

The Architecture and Use of Social Media in the 2015 Nigerian General Elections

Koblwe Obono, *Ph.D.*
University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper analyses the use of social media for political mobilisation and communication during the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. Its aim is to describe the structure and context of information dissemination and communication among political actors, agents and the electorate during this period. It argues that the widespread use of social media was due to the evolving technological architecture of the Internet as well as the ready supply of human technical competencies and appetite for use. The technical setting for the observed level of use depended on several factors, which included, primarily, high Nigerian mobile teledensity, a relatively large number of Internet service providers, a demographic youth bulge and real time communication. It was facilitated by improvements in the availability, accessibility, affordability, and adaptability of the Internet and mobile phones. These factors, among others, were the precursors and enhancers of

political communication via social media during the elections.

Keywords: Social media, Social structure, Election campaigns, Architecture, Political communication

Introduction

The use of social media for elections is increasing in Nigeria based on the current socio-technological architecture enabling its use for communication processes. Their prominent use is linked to the wave of web innovation and emergence of Web 2.0 applications, which have created new communication opportunities and a dynamic fusion of interpersonal social networking, mass news and information sharing (Matteson, 2013). Web 2.0 technologies have revolutionized information publishing, access and consumption, changing the act of communication, information dissemination and networking, and making computer-mediated communication all pervasive. Social media networks and web applications therefore open new opportunities for the news industry (Alejandro, 2019), and by extension, politicians, publics and media organizations.

Although the use of social media for elections prevails, what remain unknown are the factors that have made their use in the Nigerian political environment possible and inevitable. In other words, there is dearth of scientific knowledge on the phenomenon, hence, little is known about the architecture and use of social media in 2015 Nigerian elections. This study therefore, investigated the architecture and use of social media, with a view to determining the precursors and enhancers of their use, including software and hardware technologies and social capital.

Architecture is conceptualised in this paper as the structural foundation upon which social media use is built to enhance and maximise human interactions and productivity in

social settings. It is the structure of digital spaces and design of an environment that encourages a desired range of social behaviours leading towards some set of goals (Gatsby, 2014), including political communication. The architecture of social media use is therefore an examination of the technological and social structures that permit their use, including skilled manpower, evolving Internet culture and the general enabling environment. Social media use is framed as the utilisation of this new media platform by Nigerians to disseminate and engage in political discourse. It consists of the activities of political actors, agents, electorates and citizens to disseminate information as well as share and discuss political messages throughout the election period. Use is not limited to specific political parties, social media networks or individuals but generalised to provide a holistic view of social media and politics, and their relevance for political discourse. In this sense, social media use in Nigeria is a form of political participation.

The paper examines social media use by describing the structural context of their operation in 2015 elections. The study was anchored on Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory, which is "the structuring of social relations across time and space, in virtue of the duality of structure" (Giddens, 1984, p. 376). It notes that social life is more than random individual acts, but suggests that human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other (Gauntlett, 2002). Accordingly, the theory attempts to recast structure and agency as a mutually dependent duality (Rose, 1999). For Giddens, human agency and social structure are not two separate concepts or constructs, but ways of considering social action. Structuration, therefore, means studying the ways in which social systems are produced and reproduced in social interaction (Giddens, 1984). His approach to social action is that of active actors, who interact in more conscious ways and his use of the word 'interactive' suggests the active status of human beings,

hence, Poole's (2000) adaption of Structuration to communication to produce the theory of Adaptive Structuration.

Adaptive Structuration Theory is useful for understanding how the structures that are created influence communication and is a viable approach for studying the role of advanced information technologies. It examines the types of structures that are provided and emerge in human action as people interact with technologies (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994). For them, Adaptive Structuration is relevant for capturing the complexity in technology use due to the expanding influence of technology on human-computer interaction. Based on these theories, the paper posits that human agency and social structure are produced by social action and interaction. While political actors and citizens are the agents of political communication, they facilitate interaction through available social media structures.

By using the word interaction, therefore, Giddens signals his belief that people are relatively free to act as they will. His concept of Structuration is the core idea that produced Adaptive Structuration because Poole (2000, p. 238) "observes that members of task groups intentionally adapt rules and resources in order to accomplish their decision-making goal". The theoretical framework is, therefore, relevant to investigating the structures that enabled the 2015 social media political interactions.

Social Media and their Utility for Communication

Social media are a new trend of communication among people who depend on the media for news and information. They encompass the basic characteristics of the media and users of the media (Drury, 2008) as the communication deals with creating, sharing and exchanging ideas among a network of people in a society. Social media are Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan

and Haenlein, 2010). These online resources enable individuals, groups and organisations to share content, including video, photos, images, texts, news, ideas, insight, humour, opinion and gossip. They facilitate social interactions, and enable development and diffusion of information (Kavanaugh, Fox, Sheetz, Yang, Li, Shoemaker & Xie, 2012). Chan-Olmsted, Cho and Lee (2013), citing Mayfield, observe that participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness are the five distinguishing features of social media.

Social media are classified into types (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), properties (Taprial and Kanwar, 2012) and features (Neelamalar and Chitra, 2009). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) grouped them into collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs and micro blogs (e.g. Twitter), content communities (e.g. YouTube), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), virtual game-worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft) and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second life). Despite these groupings, social media do not operate in isolated spheres but as a unit, hence, the argument that Twitter is a combination of broadcasting service and social network, classified as a “social broadcasting technology” (Shi, Rui and Whinston, 2013). The divisions are therefore structural attributes for easy distinction as they all play important roles in sharing information.

The properties of the social media identified by Taprial and Kanwar (2012) include accessibility, interactivity, longevity/volatility, speed and reach while the features that attract social media use are scrapping, profile setting and photo sharing (Neelamalar and Chitra, 2009). Scrapping satisfies the socialization needs of users to participate in discussion but profile setting allows individuals to exhibit their personal identities in their own terms. Accordingly, each profile page is unique to the owner and allows its purveyor to literally “type oneself into being” (Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley, 2010).

Social media users are active or passive depending on their level of involvement in communication. Bruns (2009) classified them into instrumental and social users, where instrumental users desire information or entertainment but social users remain active participants. Their participation is facilitated by user-generated content, which enables users to comment and exchange views through social interactions and collaboration. Based on the capacities of social media for collaboration, participation, empowerment and time, youths have been able to do exploit social media use (Magro, 2012). The technology affords users with more freedom during interpersonal interactions (Sidelinger, Ayash, Godorhazy and Tibbles, 2008) and improvements in technology enable individuals and groups to communicate irrespective of their geographical locations.

Social media empower expression of opinions and sharing of information. Users are active in designing and deciding contents, to buttress Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch's (1974) proposition of an active audience rather than passive consumers of media contents. The role of social media in modern society is fascinating because of user's ability to participate, collaborate, consume, create and share content via a variety of platforms, including blogs, email, instant messaging services, social network services, collaborative wikis, social bookmarking sites and multimedia sharing sites. Their use in Nigeria is motivated by identity construction, entertainment, information gathering and utility for cheaper communication (Olowu and Seri, 2011; Agunbiade, Obiyan and Sogbaike, 2013; Ezeah, Asogwa and Edogor, 2013; Edegoh, Asemah and Ekanem, 2013 and Olatokun and Ilevbare, 2014).

The strengths of social media are diverse. They are unique and have comparative advantages over traditional media. They differ in reach, accessibility and availability because although old and new media are capable of reaching a global audience, traditional media use a centralised framework for production and

dissemination of information while social media are more decentralised, less hierarchical and distinguished by multiple points of production and utility (Chan-Olmsted et al, 2013). According to them, only government officials and wealthy private individual have the financial, technical and managerial wherewithal to dictate the tune on traditional media relative to social media, which accommodates audience participation and contribution. Social media technologies are also capable of delivering virtually instantaneous responses that enhance political participation.

Methods

The study adopted the descriptive research design to examine the socio-technological structures that permit social media use in 2015 elections. A triangulation of quantitative and qualitative research approaches was used for investigating the architecture and use of social media within the period. Survey was the principal research method, complemented by focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview (IDI). Questionnaire, in-depth interview and focus group discussion guides were used to retrieve data concerning the study phenomenon.

A multi stage sampling technique was used to select the study participants. The first stage was to purposively select the University of Ibadan based on its status as a federal institution accommodating people from the six socio-political zones. The university was thereafter stratified into faculties out of which three - Faculties of Arts, Social Sciences and Law - were randomly selected. Using the simple random sampling technique, two departments were selected from each faculty, except Law, which operates a unique departmental structure. Samples were drawn from the Departments of Communication and Language Arts, Religious Studies, Sociology, Political Science and Law.

Copies of the questionnaire were administered on 700 staff

and students but 693 were valid and used for the analysis. Six in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions were conducted based on sex, age and occupation for in-depth understanding of the problem. While the research examined social media to know the most used for different political activities, election issues focused on were spread across 2015 pre-election campaigns, elections and post-election discourse. The election period covered by the study therefore spanned November 16, 2014 (commencement of presidential campaigns) through February 14, 2015 (Presidential election) and April, 2015 (post-election activities). Quantitative and qualitative data were respectively analysed using the statistical package of the social sciences (SPSS) and thematic building technique.

Results

The results present the architecture and use of social media in 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. They describe the structure and context of information dissemination and communication among political actors, agents and electorates, highlighting the different strategies of social media use during the elections. Finding showed a fair representation of people across age, sex, income, occupation, education, religion, among other socio-demographic divide. Table 1 shows that most respondents (96.8%) are eligible voters but largely, young people aged 18-29 years (80.5%). They have the capacity for engaging in independent assessment of politics and social media use in Nigeria.

A majority of the respondents are educated with educational levels, ranging from primary to postgraduate. However, the highest education attained by participants is Bachelor's degree (60.2%) and a monthly income that is below N 20,001 (64.9%) likely because most of the respondents are students (87.7%). This low income level may detract from the use of social media, which operate with Internet and ICTs. The variance in occupational, educational and residential structures

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	287	41.4
	Female	398	57.4
	Missing	8	1.2
	Total	693	100.
Age	15-17yrs	22	3.2
	18-29yrs	558	80.5
	30-39yrs	58	8.4
	40-49	38	5.5
	50-59yrs	15	2.2
	60 and above	2	.3
	Total	693	100.0
Marital Status	Single	586	86.2
	Married	88	12.9
	Separated	2	.3
	Divorced	1	.1
	Widowed	2	.3
	Others	1	.1
	Total	680	100
Highest Educational level	Primary	2	.3
	Secondary	76	11.4
	Diploma	17	2.6
	BA/BSc	400	60.2
	Ma/MSc	138	20.8
	PhD	21	3.2
	others	10	1.5
	Total	664	100.0

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (Contd.)

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percent	
Occupation	Student	592	87.7	
	Lecturer	33	4.9	
	Admin staff	22	3.3	
	Business	21	3.1	
	Others	7	.9	
	Total	675	100	
Monthly income	Below ₦5,000	69	12.1	
	Between ₦5001 - ₦20,000	300	52.8	
	Between ₦20,001 - ₦50,000	114	20.1	
	Between ₦50,001 - ₦100,000	30	5.3	
	Above ₦100,000	48	8.5	
	Others	7	1.2	
	Total	568	100	
	Religion	Others	592	88.1
		Others	75	11.2
		Others	3	.4
		Others	2	.2
Others		672	100	
Total	496	72.2		

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (Contd.)

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percent
Ethnicity/ Religion	Christianity	115	16.7
	Islam	4	.6
	African Traditional	72	10.5
	Others		
	Total	687	100
Residence	Rural	30	4.5
	Sub-urban	115	17.3
	Urban	519	77.9
	Others	2	.4
	Total	666	100

Architecture of Social Media Use

Communication does not occur in a vacuum. The same is true of social media use as observed in 2015 Nigerian elections, where they operated within the existing communication architecture. In other words, social media use is predicated on technological and social structures, which are the foundational apparatus necessitating their use for electoral discourse. The structure and context of information dissemination and communication among political actors, agents, electorate and citizens depended on social structure, including skilled manpower, enhanced technology, evolving Internet culture and the general enabling environment in Nigeria.

The use of social media for political discourse in 2015 Nigerian elections builds on existing structural facilities. It deals with the precursors and enhancers of social media use; hence, its architecture is anchored on several technological and social factors, including high teledensity, mobile telephony, the Internet

and skilled manpower. A male discussant noted:

...no better place for creating awareness than social media. Look at this example, there are more than one million Nigerians on Facebook and that's a huge amount and other social media too. We have Instagram, just everywhere you can just go online, go to the Internet, surf the Internet. You just see vote for this, vote for that. It is very easy and it is very fast.

The ease at which social media was used for the elections was based on the already existing framework for high use by Nigerians, including ease of Internet access and proliferation of social network sites (SNS). The speed of operation and high online presence of citizens also facilitated its use in 2015 elections.

The structure of social media use is not only revealed through qualitative data as quantitative findings also support these structural views, including the high level of exposure to and use of social media by citizens. Accordingly, all survey respondents have heard of social media, exposed to it (99.7%) and used it (99.4%) before the election period, thus, the foundation upon which its use for the 2015 elections was based. The structure of social media use therefore depended upon peoples' pre-existing knowledge and behaviour. Table 2 highlights more of the structural aspects of the architecture of social media use. It reveals that most participants use social media regularly (88.0%) relative to only 0.3 percent respondents that have never used it. This usage structure may pre-empt exploration of the medium for election matters.

Table 2: Structure of social media use

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percent
Regularity of use	Always	324	47.5
	Often	276	40.5
	Sometimes	61	8.9
	Rarely	19	2.8
	Never	2	.3
	Total	682	100
Platform	Facebook	508	74.3
	Twitter	59	8.5
	YouTube	3	.4
	WhatsApp	66	9.5
	2go	2	.3
	BBM	7	1.0
	Instagram	1	.1
	Others	47	6.8
	Total	693	100
Content format	Written text	500	74.6
	Audio	8	1.2
	Audio-visual	34	5.1
	Visual	91	13.6
	Others	3	.4
	Others	34	4.9
	Total	670	100
Followers and Contacts	Below 100	165	24.3
	101-300	239	35.2
	301-500	102	15
	Above 500	172	25.3
	Others	1	.1
	Total	679	100

New media messages are channelled through diverse SNS but the most used is Facebook (74.3%). This finding suggests that electioneering may be more effective through Facebook relative to other SNS. In other words, social media was heavily used by Nigerians a few years before 2015 elections. Most people also use their written or textual content (74.6%) relative to audio and visual formats. The high use of textual content is because, it is cheaper to access than audio-visual, which is cost intensive. This explanation was provided by focus group discussants who narrated the financial implications of downloading videos relative to textual messages. Respondents also noted that they have above 100 social media followers and contacts. The fact that 25 percent of respondents have above 500 followers is a strong indication that social media are capable of reaching many people at a short time, hence, their importance for political communication. An adolescent female noted:

On my Facebook right now, I have over 3000 followers, so if I post anything it reaches 3000 people and those 3000 people, also have friends that are not my friends so when it gets to them, it will have gotten to like 20000 people as a whole. So that means ... it just had to be social media.

These social structures have implications for information dissemination as political messages that are targeted at a few individuals could easily go viral through users' followers and friends. In other words, the use of social media in 2015 electioneering suggests that messages had a multiplier effect based on multiple followership. The discussions were not limited to particular groups as electorates, political agents, and Nigerian citizens, including eligible and ineligible voters, engaged in the political communication. A participant noted:

Even people that are not yet of voting age, they even keep talking and talking about the elections. So I think that the politicians had to think of ways to reach

out there to people that they have to be actively involved in the election. They thought that, ok, social media, people are mainly active on social media so they have to use social media for them.

A male interviewee added:

Social media also is the fastest way to get around the world now. Through it, people meet people, talk to people even outside the country. I noticed that during the election, many countries were really involved in the election with us, you know, outside Nigeria, in the UK, the British, US, they were really involved. They want to know what's going on and to get to them, we need social media to tell them how the whole election is going on. So social media, I think, is the fastest and the best way.

Speedy information delivery environment further made social media use in 2015 elections a viable option in addition to improved hardware and software technologies as indicated by participants below:

The youth know that the fastest way to get to the people is through the social media and am very sure that it would be of more advantage to use the social media than to just campaign.

Yeah, mostly smart phones. You know technology in this 2015 has gone really really very far. If you have a smart phone now you can do many things on the Internet. Most phones have Internet, ehm browsers now. So easy, very very easy. If you have a tab now you can even blog.

The technological context upon which social media thrived in 2015 elections can be summarised in terms of most used information and communication technology by Nigerians, type of phone used and level of accessibility of the Internet. The most used technology by Nigerian publics is smart phones. Table 3 shows that relative to desktop and laptop, mobile telephony plays a prominent role in the context of new communication technologies as it is mostly used by 96.5 percent of respondents. In this category, smart phones are mostly used (90.6%) while 88.8 percent of respondents use the Internet almost constantly or several time a day. This high rate of Internet use suggests that political information can be accessed and discussed at any moment the information is made available to the public. Smart phones and the Internet are key to the operations of social media and have been heavily used by participants, necessitating their use for political communication in Nigeria.

Table 3: Technological context of social media use

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percent
Most used technology	Desktop	2	.3
	Laptop	15	
	Tablet	17	2.8
	Smartphone	543	88.0
	Basic cell phone	35	5.7
	Others	5	.8
	Total	617	100
Type of phone used	Smart phone	619	90.6
	Basic cell phone	46	6.7
	Landline	1	.1
	Smartphone and basic phone	10	1.5
	Others	4	.6
	None	3	.4
	Total	683	100
Frequency of Internet use	Almost constantly	313	46.1
	Several times a day	250	36.8
	Once a day	40	5.9
	Several times a week	42	6.2
	Once a week	8	1.2
	Less often	24	3.5
	Never	2	.3
	Total	679	100

Constant use of the Internet is attributed to its accessibility, better telecom networks and stability of service providers. The high use of the technology is supported by availability, affordability and portability of the devices. Participants added that enhanced technological features, speed of updating information and skilled manpower provided a suitable context for social media use in the 2015 elections. Female youths, that are eligible voters, also observed that social media are cheaper for communication, explaining the value of smart phones in terms of cost efficiency, thus:

What has happened now in Nigeria is that even if you cannot afford the most expensive devices, there are even smart devices that are for like N6000 naira and they can browse. In Lagos you get it N3000 and it can browse. (FGD_Female non-voter A)

At any cost or not at any cost, at a low cost, sending something is just by MB. (FGD_Female voter C)

On TV you pay one million for advert that we will not watch. And the youths hardly watch TV nowadays. The only thing they watch is on their phones and Tabs, because you can easily carry them. (FGD_Female non-voter A)

I think that was the idea behind the thing that they were sharing phones, they were distributing phones. Yes! In Ikeja, they were throwing the pack, people were catching them, branded things-PDP. (FGD_Female voter D)

Now there is a cheaper means, there is a

means that is even more faster than somebody passing a bridge ... java phone and above, any phone that is Java and above, because Java is like the lowest form of phones. If it was not Java, they could use Android. (FGD_Female non-voter B)

The use of social media for the 2015 political process was easy because prior to electioneering, people had become familiar to their working. Their use was therefore enabled by availability, affordability and accessibility of smart phones and the Internet. They provided an environment for networking, interaction, chatting, discussion, blogging, and podcasting, and 93.8 percent of participants indicated that they had Internet access during the elections. Low cost of obtaining Internet services through “cheat code”, “tapping” WiFi and promotional activities, enabled browsing. In their view, female discussants observed:

I think Airtel was bringing maybe 100 naira for 100 MB, Etisalat too was coming, and they were bringing cheaper things. (FGD_Female non-voter A)

2000 MB for 2000 Naira. It was just too much. MTN will never do something like that because that's just like giving one kobo per MB! And they did. Yes! They did. It was a promo. It ran all through that [election] period and there was even something that some other people did. They branded Sim cards that had subscriptions on them. So the moment you put it on your phone, whether you are doing WhatsApp or you're doing Facebook,

you can use the MB that you got from just that Simcard.
(FGD_Female voter D)

If you see a cheat ... like something you [normally] get for N1,500, they will give it out for N 300 (FGD_Female non-voter E)

At a time I began to think that maybe they were paying some companies to put on their Wi-Fi, because you just put on your Wi-Fi and you connect to over how many buildings at once and Wi-Fi is free once the person does not lock it with any password, you are free to go anywhere, you just keep on browsing.
(FGD_Female non-voter B)

In summary, availability, affordability and accessibility of the Internet and smart phones, frequent use of the Internet, human technological know-how, among others, were the structures that ensured the successful utilization of social media in 2015 elections. The widespread use of social media was therefore due to the evolving technological architecture of the Internet as well as the ready supply of human technical competencies and appetite for use.

Use of Social Media for 2015 General Elections in Nigeria

The use of social media for the 2015 Nigerian elections was very high and featured prominently during pre-election, election and post-election phases. They were utilised by most respondents. The high use rate (83.2) was empowered by the level of Internet access by respondents (93.8%). Social media were used for political mobilization, campaigns, sensitization, monitoring and

interaction (Table 4). Participants highlighted the exact things they used them for, including getting information on election matters (52.0 %), reading and reacting to political opinions (11.5%) and sensitizing and campaigning to the public (11.1%).

Table 4: Social media use for 2015 Nigerian political process

Variable	Description	Frequency	Percent
Used	Yes	550	83.7
social	No	111	16.8
media	Total	661	100
What it was used for	Getting information on election matters	271	52.0
	Reading and reacting to people's opinions	60	11.5
	Sensitizing and campaigning to the public	58	11.1
	Campaign monitoring for current trends	27	5.2
	Discussing and sharing elections information	35	6.7
	All of the above	47	9.0
	Others	23	4.4
	Total	521	100

The views of respondents indicate that social media were not merely used as a transmitting channel but a transacting communication platform. There was no monopoly in use as political actors, agents, the electorate and citizens used social media to campaign and discuss political matters. Social media were therefore used in different ways. Discussants noted that the media were used to provide information, change the opinions of people concerning political candidate, interrogate political issues and candidates, and for propaganda. They were also used for reaching out to most people irrespective of their location. Others used them positively and negatively to respectively update people with political information and attack political opponents. Elaborating on their uses, discussants and interviewees revealed some of the specific things the media were used for: According to a male interviewee:

They have used them effectively because someone like me have been following on

the trend and update of what is going on, even before the election and after the election, even during the election... Yes, social media were giving me information about what was going on, and with that I think I'm impressed with the role of social media.

They were also used for reaching out to most people irrespective of their location and for campaigning for their choice candidates. These views were expressed during IDIs and FGDs:

People were very active in this 2015 campaign. They were really active. It's quite funny that people will open accounts even in the names of these politicians and they will send out broadcast messages, long speech of what the person had done before, the person's kind of character, even without having any personal relationship with the person. (IDI_Female)

It was used to advertise the aspirants and their parties. (FGD_female)

[they used] music, you know they call them jingles, short videos and they also use negative campaigns, advertising the detriment or mistakes of their opponents and that was not really good enough but it was mostly their agent and their parties. (IDI_male)

They used it to conduct a mock election; I can't remember whether it was Facebook or twitter. They were telling people. (FGD_female)

Social media were therefore used in different ways and for diverse purposes. Their use for political communication extended beyond campaigning, conducting mock election, advertising, publicity, and propaganda to unsolicited campaigns by individual that had no form of affiliation with the candidates. Such people campaigned for their desired candidates using individual and group social media accounts to reach many people, leading to the visibility of political messages. Communication was not limited to the use of text but video and audio to aid clarity and comprehension of messages. The additional information was disclosed by males and females during FGD and IDI sessions, but captured in these utterances:

People were creating groups for Buhari and they were talking about what you think you can advise Buhari to do when he comes in, even when he has not yet entered. (IDI_Female)

The social media were used mostly for propaganda. Some act like party agents for APC whereas APC don't even know anything about them. Social media were very easy to allow propaganda since there is no gatekeeping. (FGD_Male)

On WhatsApp, even on our group page, we were discussing. Even on Facebook. Some of these campaign managers will be sending you friend request, which they will not do on a normal day. (FGD_Femalenonvoter)

A particular girl in my hall... She actually shared so many of us one video by Abiola or something where she actually said the part, the good and bad of emm! Abubakar, Buhari and

Jonathan, the person posted it ...it was a video (FGD_Female voter)

The results show that there were regular discussions taking place on the platform. Unsolicited political messages filled the airspace as people constantly sent messages to ensure that citizens were informed. In other words, users were busy, resulting to high political participation achieved through the sending and receiving of political messages, reading and reacting to information and political discussions among friends, contacts and followers. Participants also identified some of the social media channels they used to engage in these interactions. While mention was made of WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, BBM, Instagram, Facebook, among others, Facebook featured the most in their utterances and was identified as the most used site during the election period. A male and female summarised:

Series of social media platforms were used, like the use of Twitter, the use of Facebook – mostly- and some others like BBM and WhatsApp... YouTube was also used to disseminate information. When it comes to Twitter, [it is] written, Facebook [it is] written also but when it comes to YouTube, videos were uploaded, even on audio, they were able to record jingles that were being sang all over. That means social media have helped a lot. (IDI_Male)

They used Facebook, they used Twitter, they used WhatsApp, they used LinkedIn and then people were even using Instagram too to send pictures. There was a picture that they did. It was a mockery picture of Jonathan and also of Buhari where he dressed like someone that was boxing, fighting. People were sharing the pictures.

Instagram had videos of it live. People used mostly Facebook.
(FGD_Female)

This is also revealed in the survey result, which indicates the most used social media platform for particular political activities (Table 5). Irrespective of the kind of things that were done with the media and those involved, Facebook emerged as the most used for pre-election campaigns, elections and post-election activities. It was also ascribed the most used network for reaching many people. This finding corresponds with previous submission on the architecture, which identified Facebook as the most used SNS by most participants. Accordingly, while Facebook had an average of about 70 percent usage rate, Twitter, the second most used network recorded an average of 18.7 percent. The least used platform was 2go. The wide gap between the most used and the second most used social media platform indicates that Facebook is quite popular among citizens, hence, its use for political communication. All the discussants submitted that politicians used Facebook for politicking and young people also used it most of the times.

Table 5: Most used social media for 2015 election processes

Description	Facebook	Twitter	YouTu be	Whats App	2go	BBM	Instagram
Used for the campaigns	458 (71.8%)	122 (17.6%)	23 (3.6%)	34 (5.3%)	-	6 (9%)	5 (.8%)
Used by politicians	445 (70.5%)	137 (21.7%)	22 (3.5%)	16 (2.5%)	1(2%)	5(8%)	5(8%)
Used for political information	451 (70.9%)	120 (18.9%)	20 (3.1%)	35 (5.5%)	2(3%)	5 (8%)	3(5%)
Used for election activities	453 (71.9%)	113 (17.9%)	18 (2.9%)	34 (5.4%)	-	5 (8%)	7 (1.2%)
Used during the elections	420 (67.0%)	133 (21.2%)	16 (2.6%)	40 (6.4%)	-	11(8%)	7(1.2%)
Used for election results	427 (66.9%)	124 (19.4%)	19 (3.0%)	49 (7.75)	-	14 (2.2%)	5 (8%)
Used for post-election issues	433 (68.6%)	126 (20.0%)	19 (3.0%)	39 (6.2%)	-	12 (.9%)	2 (3%)
Used to reaches most people	463 (72.3%)	81 (12.7%)	5 (.8%)	73 (11.4%)	-	13 (2.0%)	5 (8%)

Several reasons were provided for the popularity of Facebook in 2015 elections. Participants observed that most people use this platform for connecting with others. This position was unanimous among participants and captured by a discussant thus:

Why they use Facebook is because people are actually more on Facebook than on twitter or any other social media. People are more on Facebook than in any other social media in the world. And apart from that, Facebook actually has a particular way of attracting people because when you will be sharing to your friends, your friends' friends will see it. That's exactly how they used.

The use of social media was further elaborated as discussants submitted that they used it because of its reach is wide and beyond Nigeria. Facebook enabled Nigerians residing outside the country to get information on election matters. Their use for political activities is, therefore, empowered by the interactive and participatory nature, which enables communication among the political class, electorates and citizens. Accordingly, social media became a vital communication platform in the 2015 Nigerian elections as citizens utilised different networks to disseminate, receive and discuss election matters in a convenient and cost effective way.

Discussion

The emergence of social media has transformed communicative events and activities. They have revolutionised the political environment based on new communication technologies, evolving technological architecture and human technical competencies. Exchange of information via an Internet-connected computer or smart phone has become very interactive, with conversations occurring among people from different

geographical areas. The success of social media use was therefore predicated upon advancement in communication technologies and technical know-how distributed among different cohorts and subgroups of the Nigerian population.

The findings are therefore consistent with some of the propositions of Adaptive Structuration concerning human-technology interactions and communication within subgroups (DeSanctis & Pool, 1994; Poole, 2000) as well as the use of social and technological structures for interaction (Giddens, 1984). Corroborating Structuration theory, a combination of existing structures and human agencies have made political interaction through social media productive. Stability of the Internet and possession of mobile phones by most Nigerians and preference to read online materials (Obono, 2012; Obono, 2014) also made social media use in the 2015 elections indispensable, especially as diffusion of social network sites (SNS) have become popular in the world.

The hallmark of recent technological discoveries is the Internet, which is the latest in a series of technological breakthrough in interpersonal communication (Bargh and McKenna, 2004). Since its inception, the Internet has significantly changed the methods of communication by the addition of novel features and virtual platforms through which people interact including, Instagram, Google+, Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr, BBM, Hi5 and Twitter. Social media have therefore gained popularity over the last decade, especially among the youth (Sponcil and Gitimu, 2013). They enable information dissemination and interaction among online and offline electorates (PLAC, 2012). The interactive and networked nature of the Internet creates new ways of grassroots organising and coalition building (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). Social media have, therefore, become vital channels for human interaction and citizens rely on them to connect with the political class as well as gather and share political information.

Interpersonal social networking and mass information sharing is transforming the spheres of influence and empowers users to actively interpret meaning and create their own agenda (Matteson, 2013). It is therefore important to note that the new media have caused major changes in political communication as they have become resources used by political actors for strengthening their visibility. The new communication environment created by the digital and broadband convergence of technologies promotes and challenges the campaign process.

The rise in social media use in Nigeria has brought about tremendous changes in the nation's political process (PLAC, 2012, Oseni, 2015). They played a prominent role in the Ekiti and Osun states governorship elections, where citizen, civil society, All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) situation rooms deployed observers who relied on SMS, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, BBM and Instagram for reporting (Oseni, 2015). Social media platforms enable “the affirmation of a *discursive identity* of politicians, contributing to the *customizing* of the political discourse because, politicians present their political platform in the context of *interaction* with voter (Beciu, 2011, p. 281). Social media have empowered people to express their opinions and share information with others. Users are active in designing and deciding contents, buttressing Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch's (1974) and Giddens' (1984) proposition about active agents rather than passive consumers of media contents.

The role of social media in modern society is fascinating because of the ability of users to participate, collaborate, consume, create and share content via a variety of platforms, including blogs, email, instant messaging services, social network services, collaborative wikis, social bookmarking sites and multimedia sharing sites. Their use in Nigeria is motivated by

identity construction, entertainment, information gathering and their utility as a cheaper means of communication (Olowu & Seri, 2011; Agunbiade, et al, 2013; Ezeah, *et al*, 2013; Edegoh, et al, 2013 and Olatokun & Ilevbare, 2014). The rapid growth in technology has affected modern communication as there are changes in operations because people are communicating more rapidly and globally. Technology affords users with more freedom during interpersonal interactions (Sidelinger, et al, 2008). Improvements in technology, therefore, enable individuals and groups to communicate irrespective of their geographical locations.

Conclusion

Social media were heavily used in the 2015 elections in Nigeria. Their use was facilitated by existing architecture of new communication technologies and human competences, including evolving mobile telephony, the Internet and an enabling social environment. They play a critical role in disseminating political messages and discussing issues related to the election. In contemporary political environment, therefore, elections operate through new media technologies that enhance availability and accessibility of the message due to affordability of smart phones and the Internet. This structure enhances political participation and reachability of political messages across different locations. Given the increasing availability, accessibility, affordability, and adaptability of the Internet, the paper submits that there will be a corresponding increase in the employment of social media as indispensable tools of electioneering and governance in subsequent elections.

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