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## South-East Residents Opinion on the Influence of Social Media on the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria

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### **Abstract:**

*This study examined if social media had any determinable influence on the political opinions and behaviour of the Nigerian electorate. The researchers used the uses and gratification theories to explain how people access the social media for political news and discourse and how it influences their behaviour during political campaigns. The survey research design was applied to produce quantitative data from 390 respondents using the multi-stage sampling technique and qualitative data from 20 respondents through in-depth interviewing on how social media influenced their political behaviour. The findings show that social media is now a source of political news and information and that active use of social media enables citizens' participation in political discourse. It revealed that the use of social media influences political opinion and voting behaviour. The researchers concluded that social media, has become vital in Nigerian politics and that it played a role in enabling Muhammadu Buhari to win the 2015 Presidential elections. This study recommends that politicians, elected officials and governments must learn to leverage social media to win elections.*

**Keywords:** Social media, elections, political campaigns, political opinion, muhammadu buhari.

### **1. Introduction**

It is no more news that the world has become a global village as predicted by Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian scholar and communication philosopher, in the 1960s. What is news is that the tools that have enabled the shrinking of the globe into a 'village,' - the information communications technologies (ICTs) - have changed the shape and mode of human communication and interaction and thus affecting such areas as commerce, social networking, mass media, governance and politics. ICT have spawned social media, citizen journalism, social activism (which have toppled some governments across the world), and reinvigorated electorate across the world.

Social media has brought the world to the 'fingers' of the average citizen bypassing many traditional gate-keepers and creating new opinion leaders. The influence of internet-driven social media has made some observers to describe the web as an invention on the level of Gutenberg's printing press. A look around the society show that social media (which are free) is attracting more and more users. According to numbers from the website statista.com, Facebook, established in 2004, moved from one million users at the end of 2004 to over one billion in 2015. This massive increase occurred in just ten years. Twitter, founded in 2006, averages over Three hundred million active monthly users now. In the recent past, instant messaging applications like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, etc. all report more than One hundred million new monthly active users.

In 2012, Barack Obama with the aid of social media broke previous records to raise over one billion US dollars in campaign funds (<http://www.politico.com>). He leveraged on his popularity on Facebook to beat Hillary Clinton to the Democratic ticket in 2008 and went on to become the first black President of the USA. According to Aaker and Smith (2010) 'The Obama campaign reached 5 million supporters on 15 different social networks over the course of campaign season; by November 2008, Obama had approximately 2.5 million (some sources say as many as 3.2 million) Facebook supporters, 115,000 Twitter followers, and 50 million viewers of his YouTube channel.'

Obama, having set the pace, the Goodluck Jonathan campaign of 2011 utilised social media to secure the presidential race for the People's Democratic Party in Nigeria. On 29 June 2010, President Jonathan launched the first Nigerian President's Facebook page. Mr. Jonathan, the then Acting President later announced his decision to run on Facebook, a social media platform in which he had 300,000 followers by December, 2010 (Ekine, 2010). Fidelis Mbah of the BBC reported that 'President Goodluck Jonathan made history as the first head of government to use Facebook to make his formal declaration to stand for election. The president's decision has literally changed the political tide' (2011).

In America, which sees itself as the bastion of participatory democracy, the announcement via social media of the 2016 presidential candidates show that the influence of social media on political communication has continuously grown with each election. Senator Ted Cruz announced his decision to run for President on the Republican side through his Twitter account. Hillary Clinton, former first lady and Secretary of State, who lost the Democratic nomination to Barack

Obama in 2008 announced her intention to seek the Office of President via a YouTube Video and then a Twitter post. And Jeb Bush, whose father and brother had been U.S Presidents chose to use Snapchat, a messaging platform, to announce his bid to run.

Speaking about Donald Trump, Barbaro (2015) described Trump's campaign strategy as a means to 'forgo costly, conventional methods of political communication and instead rely on the free, urgent and visceral platforms of social media.'

In Nigeria, the 2015 elections were matchless as social media played a pivotal role in advocacy, citizen/social activism and of course political campaigning and advertising. The presidential, gubernatorial and candidates for the national and state assemblies and their army of supporters, advisers and policy makers all deployed social media in a bid to sway voters. Practically all the candidates at every level had a social media presence with Facebook and Twitter being the major platforms and online messaging networks like WhatsApp and Blackberry Messenger (BBM) coming behind. Agbaje (2015) opines that 'The election also marked the coming of age of social media as a critical force in Nigerian politics, for good or bad.'

The electorate were faced with two major issues: maintain the status quo by voting the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan and his People's Democratic Party (PDP), which had been in power at the Federal level for 16 years. Or vote for change with the All Progressives Congress (APC) and its Presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a former military head of state known for his rigid and incorruptible ways. While the PDP favoured a conventional campaign with a mix of traditional and new media tactics - which had kept them power since return to democracy in 1999 - the APC preferred a social media centric approach, hiring StateCraft Inc, a governance communication company focusing on a digitally driven campaign communication to 'drive agenda and build PR movements, that turn you audiences into raving fans,' according to their company website [redmediaafrica.com](http://redmediaafrica.com). StateCraft, a subsidiary of Red Media Africa also worked in elections across West Africa.

Social media, which are increasingly ubiquitous and free, seem to have drastically changed the course of political communication. Candidates now deploy them because they give them control over the content and timing of their messages. Social media helps candidates to reach demographics like teenagers and young people. Social media also enable candidates and parties to limit the power of traditional media during campaigns as was seen in the Donald Trump presidential campaign in America. Social media is cheaper to adopt and enable new and not-so-rich candidates to compete favourably for 'airtime' with established parties. The instant feedback mechanism in social media appeals to politicians and their handlers and the digital nature of social media can aid campaign organisations in gathering statistics and monitoring the performance and reach of political messages. These characteristics have endeared them to users and according to Verster (2010), social media are 'fast becoming the default internet mode of interaction, communication and collaboration.'

Abubakar (2011) writes that 'social media are both internet and mobile based apparatuses that allow people to easily share and discuss information.' Social media are a consequence of web 2.0, the second iteration of the World Wide Web, which seeks to have a 'Web' that is classified by the change from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content.

In Nigeria today, social media have become accessible and everywhere and its use in the political arena has become common. While the youth seem to love using it, the idea of a bill limiting the practice of social media has been mooted on the floor of the National Assembly titled 'a bill for an act to prohibit frivolous petitions, and other matters connected therewith (S.B 143, 2015).' It is in this connection that this study sought to find out how social media have influenced political campaigns, especially the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria.

The adoption of social media in Nigeria is quite high - especially among the young and educated people - with Nigeria having the highest users of Facebook in Africa according to [internetworldstats.com](http://internetworldstats.com). The ever increasing number of Nigerians using smartphones and the fall in data prices meant that social media is now heavily entrenched. With the growth of democracy, democratic ideals and culture in the country, social media and political campaigns have become interconnected.

Though several studies have focused on the role of social media during the 2015 General Election (Onyebuchi, Anorue and Obayi, 2016; Obono, 2016; Obukoadata, 2016), which was a watershed moment in Nigeria's democracy with the ousting of an incumbent for the first time in the history of presidential elections in the country, this study was focused primarily on the voters in the South-East

Therefore, this study seeks to find out if there is a determinable influence of social media, especially social network channels on political campaigns and on the political behaviour of the electorate in South-East Nigeria?

### 1.1. Objectives

The study aimed to:

- Ascertain the extent of social media use to participate in political discourse.
- Examine the influence of social media on political opinion formation and voting in Nigeria.
- Determine the effect of social media on President Buhari's performance in the 2015 general elections.

### 1.2. Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

- To what extent is social media used by citizens to participate in political discourse?
- What is the influence of social media on the formation of political opinions and voter behaviour in Nigeria?

- What effect did social media have on President Buhari's performance in the 2015 general elections.

### 1.3. Hypothesis

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between active use of social media channels and citizens participation in political discourse.

### 1.4. Limitation of the Study

Although the study was carefully conducted, I am not oblivious of its limitations and shortcomings.

First, since the questionnaire designed to measure respondent's attitude towards the use of social media for political campaigning might give useful information about the impact of social media, it seems not to provide enough evidence of the respondent's actual voting decision at the ballot box.

Secondly, it is not easy to decide where social media influence began and ended as other extraneous variables outside the scope of this work may have contributed also.

## 2. Related Works

### 2.1. Empirical Review

Agboola (2013) in a study to investigate the empirical relationship between internet use and online political behaviour found out that using blogs leads to democratic participation beyond the effects of traditional media use. The study titled students' perception of internet use in political campaigns in Nigeria found out that 'the positive effects of the blogosphere on certain political behaviours suggest that beyond self-expressions, blog use has societal level consequences in the form of enhanced political participation.' The researcher was able to show that regular blog readers became politically aware and that this affected how they behaved politically.

In a study conducted in 2013 in Jos metropolis, on youth participation in social media and political attitudes in Nigeria, Dagona, Karick and Abubakar (2013) discovered that 'there was a significant positive relationship between Facebook use and political participation.' The survey of 100 youths between the ages of 16 - 32 in Jos showed that usage of social media channels like Facebook increased the likelihood of participation in political discussion by participants. However, the study also revealed that Facebook use did not significantly influence political participation but afforded persons from varying perspectives the ability to 'unite and engage in political discourse.'

Another study on social media and political participation conducted by Okoro and Nwafor (2013) revealed that the social media are used to campaign, interact with candidates and electorate one-on-one, report happenings at the polling centres, share personal opinions and gauge public opinion. The study which focused on how youths in Nigeria deployed social media during the 2011 General Elections and which surveyed young people in all the state capitals also revealed that social media spread false rumours, hate and inciting messages, attack political opponents, digitally manipulate images, messages and videos and initiate spam and virus attacks on opponents.

A study which focused on students in tertiary institutions in the Lagos area reported that Facebook increased awareness about elections, initiated dialogue with the aspirants and created an environment for candidates to persuade and influence voters. Conducted by Oyesomi, Ahmadu and Itsekor (2014) it examined the effectiveness and role that Facebook played as a tool of communication and mobilisation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections also found out that the social media platform was heavily used by aspirants to elicit action - actual voting - from the electorate. The researchers also reported the misuse of the platform by demagogues hurling ethnic rhetoric and a lack of internet access as some of the problems.

To gauge the thematic narratives in political advertisements and voter's decision during the 2015 electioneering, Obukoadata, Uduma, Akan and Mbozo (2016) conducted a study that evaluated voter's perception towards these themes. The study used Pearson statistics to deconstruct data drawn from 600 voters in the six geo-political zones of Nigeria using a multi-stage design. The objective of the study was to analyse some of the inherent themes within the framework of presentation in order to gauge voter's perception and how it impacted voting decision. They found out that 'insults and hate campaigns on the social media had very significant incidence in all campaigns on the social media'. Obukoadata et al (2016) conclude that the themes are both sublime and manifest and include others like shaping political agenda and polarisation of ideologies and culture.

A study to investigate the ways in which politicians and other Nigerian citizens used citizen media before, during and after the 2015 elections was conducted by Usua and Nwachukwu (2016). The pair used a survey and focus group discussion to study the South-South region of Nigeria. 400 respondents in Port-Harcourt, Yenagoa and Uyo and 6 Focus group discussant provided the sample size. The data gathered indicated that Facebook was the most frequently used social media during the 2015 General Elections. The study also revealed that social media featured prominently from the period before the elections, during the electioneering campaign period and also during the collation process. According to them, 'The people exposed to these messages in the South-South region of Nigeria agreed to have been influenced by some of these messages from the citizen media in their voting decisions, although the direction of this influence was not indicated.' An increasing body of research has also examined the impact of online news consumption on democratic participation across the globe. Some authors have proposed that there are no significant links between online news consumption and civic participation. One of such is an early study done by Bimber (2001) on information and political engagement in America. The study, one of the earliest on the internet, used data about internet engagement in the period 1996 -1999 and

found no relationship between information availability via the internet and political engagement. However, he found a connection between use of new media and donation of money to political causes.

A panel study conducted during the 2010 Swedish election campaign found that new media channels like online news and campaign websites had a weak effect on political participation even though they increased political knowledge and had a significant effect on learning. The study by Dimitrova, Shehata, Stromback and Nord (2014), indicated that social media in particular 'showed both significant and positive effects on political participation.'

Emetumah (2016) in a study titled social media as a factor for increased frontiers of democracy in Nigeria's 2015 Presidential election found out that the two main political parties PDP and APC deployed social media for propaganda and unethical communication. The study which purposively sampled 200 tweets, Facebook posts and blog articles found out that 'social media platform played a major role in the voting pattern of the electorate; Nigerians became politically aware as a result of the activities of the platform'.

## 2.2. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the uses and gratifications theory. The uses and gratifications theory deals with how people use the media for gratification of their needs. Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango and Peters (2012) commenting on the theory say that 'what the studies by Lazarsfeld and other researchers have shown is that the power of mass media as agents of direct social and political influence was quite minimal and cannot be isolated from the influences of other factors.'

A major principle of uses and gratifications theory is that media use is selective and motivated by rational choices based on the individual's needs and expectations that certain media and content will satisfy their needs. A study by Fry and McCain (1983) discovered that an individual's expectations, evaluations, and motivations determined the usefulness of a medium. Perse and Courtright (1993) state that people know of alternative communication channels and select certain channels based on the normative images those channels are seen to have.

With each invention of new communication media, scholars have noted that emerging technologies continually provide users with a wider range of channels and media, and individuals are selecting a media catalogue that best suits their areas of interest be it cable television, VCRs, digital radios, Walkmans/iPods/Mp3 players, smartphones and internet mediated social media.

The theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumer and Michael Gurevitch in the 1970s and was built on the earlier work of Paul Lazarsfeld and founded on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Uses and Gratifications theory says that audiences expose themselves to the media in a bid to meet some of their needs and from which they derive gratifications (McQuail, 2010; Baran and Davis, 2012).

Uses and Gratifications theory approach the mass media audience as having agency and active rather than passive, as was expounded by the powerful effects approach. In essence, the theory is about what the audience does with the media and not what the media do to the audience. For instance, why the social media was originally designed as a socialization tool, the audience now also uses it for political participation, political campaigns, mobilisation, persuasion and even radicalization while receiving corresponding gratifications.

Katz, Blumler and Gurevich (1974) in their proposition listed five components comprising the Uses and Gratifications Approach:

- The audience is active.
- The audience takes initiative in connecting gratification and media choice
- The media competes with other sources for audience satisfaction.
- Many of the goals of mass media use can be derived from data supplied by individual audience members themselves.
- The audience judges the value to place on media content.

The authors in their uses and gratification theory articulated various gratifications obtained by audience members to include among others: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance.

Today, the media has become the biggest diversion industry in the world. Audience members use television soap operas, telenovelas, films, sporting broadcasts and other entertainment programmes to escape from the bore of making a living, relax, have emotional release and even sexual fantasy. With the widespread adoption of social media, getting people to focus has become a recent problem as audiences face an onslaught of content from the myriad social media applications available.

Personal identity has soared in the age of social media. Online avatars and profiles are providing users with the opportunity to seek identification and identity in myriad and unique ways - many of which are 'larger-than-life' personas - in addition to the other ways available via the traditional media like musicals, sporting heroes, film characters, on-air personalities etc.

With social media apps like Facebook, Tinder, WhatsApp, Instagram, Weibo, WeChat, Telegram, etc., audiences seek gratifications that come in personal relationships. This gratification is behind the popularity of social media apps globally driving increasing numbers of audience members to the instant gratification of connecting with another human over the limitation of time and space.

Social media changed the news cycle introducing online, on-demand, 24-hour news cycles delineated by trends. In the public-sphere of the global village, the gratification of surveillance is fuelled by social media.

The uses and gratifications theory is used in this study because it is audience-based and focused on how voters use social media for the satisfaction of their cognitive need for information and knowledge about the political process. Lin (1996) talking about the strength of uses and gratifications theory as relates to social media says that the use of personal

computers and more recently smartphones can be traced to an individual's motivations to use the internet for communication in order to get gratifications like social identity, interpersonal communication, escape, entertainment, and surveillance.

This theory is relevant to this study because it offers significant evidence that helps to explain the ways social media is used for political dialogue, debate and campaign, and the gratifications received from using the social media to participate in politics and in deepening the political culture.

### 3. Methodologies

The study adopted the descriptive research design to examine the impact of social media on the opinion and political behaviour of residents of south-eastern Nigeria during the 2015 presidential election. This study was carried out using the survey research method. The Questionnaire and In-depth Interview were used as research instruments to obtain data from the area of the study which is the South-East geopolitical area of Nigeria comprising of five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The population for this study consists of Nigerian voters living in the five South-Eastern states over the age of 18 (that is, those eligible to use social media and also to vote). The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) puts the number of registered voters in the South-East states at 7, 665, 859 as at January 2015 (Nwafor, 2015).

The survey adopted a sample size of 400. However out of 400 questionnaires administered to the respondents only 390 were returned and this number formed the basis for the analysis.

The In-depth Interview sample constitutes of 20 respondents including journalists, lecturers, students, IT experts, community organisers etc. Guest, Bunce, et al (2006) counsel that 'saturation often occurs around 12 participants.' The interviews were conducted by the researcher who recruited respondents by visiting their places of work and interviewing persons that use and are knowledgeable about new media.

For the questionnaire distribution, the sampling technique that was used is the multi-stage sampling technique. The population was divided into 5 clusters using the existing states as criteria: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. To know the required number of respondents to sample from each state, the sample size of 400 was divided by the five eastern states to get 80 respondents. Simple random sampling technique was then employed to sample only respondents from each of the state capitals because the capitals meet the criteria needed of a place with an abundance of educated people who use social media and the availability of internet facilities. Twenty respondents each from two local government areas in each of the five state capitals were sampled using simple random sampling making it 40 respondents per state. Thereafter, 4 localities were simple randomly selected in each local government area and 10 respondents sampled using simple random sampling. In each locality, 2 streets were simple randomly selected and 5 respondents simple randomly sampled in each street to get 10 respondents in each locality. Finally, on each street 5 houses were simple randomly selected and 1 respondent in each house who is over eighteen and uses social media was given the questionnaire.

POPULATION (7.6M)					
CLUSTERS	IMO	ABIA	ANAMBRA	EBONYI	ENUGU
SAMPLING UNIT 1	2 LGAs/State	2 LGAs/State	2 LGAs/State	2 LGAs/State	2 LGAs/State
	- Owerri Municipal	Umuahia North	Awka North	Abakaliki	Enugu North
40 respondents/LGA	- Owerri West	Umuahia South	Awka South	Ebonyi	Enugu South
SAMPLING UNIT 2	4 localities/LGA	4 localities/LGA	4 localities/LGA	4 localities/LGA	4 localities/LGA
	Owerri - Prefab	UmuahiaNorth	Awka North	Abakaliki	Enugu North
10 respondents /locality		Ehimiri H/E	Achalla	Kpiri-Kpiri	New Haven
	Ikenegbu L/out	World Bank	Amansea	Pressco Junc	GRA
	Aladinma H/E	GRA	Amanuke	New Layout	Independence
	Umuoronjo	Isi Gate/Town	Ugbenu	GRA	Asana Ogui
	Owerri West-	Umuahia South-	Awka South	Ebonyi	Enugu South
	Amakohia	Old Umuahia	Ahocol Phase1	Edda	Achara Layout
	Akwakuma	Aba Road	Awka/ Zik Ave	Amagu	Ziks Ave/Uwani
	Egbeada FHE	Ubakala	Amawbia	Amachi	New Layout
	Umuguma H/E	Agbama Estate	Nise	Ntezi-Aba	Garki/Agbani Rd.
SAMPLING UNIT 3	2	2 Streets/locality	2	2	2 Streets/locality
5 respondents /street	Streets/locality		Streets/locality	Streets/locality	
SAMPLING UNIT 4	5 Houses /Street	5 Houses /Street	5 Houses /Street	5 Houses /Street	5 Houses /Street
1respondent /House					

Table 1: Multi-Stage Cluster Sampling Technique

The In-depth Interview sample of 20 persons was composed of 4 respondents from each South-East state capital. The researcher purposively contacted journalists, IT practitioners, civil servants, youth leaders, a religious official, lecturers and students in tertiary institutions etc., who actively use social media for news and information. Their opinions were then analysed to pick out codes and themes expressed within that agree or disagree with the proposed hypotheses.

The instruments were face validated by a professor and other experts drawn from Faculty of Social Sciences, Imo State University, Owerri. In order to determine reliability, the test of inter-item consistency reliability, Cronbach's coefficient alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was applied. Internal consistency of the scale (pilot test) was computed using SPSS v. 20.0.

### 3.1 Results

This section presents the analyses of data collected through survey. The data collected via quantitative and qualitative methods are presented.

Research Question 1: To what extent is social media used by citizens to participate in political discourse?

Statement	Always	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	TOTAL
How often is your engagement in political debates/communication on social media (e.g. Post, like, share, tweet, blog a political campaign message etc.)	51	74	101	98	66	390

Table 2: Participation in Political Debates and Communication Via Social Media  
Source - Field Study 2016)

Table 2 above shows that 51 of participants responded always on engagement in political campaigns on social media, 74 Very Often, 101 Often, 98 Sometimes, while 66 rarely.

	Number	Weighted Responses
Always	51	1
Very Often	74	2
Often	101	3
Sometimes	98	4
Rarely	66	5

Table 3: Mean Score Calculation

Using  $M = \frac{\sum X}{N}$  where:

X = any score in series of numbers

M = the mean

$\sum$  = the sum

N = the total number of series in a distribution

The mean score table above reveals that respondents often participate in political debates and communication via social media (M=3.1).

- Research Question 2: How is Social Media influencing formation of political opinions and voter behaviour in Nigeria?

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
People now believe Social Media more than traditional media (Radio/TV/Newspapers)	128	198	4	55	5	390

Table 4: Social Media Influence on Formation of Political Opinions and Voter Behaviour  
Source - Field Study 2016

Table 4 above shows that 128 of participants responded Strongly Agree, that People now believe Social Media more than traditional media like Radio/TV/Newspapers, 198 Agree, 4 No Opinion, 55 Disagree and 5 Strongly Disagree.

	Number	Weighted Responses
Strongly Agree	128	1
Agree	198	2
No Opinion	4	3
Disagree	55	4
Strongly Disagree	5	5

Table 5: Mean Score Calculation

Using  $M = \frac{\sum X}{N}$

The mean score table above reveals that respondents agree that social media influences the formation of political opinions and voter behaviour (M=2)  
 Research Question 3: What effect did social media have on President Buhari's performance in the 2015 General Elections.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Social media had a big effect on the outcome of the 2015 Presidential Elections.	108	242	21	10	9	390

Table 6: Social Media and President Buhari's Election Victory  
 Source - Field Study 2016

Table 6 above shows that 108 of respondents Strongly Agree that Social Media had a big effect on the outcome of the 2015 Presidential elections that saw the emergence of President Buhari, 242 Agree, 21 No Opinion, 10 Disagree and 9 Strongly Disagree.

	Number	Weighted Responses
Strongly Agree	108	1
Agree	242	2
No Opinion	21	3
Disagree	10	4
Strongly Disagree	9	5

Table 7: Mean Score Calculation

$$\text{Using } M = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

From the mean score, Table 7 reveals that respondents agree that social media had a significant impact on the outcome of the 2015 Presidential elections (M=1.8).

### 3.2 Testing of Hypothesis

In testing the hypothesis stated, the researcher used regression analysis.

- $H_{01}$ : There is no significant relationship between active use of social media channels and citizens participation in political discourse.

Activeness	Frequency	Percentage
Always	205	53%
Once a day	151	39%
Once a week	29	7%
Once a month	5	1%
Never	-	0%
Total	390	100%

Table 8: Distribution of Respondents by Activeness in Social Media Use  
 Source - Field study 2016

S/N	Statement	Always	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	TOTAL
1.	How often is your engagement in political debates/communication on social media (e.g. Post, like, share, tweet, blog a political campaign message etc.)	51	74	101	98	66	390

Table 9: Participation in Political Debates and Communication via Social Media  
 Source - Field Study 2016

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.473 <sup>a</sup>	.224	-.035	78.15664

Table 10: Regression Analysis for the Relationship between Active Uses of Social Media Channels and Citizens Participation in Political Discourse  
a. Predictors: (Constant), VAR00002

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean of Square	F	Sig.
Regression	5282.619	1	5282.619	0.865	.421 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	18325.381	3	6108.460		
Total	23608.000	4			

Table 11

- a. Dependent Variable: VAR00001  
b. Predictors: (Constant), VAR00002

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	210.96	147.187		1.433	0.247
	VAR00002	-1.705	1.833	-.473	-0.93	0.421

Table 12

- a. Dependent Variable: VAR00001

A linear regression was calculated to predict citizens participation in political discourse based on use of social media channels. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(1, 3) = .865, P < .421$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .224. At 95% confidence interval we reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between use of social media channels and citizens participation in political discourse and conclude that there is a significant relationship between use of social media channels and citizens participation in political discourse.

### 3.3. Analysis of Data (Qualitative)

A 100% response rate was achieved as all the planned interviews totaling 20 interviews were conducted.

#### 3.3.1. Analysis of Research Questions

- *Research Question 1: To what extent is social media used by citizens to participate in political discourse?*
- *In-depth Interview Question. To what extent is social media used by citizens to participate in political discourse?*

The qualitative data obtained from the In-depth interview answered this research question. Most of the interviewees stated that their use of social media channels enhanced their participation in political discourse. They posit that since a great number of people have smartphones that can access the internet and belong to one social network or the other, it encourages them to participate in political discourse. A male interviewee said, 'Basically everybody has a smartphone. And they have Facebook account and Twitter. And they all go in there. So many political news is there and they also lend their voices there.' Respondent 11 contributed by saying, 'In fact, I love this technology and the way it helps us ordinary people to voice out our opinions and join the debate on better welfare for citizens of Nigeria. I love these apps. My WhatsApp and Facebook are full of political debate and adverts and discussions with others about how to make Nigeria better.'

- *Research Question 2: How is Social Media influencing formation of political opinions and voter behaviour in Nigeria?*
- *In-depth Interview Question: Which of these channels, media and applications would you consider to be key for forming opinion about whom to vote for or policies to support or not support? Please explain*

The responses from the in-depth interview indicate that there is some correlation between using social media as a primary source of news and opinion formation and voter behaviour. An interviewee responds that 'To me Facebook is the media that best helps people to form opinions about politics and happenings in the political space. Everybody has a smartphone and many people are subscribed to Facebook. How much is a newspaper now? But with just little MB (megabyte) people can log into Facebook and criticise the President or Governor.' Another respondent (16) added: 'All of them are key to forming opinion. You see all these digital new media report information from different angles. Sahara Reporters can give you serious investigative information. Nairaland forum has minds that can debate issues; Facebook too and on Twitter for example the politicians and stars are interacting making it possible for you to get more information. So they're all good for forming opinion about everything, not just politics - fashion, technology, economics and all others.'

- *Research Question 3: What effect did social media have on President Buhari's performance in the 2015 general elections.*



- *In-depth Interview Question: Was President Buhari's election victory in 2015 linked to influence of social media? Please elaborate.*

The In-depth interviews reveal that nearly all the interviewees concur that President Buhari's election victory was influenced by the effective use of social media by his supporters. A respondent (8), said, 'I will elaborate by saying that the internet and social media played a vital role. It is undeniable that the APC propaganda machine on Facebook and Twitter and the rest of the web was focused on telling the youths that Jonathan was a failure. They used words like 'clueless' a lot and many young minds who used the internet felt things were not going on well especially with all the corruption. The social media was also used to attack Patience Jonathan and all the things they said about her made her husband to lose the election.' Respondent 18 adds, 'My brother, yes o. PMB as he is called on the internet used the influence of social media to a great deal. His social media team was excellent and deployed a great media marketing mix to woo the voters. Young people across the nation trooped to him in droves. Many came on social media to declare that they will vote for PMB, even before the elections. This action prompted other young people to join the PMB train and before anyone knew what was happening it was a wining train.' Respondent 1 advances that 'So many people accessed that change mantra in social media platform. So many of them. Especially, the youth. They were able to access manifesto of APC. And what Goodluck Jonathan was not doing. So many people appreciated the change mantra. They did it through social media. So it's an effective platform.'

#### 4. Discussion Of Findings

The discussion of findings is based on the research questions outlined for the study.

- *RQ1: To what extent is social media used by citizens to participate in political discourse?*

The study found that there is a significant relationship between active use of social media channels and citizens participation in political discourse. The availability and ease of adoption of social media channels has enabled more Nigerians, especially young ones and those previously unengaged in the political process to habit and participate in the political space.

The findings are consistent with Obono (2016), whose work titled 'The Architecture and Use of Social Media in the 2015 General Elections' revealed that the use of social media was very high and featured prominently prior, during and after the 2015 General Elections. Obono revealed that citizens used social media for political activities to be 'empowered by the interactive and participatory nature, which enables communication among the political class, electorates and citizens'.

The finding corroborates the uses and gratifications theory which is about the uses audience members put to mass media channels, and in this case social media has been used as a tool for expression of speech and ideas and a means for people to contribute to debates and political discourse. Where the traditional media is becoming restrictive and limiting for the individual, the social media is proving to be a platform used by the masses for political communication and public discourse.

- *RQ2: What is the influence of social media on the formation of political opinions and voter behaviour in Nigeria?*

The study found that people now believe social media more than traditional media like radio, TV, and newspapers and this believability of social media news and information is influencing political opinion and voting behaviour. This is likely because social media content, which is spread via existing social networks, are more likely to be taken in. And this finding is corroborated by the work of Anorue et al (2016) on the 'Perceived influence of political campaigns carried out on social media and voter's behaviour in the 2015 General Elections.' They concluded that '...it can be inferred that the social media contributed more in political enlightenment of Nigerians as it increased the quotient of political discourses than influencing their voting behaviour ' This fits into the uses and gratifications theory which proposes that the audience judges the value to place on media content and some of the gratifications received from media use by audience members include personal relationship and identity.

- *RQ3: What effect did social media have on President Buhari's performance in the 2015 general elections.*

Findings reveal that social media had a big impact on the outcome of the 2015 Presidential Elections and that many voters chose a candidate (in this case Muhammadu Buhari) simply because of the candidate's appeal on social media. Therefore there is a significant relationship between deploying of social media channels in the campaign process and Muhammadu Buhari winning the Presidential elections.

This study agrees with the work of Effing, Hillegersberg and Huibers (2011) who studied municipal and national elections in Netherlands in 2011. The Dutch researchers discovered that Twitter, Facebook and YouTube affected levels of participation which they termed 'e-enabling, e-engaging and e-empowerment.' According to them 'politicians with higher social media engagement got relatively more votes within most parties' during the Dutch national elections of 2010/2011.

This shows that politicians using and integrating social media channels into campaign and political communication contributes to deciding an election. Politicians have latched onto the opportunities provided by social media in line with the public sphere theory. In this Information age, social media has become a veritable tool vigorously utilised by audiences to participate in the political process, to join in political campaigns and make decisions over who to vote or support as supported by the uses and gratifications theory.

#### 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study show that social media is now a source of political news and information and that active use of social media enables citizens participation in political discourse. Also, that the use of social media as a source of

news and information influences political opinion formation and voting behaviour. Finally, that there is a relationship between the use of social media and Buhari's electoral victory in the 2015 election.

The study provides insight into the ascendancy in level of use of social media for political news and information. It provides a useful basis to support the idea that expert use of social media to campaign enabled Muhammad Buhari to win the 2015 Presidential election.

Some of the relevance of this study is that governmental and non-governmental agencies must note the high rate of social media use by young people and invest more in communicating via social media to reach the youths, especially in the areas of opinion formation and political behaviour as the importance of social media in society continues to rise.

## 6. Recommendations

In the aftermath of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Politicians, elected officials and governments must learn to leverage social media to continually engage with constituents in this age of the 24 hours 'breaking news' cycle.
- Citizen journalists must be subject to the rules that govern professional journalists as it concerns defamation, libel and disinformation, especially in this age of the 'fake news' phenomenon.
- Politicians, political parties, civil society groups, electoral commissions and political communication scholars must start focusing on social media as it is now a veritable turf for winning and losing elections.

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