INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ELECTIONEERING PROCESSES DURING THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The advent of the social media in recent times has dramatically transformed the way information is created, disseminated, distributed and consumed. In an age where information equates power, diversity of opinions has greatly influenced the evolution of creative problem solving skills and ensured more equitable outcomes that have resulted to good governance and democratic consolidation across human society. In Nigeria, the social media played an influential role during the 2015 general elections. Relying on a systematic review of secondary sources, this paper through the lens of technological determinism theory examines how the social media altered social structures and cultural values during the 2015 electioneering period within the Nigerian society. Major findings established that the social media altered the meaning of geographic distance within the Nigerian society during the 2015 general elections in the country. Altogether, electioneering processes were altered in manners that they allowed a huge increase in the volume of communication flow; thereby increasing the speed of communication and also providing opportunities for interactive communication in domains that were previously difficult to overlap and interconnect. The paper's conclusion affirms the weak or non-existence of social media regulations in Nigeria. Hence, the paper recommends the review of media laws in Nigeria in order to address absurdities in form of fake news and cyber bullying associated with the social media including Facebook, blogging and Twitter, during periods of general elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democracy, social media, elections, technological determinism, fake news

Introduction

The assumption that social media can foster free and fair elections and promote stable and sustainable democracy in the ethno-political-cum-religious crisis-ridden regions of Africa is no longer a utopic conception; but a provable fact (Boyd, 2021). The use of social media and its hypodermic effect in politics has continued to grow in many parts of Africa in recent time. The year 2015-2019 alone witnessed a massive use of mobile phones SMS, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter in the national and local elections in Nigeria and South Africa respectively, and in the independence referendum in South Sudan, as well as in the Arab uprising in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and in Syria (Boyd, 2021). The social media due to their participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature has no doubt become veritable instrument for carrying out election campaigns and other electioneering activities (Boyd, 2021). Its efficacy can never be overemphasized as it has now become a potent for socio-political revolutions and governmental change cut across the globe (Boyd, 2021). As a new and potent vista of human communication that is affordable and interactive; social media has greatly shaped the matrix and praxis of politics, electioneering and decision-making process. The use of the Internet by politicians to communicate with their constituencies has further extended the concept of "Mediatization" of politics in Nigeria (Boyd, 2021).

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 cause. In the political sphere it has become a veritable tool for mobilizing citizens towards active participation in the political process and democratic projects. It is apt to assert that conventional diplomacy, electioneering process and governance have become an anachronism in a high-speed, media-centric world. International events, such as the Arab uprisings, move quickly, as does public knowledge of and reaction to those events. According to Odoemelam et al. (2019) who in an unalloyed display of intellectuality surmised that social media is that space, the many tools helping to amplify the voices of average Nigerians, taking ordinary voices and making them extraordinary by bringing them to homes, offices, and places most of them would have probably never reached

under different circumstances. It started out as a playground for mostly young jobless people. Today, it has become the battleground of what was arguably the most competitive election in Nigeria's history of which apart from professor Jega, the keyboard is also a key umpire stakeholders taken to it has been the motive for this research work? This work has also explored how diplomacy, electioneering process and governance is evolving as policy-makers find themselves without the time to carefully weigh alternatives, pressed to respond in real time. Furthermore one can categorically aver that people relied heavily on the internet for unfettered opinion as there were no red lines to coordinate its operations and as such this leads to anarchy. Social media despite its positives has served the negative interest of both its conscious and unconscious users and audience. The social media expectedly is to bridge the knowledge gap and compact the global village, however, changes in communication brought about by increasing access to social media have engendered complexity, vitality and absurdity in many cases. From the foregoing, this paper examines influences of social media on electioneering proceses during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

Social Media, Social Networks and Democracy
Despite the new media's impact in providing information, influencing the news cycle and setting agendas, shaping public opinion, providing more fundraising opportunities, increasing political participation and youth voter turnout, and changing election results, it is not without drawbacks. From the standpoint of the pro-social media advocate it is generally agreed that the social media. The much needed mechanisms by which social interactions can promote or inhibit individual and collective behaviour. According to Ifukor (2015) emphasizes the importance of "social network" which refers to the set of linkages and social relationships between/among members of society. Simply put social media work in fostering social interaction that in turn influence societal action especially in elections, sustenance of democracy and fostering of good governance. According to Katz, Jay Blunter and Michael Gurevitch (1974), Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008, p.71) from a humanistic dais alluded that social media is not just about platforms but about human beings who are online or virtual audience, they are not passive but play active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. In other words

people use media to fulfil specific indulgence Okoro (2001) notes that online audience have certain needs which make them to be selectively exposed to, attend to, and retain media messages because of the perceived gratifications derivable from such messages. In another parlance the fact that people are important in the process of communication because they choose content, make meaning and act on that meaning Mc Qail (2011, p.511). Users of social media are intentional seekers of such messages. They are able to select and use the technology in ways that suit their purpose. Thus, they (people) as the audience are active and not passive. Similarly, political candidates are also able to select and use media of choice and message content of their choice during electoral campaigns. It states that the media is more than the message. It is crucial that the media should deliver values, business and opportunities to the audience. From a functional perspective, social media have been credited with carrying the functions of surveillance, correlation, transmission, entertainment, and mobilization. Lasswell (1948) and Wright (1960) argued that surveillance function requires the media to provide new information, correlation means information provided must be selected, interpreted and citied, cultural transmission of social values, beliefs and norms of the society and entertainment provides escape from everyday life stress, and mobilizations which deals with promoting society's interest especially in times of crisis. Epistemologically it is argued that the social media is part of our society and it is the society that must be served. This is also in line with work of Lindey (2021) were he noted that social media has been one of the most influential so far. Social media has allowed us to create new ways of communicating, such as texting or posting through different apps. It can connect us with people all over the world and give us a platform to express ourselves in ways that have not been possible before. While social media started off as a small form of technology, it has morphed into aspects of our everyday life. On the contrary, when the mass media fails to deliver this service, they become dysfunctional or non-functional, from a polemical point of view. Thus Kurt Lewin, Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso (2008, p.91) asserted that powerful tools like social media should have some sort of monitoring and regulation to forestall the possible abuse especially by minors and the young at heart. Apostate of the narcotizing dysfunctional media theory surmised that social media is a tool of social dislocation, a social situation whereby the

consequence of media message does not serve the interest of the society.

This derives from the minimalists' effects theory because the audience has a right to withdraw from the use of that media message if it does not serve the purpose of social harmony. The individual may fail to act based on a media message or act negatively against the expected behaviour. Although the individual is assailed with a gamut of information on issues and problems and becomes knowledgeable about them or discuss them, however they may fail to act. For example increasing volume of political messages may not necessarily propel people to actively participate in the political process. Thus, the number of advertisements, political campaigns, political hypes and rallies exposed in the social media may turn out to bore people and elicit political inaction. Baron, Branscombe & Byrne (2009) say that as news about an issue inundate people, they become apathetic to it. Thus, excessive media coverage of an event or exposure of a candidate during election might narcotize the audience to the extent that they become indifferent. They further argued that due to the slippery nature of the social media, as evident in the 2011 and 2015 general elections where it was used as a platform to spread hate campaign, defame political opponents, ostracise competing parties, heighten mutual suspicion, raise false alarm, sparked off violence, mislead people on several occasion. Despite its many drawbacks, it is the position of this paper that the use of social media has deepened democratic ideals and promotes political participation in Nigeria. It has served the purpose of democratic sustenance in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are explanatory cardinals and lens that explain a social phenomenon. Within the periscope of this study many scholars have postulated several theories on the power of the new technology and social media, which include Social Network theory, User gratification theory, Theory of Communicative Action, Theory of social Anarchism. Although most of them are relevant, however this study is anchored on Technological Determinism Theory.

Social Network Theory

Social networks are self-organizing, emergent, and complex, such that a pattern appears from the interaction of the elements that make

up the system (Newman M, Barabási AL, Watts DJ. The structure and dynamics of networks. Princeton studies in complexity. Princeton University Press, Oxford, 2006). These patterns become more apparent as network size increases. Social network analysis is a collection of concepts, measures, and techniques for relational analysis. It is an approach that is specifically designed to grasp the most important features of social structures and it is unrivalled in this task. It can be used to explore social relations themselves and also the cultural structures of norms and ideas that help to organize those relations in conjunction with material circumstances.

User gratification theory refer to as the uses and gratifications (U&G) approach is generally recognized to be a subtradition of media effects research (McQuail, 1994). Early in the history of communications research, an approach was developed to study the gratifications that attract and hold audiences to the kinds of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs (Cantril, 1942). Much early effects research adopted the experimental or quasi-experimental approach, in which communication conditions were manipulated in search of general lessons about how better to communicate, or about the unintended consequences of messages (Klapper, 1960). Other media effects research sought to discover motives and selection patterns of audiences for the new mass media. Examples include Cantril and Allport (1935) on the radio audience; Waples, Berelson, and Bradshaw (1940) on reading; Herzog (1940, 1944) on quiz programs and the gratifications from radio daytime serials; Suchman (1942) on the motives for listening to serious music; Wolfe and Fiske (1949) on children's interest in comics; Berelson (1949) on the functions of newspaper reading; and Lazarsfeld and Stanton (1942, 1944, 1949) on different media genres. Each of these studies formulated a list of functions served either by some specific content or by the medium itself: To match one's wits against others, to get information and advice for daily living, to provide a framework for one's day, to prepare oneself culturally for the demands of upward mobility, or to be reassured about the dignity and usefulness of one's role. (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974, p. 20)

Communicative Action

The theory of communicative action is developed by Jürgen Habermas, the most influential author of the second generation of the

Frankfurter school of sociology and a progenitor of most modern flows in the theories of democracy (deliberative democracy). Habermas as a student of Theodor Adorno and Max Hornheimer after their return from the USA, is following their example indicating that historical Marxism has serious weaknesses, and therefore is needed correcting. Starting from this position in the beginning of the 1970-es he started developing his own social theory above all dedicated to analyzing of communication.

Some authors think that several phases can be recognized in Hagerman's intellectual and scientific development: speculative hermeneutics, empirical criticism, neomarxistically and communicatively characteristic after the developing of the communicative action theory (Mitrovic 1999:217). All these phases are interlaced in between and generally form a coherent totality. So in theory of communicative action Habermas implements his attitudes of critical theory which he represents as part of the Frankfurter school of sociology.

The communication between individuals is the most important constitutive element of society. The society can't be understood without understanding communication among individuals. Therefore, the key aspect of theoretical perspectives which are opened by Habermas is his theory of communicative action. Relying on communicative action Habermas analyzes societal development, but also societal conflict in modern society that gives the critical dimensions of his opinion about society.

Theory of Social Anarchism

Anarchism boasts a heterogeneous and rich approach which, through a thorough-going skepticism of any concentrations of power, aims to challenge domination and hierarchical modes of governance. Most famously, this takes the form of its opposition to the state apparatus. In place of the top-heavy power structures of capitalism, representative, liberal democracy and Marxism, the political economy of anarchism is one based on participatory democracy, mutual aid, solidarity and co-operation. Indeed, anarchism expresses profound and historically-substantiated misgivings not just of the state in contemporary capitalist societies, but also regarding the capture of the state by a revolutionary vanguard in Marxism.

In spite of the somewhat negative etymology of its name, translating as "without a ruler," anarchism is a positive project which has, as Uri Gordon (2007: 47) argues, "given rise to what is arguably the largest and most coherent, vibrant and rapidly-evolving revolutionary movement in advanced capitalist countries." The cultivation of this non-hierarchical vision contradicts the atomistic, pessimistic imagery so influential in recent social thought, which has led to inadequate caricatures of humanity such as the ruthless, self-interest-maximising homo economicus. However, anarchism remains relatively maligned and misunderstood both inside and outside academia, often deemed, in a rather impossible contradiction, either utopian or as a synonym for violence (Springer, 2014). Instead, as Sal Restivo (2013: 3) puts it: If you champion the person as a social being dependent for self, thought, and consciousness on the social group or the community, if you champion and defend the rights of the person (as a social being) and the integrity and freedom of the person, if you are opposed to all forms of capitalized Authority, and if you oppose the state's claim that it owns (is the owner of last resort of) your body and labor, you are at one with the anarchist.

Technological Determinism

This is a reductionist theory that presumes that a society's technology drives the development of its social structure and cultural values. The term is believed to have been coined by Thorsten Veblen (1857–1929), an American sociologist. The most radical technological determinist in America in the twentieth century was most likely Clarence Ayres who was a follower of Thorsten Veblen and John Dewey. William Ogburn was also known for his radical technological determinism. Most interpretations of technological determinism share two general ideas which Sparks (2002) noted that the development of technology itself follows a predictable, traceable path largely beyond cultural or political influence, and that technology in turn has "effects" on societies that are inherent, rather than socially conditioned or produced because that society organizes itself to support and further develop a technology once it has been introduced (Sparks 2002, p.2).

Strict adherents to technological determinism do not believe the influence of technology differs based on how much a technology is or can be used. Instead of considering technology as part of a larger

spectrum of human activity, technological determinism sees technology as the basis for all human activity. Marshall (1982, p.15) posited that "societies have always been shaped more by nature of the media with which people communicate than by the content of the communication". In summary, Marshall (1982) was of the opinion that "the medium is the message". This statement could be used as a peg for the reason why most youth surf the net or join the social networks. Many young people do not really have a clear cut objective of visiting the internet, but because he or she believes a friend is hooked on the internet, it becomes a misnomer for him or her not to be online (Marshall, 1982). As the youths surf the net they join some social networks and consequently participate in political debates and other politically related activities. As they do so, they consciously or unconsciously participate in the political process. This informs our reason for anchoring the study on the technology determinism theory.

Methodology

This study on influence of social media on electioneering during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria utilized an expo-facto facto research depending on the data readily documented overtime. The study area of course is the entire Nigeria as a country hence the main research instruments were documentary analysis of existing literature which includes text books, journals, magazines, newspapers, online sources, publications of several research institutes and seminar materials; while secondary data was obtained from official documents i.e INEC White Papers. To determine reliability of the research instruments employed, the researcher employed the desk-top review/peer review technique to ascertain the veracity of allusions put forward by the various commentators and scholars on the subject matter being researched upon. The method of the study is qualitative and exploratory in nature. By way of descriptive analysis of secondary sources, the study draws insights from scholarly exegesis and empirical historical evidence. The outcome of this forms the substance of the analysis of the study. For convenience of systematic organization of systematic the thrust of analysis in this study is schematically presented under a number of selected themes and sub-themes carefully formulated to explore the study's derived assumption with social media as an agenda setter in the wheelhouse of contemporary Nigerian politics.

Findings and Discussions
Role of the Social Media in Providing Political and Electoral Information

The research work was able to arrive at the following major results to buttress the impact of the social media on the outcome of 2015 general elections. That Social media can be used to find information and serve as a forum for discussion. It is impacting the political process by providing political information and thus serving as a democratizing tool by helping the average voter make informed decisions. Without a sense of the issues, a person is less likely to vote, which is why this new information source is so important. Social media is the fastest growing source of information about elections and candidates. The Internet now clearly exceeds radio and is on par with newspapers as a major source of campaign information and election news among the entire adult population, with 26% of adults getting most of their election news from the Internet. TV remains a dominant source of political news with 77% of Nigerians turning to election related television programming for campaign information. Social networks, in particular, enable young voters, who might otherwise not tune into traditional news, to share information. Additionally, the Internet is constantly updating with new information e.g. campaign information. Its prevalence is explained by the fact that web sites represent a cost-effective means of communicating at any time of the day the most up-to-date information about candidates and their campaigns to the public and the media." For example, from 2014, 98% of PDP and APC contesting candidates' websites had information about the candidates' policy positions. Systematic analyses show that people go online to get information about political campaigns. The interactive quality of the social media may motivate users to get more invested in the political process. In fact, the amount of people looking online for political news over time is growing thus demonstrating the rising capability of the Internet as a source of political news. In February 2011, 17% of Nigerians went on the Internet for political news and election information, which was up from only 4% in 2007. This number grew to 40% in January 2015. This study also demonstrates that the Internet audience is much more precise in their assessment of specific topics and subjects than offline audiences. They also can address more focused questions about political

interests. The evidence presented above makes a persuasive case that the Internet has played a big role in providing political or electoral information. This data makes it clear that the Internet is impacting electoral politics by becoming a major source of information and discussion. The number of people going online to get political information has increased as demonstrated by the 2011 and 2015 elections. This information can also impact the campaigns in terms of affecting the news cycle and agenda setting, which is discussed following this directions

Role of the Social Media in Altering News Cycle & Agenda Setting

Due to its participatory quality, the average citizen has the ability to change the national news cycle with the click of a mouse or a post on a blog. Social media sources, specifically YouTube and blogs, can impact the news cycle and set political agendas. Additionally, due to this omnipresent media, candidates are much more vulnerable and can be badly hurt if they distort. Due to the interactive quality of social networking, average citizens can control content and contribute to the political conversation. The resulting struggle for control over the message can often force campaigns to respond, which then impacts the news cycle. The Internet also accelerates the process through which the public receives information and debates political news.

This omnipresent media can help to make sure stories with real implications do not slip through the cracks. Citizens can use the Internet to find past speeches to fact check and then to alert others if they find a discrepancy. Due to this, candidates can no longer be 'off the record.' Olaniyi (2014) identifies the agenda setting capability of new media. He states, "New Internet technologies such as YouTube allow a person with limited skill and equipment to blast a message that has the potential to reinforce or hijack a campaign's central themes." Social media also makes it easier for campaigns to spread their own messages. As Ogunlesi (2013), the founder of the Personal Democracy Forum states, "The campaign, consciously or unconsciously became much more of a media operation than simply a presidential campaign, because they recognized that by putting their message out onto these various platforms, their supporters would spread it for them."The agenda setting capability of social media was clearly demonstrated several times throughout the 2015 election cycle". A good example is one can see many social media platform

reporting election incidence and result during the 2015 election. One Abdulmalik in is twitter handle capture a clip on the incidence of Dala local government election reporting the good conduct of the electoral processes.

There was also much agreement on how blogs wielded political influence by setting the broader media agenda, and reaching an elite audience of opinion leaders and (especially) journalists. This presupposes the social media to be not only useful for just distributing a campaign message, but also for offering a mechanism for on-going political engagement. Additionally, on some of the biggest issues, traditional media and social media coverage merged and became uniform. Social media emerged as a viable environment for placing stories harmful to one's opponent due to the lack of a formal gate keeping authority. This study recognizes the give and take relationship between old media and social media in that one can play the agenda-setting role while the other carries it out or vice versa, one can posit that the social media has emerged as a force that can impact the news cycle and set agendas in a political context, as we ourselves saw throughout the 2015 election.

Role of the Social Media in Framing Public Opinion

Social media creates a sense of digital intimacy between the candidate and the voters and therefore, social media influences the public's opinion of political candidates. It does this by helping to facilitate the candidate's relationships with the public through online communication and direct dialogue such as texting or Twitter. This in turn can frame the public persona of a candidate. Social media can be used as an introductory tool for a political candidate and can help them establish name recognition and establish a more personal connection. It can then be used throughout the political process to communicate directly with voters. This can be seen looking at Trump's presence as the first Twitter-based Presidency is no fluke. His social media presence is intentional and strategic, his posts – while individually senseless – are collectively incredibly shareable. This is what matters in politics in the internet era, a candidate's ability to enter the household through televisions, computers, cell phones, and more. While it is difficult to view Trump as successful in the political realms that traditionally have shaped the presidency, his continued success is owed largely to his ability to navigate the modern globalized world.

However the rest of his presidency develops, at least one aspect will remain constant: Trump's active online presence is not only definitive of his presidency but no doubt will shape and inspire all subsequent national elections for as long as social media can reign supreme.

Several studies find that it is easier for the public to get to know the candidates due to personalized online messaging like Twitter or YouTube. Social networking personalizes the candidate and makes them more accessible for the general public. The Social media was used as a political tool during the 2015 campaigns to build a rapport with the public and increase awareness of the candidates. As Omojuwa (2015) states about the Buhari APC campaign, "The team's brilliant use of technology to build relationships, transmit information, and organize offline action has redefined modern politics. Beyond that, it has permanently changed the nature of our interactions with politicians…the campaign's use of blogging, social networks, text messaging, email, and video heralds a new era of integrated digital communication that is simultaneously widespread and intimate." The Buhari Support Organization website had a digital 'meet and greet' that focused on putting a face to the campaign and introducing the president.

Omojuwa (2015) points out the capability of social media to establish intimacy with the voters, "Not only did these actions render traditional news media meaningless or irrelevant; they reaffirmed the personal connection between Buhari and his supporters when a Twitter message / text message from Muhammadu Buhari appeared on their phones. This created a sense of 'digital intimacy,' the closeness one feels to another person by being near and therefore privy to his or her day-to-day activities and minutiae". President Buhari created personal bonds with his supporters through new media, which Jonathan did not quite achieve for obvious reasons as seen in the depth of insecurity as an election agenda.

Omojuwa (2015) remarks: President Jonathan dabbled in online and search engine advertising, but for the most part ran a traditional campaign (i.e. hate campaign on AIT) that never kept pace because it was almost purely image based and not rooted in the social relationships so essential to building an emotional connection in this social media era. In essence, former president Jonathan did not connect with voters through social media and therefore, was unable to build the same kind of bond or intimacy with the public as Buhari did.

Throughout the 2015 election, social media demonstrated its ability to be a political tool to raise public opinion and create a connection between the candidate and the public. Social media can help shape public opinion because the use of social media tools such as email, texting, and Twitter have created a way for the political candidate to directly communicate with electorates and establish a digital intimacy with.

Role of the Social Media in Elections Fundraising

With the Muhammadu Buhari campaign in 2015 bringing in over 20% of their funds online, the Internet has clearly established itself as a dominant source of fundraising (www.premiumtimesng com/regional/ssouth) The 2015 case studies show that social media serves as a tool for candidates to raise more money from an increased donor base. Additionally, reaching out to small donors is more easily accomplished over the Internet and enables them to contribute to the political process in this way.

Online fundraising has several distinct advantages that enable political candidates to easily increase their overall fundraising efforts as observed in the 2011 and 2015 elections. Examples from these elections to show that Internet fundraising is impacting elections in four ways. Firstly, websites provide the campaigns with immediate access to political donors. The Internet also provides a new, more populist venue that allows for a massive number of small donors to contribute smaller amounts over longer periods of time, especially when there is a need for such financial support. Thirdly, the website provides a ready venue for responding to a politician's emergency financial crisis. Finally, supporting a candidate financially through the candidate's website provides a rally point for both the candidate and for the supporters of the candidate.

Osita (2015) also recognizes three distinct advantages of online fundraising in that the cost of online solicitation decreases as the number of solicitations increases, online fund-raising allows for donor-motivated transactions at any time and from anywhere, and online fund-raising allows success to be converted quickly into money and the money raised through the Internet is in fact called 'New Money.' The Internet does yield a much greater return for the fundraising Naira and the yield is almost instantaneous.

The 2015 presidential election first suggested that online fundraising might impact electoral politics. Col Hamidi Ali (Rtd) Campaign team raised a whopping 20% online funds, which amounted to 64,702,265 Naira; even raising N4 million in one day. They were able to do this by relying on a strategy of emphasizing repeated small online donations. Chikodiri (2014) recognizes that this is a particularly salient strategy that was then copied by other campaigns.

The 2015 Buhari campaign also was successful in using the Internet to fundraise, raising N2.7 million in three days. This trend extended into the general election as both President Jonathan and General Buhari raised a reasonable portion of their funds via the Internet and most small donors made their contributions online. During this election cycle, 54% of the campaign websites allowed supporters to donate money to the campaign with their ATM card. Stig (2008) recognizes that this was the first election that showed how internet fundraising can impact overall fundraising efforts. He states, "With more than N100 million transferred from voters to both campaigns over the Internet, the 2015 presidential campaign was the first one that effectively encouraged voters to donate significant amounts of money online." As Television remained the medium of choice, but the Internet's financial role continued to enlarge. Estimates put the total for online fund-raising at N100 million and online campaign advertising at N40 million." The 2015 election cycles demonstrate the impact Internet fundraising can have on overall political fundraising efforts.

The 2015 campaign continued to demonstrate the impact of Internet fundraising in expanding donor bases and overall fundraising efforts. The Buhari campaign was particularly successful in maximizing the possibilities of fundraising online, specifically in reaching a wider range of donors.

Online fundraising had a particularly big impact in increasing small donor contributions thus involving more people in the political process than in previous elections. The above comparison demonstrate the great success Buhari had raising from small donors as compared to other candidates for President. It also demonstrates the large impact new developments in online fundraising have had for political candidates:

Buhari's online fundraising success provided him with a number of strategic advantages; first, it allowed him to raise money efficiently and at a relatively low cost. Secondly, Buhari's small donor contributors gave him a large pool of donors who he could draw upon to give repeated contributions. Thirdly, Buhari's online fund-raising provided him with the capacity to contend Jonathan at crucial points during the nomination contest by having resources in every contestable areas through these online fundraising tactics, President Buhari was able to compete both the Jonathan and the Jonathan campaign team. This demonstrates that Internet fundraising technologies are particularly effective in increasing small donations from a wider range of donors. This was illustrated throughout the Buhari campaign. The Buhari campaign's success in relying on the Internet as a fundraising tool proved the impact Internet fundraising technologies can have on overall fundraising efforts and therefore, the electoral process as a whole.

Role of the Social Media in Fostering Political Participation
It is apt to posit that while political participation has been in decline or on a flat trend for the past three decades, the Internet showed its capability of reversing those trends by increasing information, discussion, and communication. Specifically, social media has been useful in reaching out to youth voters and encouraging them to vote. While some scholars question if social media can alone improve voter turnout in Nigerian Elections, it can certainly get young voters more involved in the political process by using youth friendly media outlets to reach out to them. Political participation encompasses many forms of activities including campaign donations, attempting to persuade others, voting, and taking part in activities related to politics.

The Internet has functioned as a tool designed to increase political participation in several ways. For example, Facebook has facilitated an online voter registration drive that produced a printout for potential voters to send to their state election officials. Other tools such as online volunteer sign-up forms, downloadable campaign materials, and tell-a-friend tools were found on most 2015 campaign websites. Campaign websites are also a tool for the candidates to increase political participation among their supporters.

As Omojuwa (2015) state, "Another important function of web sites is to reinforce supporters' commitment to the campaign by

helping them to understand their stake in the campaign or at least feel that their involvement in the campaign matters." Social networks can also be used to recruit volunteers. For example, Ambode, a candidate for Lagos state gubernatorial position, recruited 80% of his campaign volunteers online through Twitter and Facebook who ended up constituting the APC situation room personnel team. Additionally, websites like gemstone.org have been pioneers "in online-to-offline organizing – using email and the web to help folks make an impact in their neighbourhoods." These sites enable people who share a political interest to find each other online and then meet up offline.

In the six months leading up to the 2015 presidential election, 1,472 Meet up users utilized the site to organize offline gatherings and groups in support of Jonathan and 13,702 users did the same for Buhari. Tosin Ogunlesi (2015) identify the possibility that social media is impacting voter turnout in Nigerian Elections. He states, "Previous studies have demonstrated that one possible consequence of third-person perceptions of media coverage is increased voter turnout in Nigerian Elections and political participation. Online political participation via Facebook groups may similarly result from users' reactions to unfavourable mass media portrayals of their candidate of choice, or favourable portrayals of his or her opponent, and may similarly divide among part lines."

Role of the Social Media in Communicating Election Results

Social media impacts the results of local government elections, National House of Assembly elections, and presidential elections and primaries as illustrated by the connection between online and offline success. However, it may have only a small or negligent impact on national presidential elections. In these smaller, more competitive races, social media outreach provides an advantage by boosting voter turnout in Nigerian Elections. In these competitive elections, each vote makes a difference in the final outcome so voter turnouts in Nigerian Elections through social media channels are particularly effective. However, many political scientists believe social media cannot impact presidential election outcomes and it is extremely difficult to measure the difference social media outreach makes. This only attest to the fact that social media outreach can change final election results by a small margin.

Social media outreach can indirectly impact election results in several ways. One example of this is through blogging. Blogs are helping candidates win, particularly at lower levels. They may accomplish this in indirect ways such as through raising money and encouraging public support of their candidates. Political Scientist Alan Rosenblatt agrees with this assessment, "a few years ago people were asking when the Internet would win a presidential election. Today we recognize that no one can win the presidency without an Internet strategy. Indeed it no longer makes sense to talk about Internet strategy in isolation.

The use of digital network strategy is integral to every part of a campaign, from field organizing to fund-raising, from branding/messaging to press relations, and from registering people to vote to getting people out to vote."Since social media can impact election results in several indirect ways, it is extremely difficult to pinpoint, isolate, and measure how it has changed election results. However, there does seem to be a correlation between success on social networks and winning elections. Williams and Gulati conducted two studies that measure the impact of Facebook on election results in the 2006 American National House of Assembly races and 2010 presidential primary season. They find that Facebook can change election results by a small percentage.

Their study of the 2006 National House of Assembly races uses data from the 2006 midterm elections to prove that Facebook can change election outcomes. They modelled their research after a study conducted on the 2011 Australian national elections that found that having a web site increased a candidate's share of the vote by an average of 2%. Williams and Gulati using a logistic regression model found that U.S. National House of Assembly candidates who campaigned on Facebook in 2006 won a larger share of the vote than candidates who did not campaign on Facebook when controlling for all other variables.

This study has illustrated that social media can impact elections by providing information, impacting the news cycle and focuses of campaigns, shaping public opinion of candidates, increasing fundraising opportunities, boosting political participation and youth voter turnout in Nigerian Elections, and in some cases, impacting election results themselves. As Suleiman (2015) states, "No traditional advertising campaign could have created this phenomenon.

Buhari established a brand, symbolized it with a message and logo, synchronized it with our cultural moment, and created a communications strategy built on the mystic cords of social networking and the dynamic synergy of new media."Musa(2015) agrees that social media usage is one of the main reasons that he is now President, "The Buhari campaign's innovative use of 'new media' as well as old media was nothing short of spectacular. Had his campaign not been so skilled in its many applications of the new technology, which allowed Buhari to raise the necessary money to be competitive in all 36 states and the FCT, he probably would not have won the presidential election." The social media critic says there is "no net effect of new media." In other words, that without social media there would have been the same results through different means.

However, it is very difficult to prove this without the same election happening twice – once with social media and once without new media. This claim that nothing would have been different without social media is a difficult one to respond to. In all of the sources used in this paper, many recognize new media's limits in not being the one factor that could lead to an election win. However, not one of these sources claims that social media is not in some way impacting, influencing, or in any way changing the electoral process – and I have been unable to find any counter proof or any scholarly articles that say so.

The very nature of social media with its speed, inclusiveness, and ease of access makes it logical that it is a tool capable of revolutionizing the electoral process. These qualities make it easier for the average citizen to participate politically whether in terms of having political discussions online, volunteering online, donating to campaigns through their website, or even impacting the national news cycle by posting a video of a candidate misspeaking at a campaign event on YouTube for the whole world to see. Now that the general public can be the press, the press is even more omnipresent making it difficult for the political candidate to get away with anything. As far as election results go, while social media may not be the one resource that will mean if a candidate wins or loses, it is very likely that it could make a difference at the margins. This is especially the case in an extremely close election. Even in indirect ways, such as turning the news cycle against a candidate or a strong Internet fundraising campaign, social media has the potential to impact election results.

New media, in its speed and democratic nature, is a completely unique tool that has infinite capabilities in influencing the electoral process.

The impact social media can have on campaigns has many implications for future elections. Some of the impact of social media may be indirect in that it amplifies existing forces in politics. Ochigbo (2014) describes how it has come to influence several components of the electoral process. She remarks, "The Internet is no longer used by campaigns just to raise money. It has come to influence every aspect of presidential campaigning, from identifying supporters to communicating with them to entering their networks and talking to their friends."

With new applications appearing regularly, e.g Tiktok political use of the Internet should continue to expand in 2019 and 2023."Social media may not be the one tool to get a candidate elected, but online social networking can play a significant role in the result. As Adesina points out, "Campaigns need to change with the technologies, going where the voters are going and employing the tools the voters are using still out there. But even more importantly, campaigns must have a message that resonates with the voters wherever they may be found. Creating a Facebook page or integrating blogging capacity into a campaign homepage does not guarantee that a campaign will catch fire. Hence as concluded here, social media tools are just part of the packaging. Social media campaign possibilities garnered during the 2015 elections has set a precedent for future elections and how campaign teams need to integrate social media into their campaign strategy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study also brought to the fore the problem of weak or no regulation of social media. Even though, Facebook and twitter have brought out some rules and regulation to guide users. But yet there are still numerous cases on the abuse of other people's right and cyber bullying going on in social media platform. To this end, the study suggests urgent review of media laws to address the technicalities involved in the newer technologies and that regulatory bodies should think of policy sub-sections on different types of media such as Facebook, blogging and Twitter. In the final analysis, the study strongly recommends greater adoption and use of social media in

electioneering activities in Nigeria and establishment of strict monitoring mechanisms to minimize the inherent weaknesses and maximize the intrinsic values of social media in electoral process in the continent. This we believe would go a long way in fostering transparency, accountability, sanity, and bring more decorum into the polity.

From the foregoing discussions, this paper therefore supports the notion that social media has impacted positively on the political praxis of Nigeria, as fostered political participation and deepened Nigeria's electioneering process and also facilitated the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. Social media has altered the meaning of geographic distance, it has allowed a huge increase in the volume of communication flow, it has been able to provide the possibility of increasing the speed of communication and also providing opportunities for interactive communication, allowing forms of communication that were previously separate to overlap and interconnect. It is the submission of this paper that after considering the strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats of the social media, one would discover that it has indeed shaped the political landscape of Nigeria.

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