult-like followership that General Buhari enjoyed especially in the North and South-West, Nigeria. In addition, his party's campaign slogan of "change" resonated with millions of Nigerians who are obviously tired of the 16-year (mis)rule of the PDP.

The study also revealed that 998(48.6%) of the respondents scored President Jonathan/PDP "excellent in the areas of agriculture, while 780(38%), also scored them "excellent in the area of women empowerment, in the course of the social media engagement. However, President Jonathan/PDP ratings is low in the areas of education, health, infrastructure, and especially corruption and insecurity. For General Buhari/APC, from the social media engagement with the electorate, 1678(81.7%) of the respondents scored them "excellent" on their strategies of curbing corruption in the country, while 1670(81.3%) of the respondents also scored them "excellent" on their capability to tackle insecurity. This is clearly understood in the light of how terrorism has further dented the image of Nigeria, without much efforts from the government tackle the scourge. Other areas where the respondents scored General Buhari/APC "excellent" are: education (1304:63.5%); health

(1221:59.4%); and infrastructure (1322:64.4%). However, General Buhari/APC are not scored well in the area of women empowerment.

On the perception of the social media engagement of President Jonathan/PDP, the results from the semantic differential scale showed that, the respondents believed that their (President Jonathan/PDP) social media engagement is 'not constructive", "not enlightening", "not educative", "not issues-based", "shallow" and "not captivating". Whereas the respondents believed that the social media engagement of General Buhari/APC, is "constructive", "enlightening", "educative", "issues-based", "deep", and "captivating". For the Likert scale, the hypothetical statement that the social media engagement of President Jonathan/PDP focused more on party manifesto than on petty issues was rejected with a mean score of 2.7; while the hypothetical statement that the social media engagement of General Buhari/APC focused more on party manifesto than on petty issues is accepted with a mean score of 4.7. Furthermore, the hypothetical statement that President Jonathan/PDP's campaign slogan of "transformation" is well received by the people is rejected with a mean score of 2.7; while the hypothetical statement that General Buhari/APC's campaign slogan of "change" is well received by the people is accepted with a mean score of 4.8.

The study also revealed that a majority of the respondents- 808(39.3%), used Twitter more in their social media engagement with Both President Jonathan/PDP and General Buhari/APC; 789(38.4%), used Facebook more; 372(18.1%), used Blogs; while 85 (4.2%) used other social media platforms. The implications of the study are that the social media are now a part of the contemporary public sphere where important political issues are being interrogated and candidates/parties' policies and programmes appraised. So it is now

instructive for candidates and their respective political parties to incorporate the social media in their overall campaign strategy during elections. The study has demonstrated the validity of the Public Sphere theory and the Technological Determinism theory. This has been seen in the way and manner the respondents scored the two leading candidates in the areas of corruption, insecurity, infrastructure, among others using the social media.

Conclusion

The major objective of this research was to evaluate the influence of the social media on political engagement with the electorate in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study, while frequency tables, simple percentages, mean scores through Likert scale and Charles Osgood semantic differential scale are used to present and analyze the data. It is imperative to note that political engagement with the electorate during election campaign in this era, does not take place only on the soap box and through political structures again, but also on the social media. With the level of networks on the social media, especially among the youths, who constitute well over 60% of voters in the country, no serious-minded presidential candidate and the party will fail to ignore this demographic class. Based on the above, it is recommended that a code of conduct that will guide constructive social media engagement should be made a part of the Electoral Act, so that candidates, parties, and the electorate will not use the social media to malign people; in other words, social media engagement should be issues-based, unlike what happened during the 2015 presidential election campaign, where there were a lot of personality attacks from the supporters of both President Jonathan/PDP and General Buhari/APC. Also, presidential candidates and their respective political parties should hire seasoned

marketing communication outfits that will manage their social media accounts, so that the ethics of marketing communication can guide the social media engagement. In addition, future studies can examine the impact of social media engagement on voters' choices during elections.

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