

Youths, Social Media and the 2015 General Elections in South East Nigeria

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Abstract: The influence of the social media in the modern day society cannot be over-emphasized. This type of media is seen world wide as the fastest and most accessible source of information. The youths of the present day are viewed as the most frequent users of this type of media but sometimes, the information viewed on the platforms by these individuals tend to be of positive and negative impact. This work examines how the youths used social media to influence the success of 2015 general elections. This is a quantitative research that adopts secondary data analyses. It is comparative analyses of social media opinion polls, results released via social media and the final result from INEC using product moment multiple correlation. Technology determinism and uses and Gratifications Theories were used to anchor this study. The findings revealed that social media results of the elections increased political participation as people had first hand results before the main release. This results was sourced from wards and participating youth corpse in the elections. The work points how the interactive system of the social media can positively lead to political participation during elections.

Key words: Youths • Social Media • General Elections • Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Scholars of media have long realized that “Advances in computing and information technology are changing the way people meet and communicate people can meet, talk and work together outside traditional meeting and officers” [1-3]. As Buildup Nigeria Poll [4] rightly deduced, the constellation and convergence of the new media had necessitated, the creation of a new public sphere with its attendant nuances.

The engagement of new media has facilitated the ability of people to schedule meetings create new opportunities of learning process and news dissemination that is in-debilitating the constrain of geographico-spatial demand and the dynamics of interpersonal communication. In the presence of new media, Agber simply stated, “Physical, geographical, socio-economic, political and cultural distances are fast appearing” [5]. By granting new forms of interconnectivity and interactivity hitherto to unknown, by altering the process of media text creation and consumption within the reach and the generality of peoples, the employment of the social media has radically altered for all times, the

dynamics of forms of interaction and relationships one can definitely state that the engagement of the new media is altering the modus operandi of many different aspects of society.

The social media has almost become an inseparable part of the human life. In recent times, social media have evolved new forms of democracy, government and have become a clear and more effective voice of many. The impact of the social media was truly felt in the 2015 general elections. It was felt in the electioneering processes- campaign and eventually in the polling procedures. According to the policy and legal advocacy centre (2012), the 2011 elections in Nigeria witnessed a remarkable use of social media as a tool for political communication. In the 2015 general elections, the social media became more potent tool and even a more lethal weapon. There are releases in the form of videos, voice notes, headlines and broadcasts that made and mar many political parties and individuals. For example, a publication on Senator Buruji Kashamu almost marred his political ambition and eventually his swearing in. A hate video was broadcasted on both General Muhammadu Buhari and Bola Tinubu.

The social media, before the day of the election, disseminated many messages to the public that went viral. These sorts of information could have caused unrest in some volatile nations. For example, the social media gave other reasons for the postponement of the election from February 14, 2015 to March 28, 2015 aside from the unpreparedness of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Reasons that made the public believed that the postponement was to the advantage of the ruling party as it would provide the opportunity for the ruling party to manipulate the election in such a way that power of the electorates would amount to nothing.

The social media pass information freely because they are not regulated. This was felt in the opinion polls, releases of early results until the panic was subdued by the tension-easily tactic adopted by INEC. This work while looking at the usage of the social media by the youths, places specific interest in the presidential election to see if it was successful or not.

Statement of Problem: In the modern day; society, social media has a formidable force for social and political development. It tends to affect human life in every aspect. This is why as far as political communication and participation is concerned, social media is viewed as the medium of the moment. But since freedom of speech is allowed to thrive in this type of media, information that are sourced online may be conjured or misrepresented.

However, one tends to wonder if the social media which is used mostly by the youths had any effect on the success of the general elections. This forms the reason for this study.

Objectives of the Study: In a broader perspective, this work tends to look at the impact of the social media on society looking at it from the angle of usage during the 2015 general elections specifically, the work seeks to:

- To determine the usage of the social media during the conduct of election.
- To ascertain whether result collation by the social media disputed that of INEC.

Research Questions:

- To what extent did the usage of social media determine the success of the elections?
- Did the collation of results by the social media affect the outcome of the election.

Conceptual Clarifications: For a proper understanding of this work, it is pertinent at this juncture to explain some of the concepts so as to be able to be in tune with the discussion.

Social Media: Social media can be understood as a group of new kinds of online media, which share most or all of the following characteristics:

- Participation: Social media encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested. It blurs the line between media and audience.
- Openness: Most social media services open to feedback and participation. There are rarely any barriers to accessing and making use of content-password-content is frowned on.
- Conversation: Whereas traditional media is about “broadcast (content transmitted or distributed to audience), social media is better seen as a two-way conversation.
- Community: Social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively. Communities share common interest, such as love of photography, a political issue or a favorite TV show.
- Connectedness: Most kinds of social media thrive on connectedness, making use of their links to other sites, resources and people.

We have basically six forms of social media although. It is important to note that innovation and change are rife. They include: Social networks, Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, Forums, Content communities and Micro-blogging.

A good way to think about social media is that all of this is actually just about human beings and the way they are sharing ideas, cooperating and collaborating to create art, thinking and commerce, vigorous debate and discourse finding people who might be good friends, allies and lovers. It’s what our species has built, not because its great shiny, whizzy new technology, but because it lets us be ourselves. Due to the power of this revolution, people can find information, inspiration, like-minded people, communities and collaborators faster than ever before. New ideas, services, business models and technologies emerge and evolve at dizzying speed in social media.

Delacey and Leonard [6] highlighted the benefits of the solid media to include media literacy, education, creativity individual identity and self expression, strengthening of interpersonal relationships, sense of

belonging and collective identity, strengthening and building of communities, civic engagement, political participation and well being. All these roles were fulfilled by the social media during the 2015 general elections.

Youths: Youths is the time of life when one is young, but often means the time between childhood and adulthood (Maturity). It is also defined as the appearance, freshness, vigor, spirit, etc, characteristic of one who is young. Youth in Nigeria include citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged 18-35 years.

The Independent National Election Commission (INEC): This electoral body, set up in 1998, is meant to oversee elections in Nigeria. The origin of INEC goes back to the period before independence when the Electoral Commission of Nigeria was established to conduct the elections in 1954. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), established in 1960 conducted the immediate post-independence Federal and Regional elections in 1964 and 1965. The electoral body was dissolved after the military coup of 1966. In 1978, the federal Electoral Commission was constituted by the regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo, organizing the elections of 1979 which ushered in the Nigerian second republic under the leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. It also conducted the general elections of 1983.

In December, 1995, the military government of General Sani Abacha established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria which conducted another set of elections. These elected institutions were not inaugurated before the sudden death of General Abacha on June 1998 aborted the process. In 1998, General Abdulsalam Abubakar's Administration dissolved NECON and established the Independent National Electoral Elections (INEC) that ushered in the forth republic on May 29, 1999.

Election: According to Merriam-Webster, an election is defined as the act or process of choosing someone for a public office by voting.

Theoretical Framework: This work is anchored on the Technology Determinism and Uses and Gratification Theories. Technology determinism was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1962. It states that media technology shapes how we as individuals in the society think, feel, act and how our society operates as we move from one technological age to another. This theory believes that all the development in the country, especially in the communication sector was as a result of the development in the technological sector.

Uses and Gratification Theory can be viewed as a supportive theory to this work. It was propounded by Kunczik in 1988. It serves as an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. It is an evidence centered approach to understand mass communication. This theory focuses on what people do with media. Here the question posed is Why do people use media and what do they use them for? It assumes that the audience is not "passive" consumers of media content but they have power over their media consumption thus, assuring an "Active" role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. UGT believes that people choose media to meet their needs and achieve gratification, Habermas [7].

Applied to this work, these two theories help to shed more light on the fact that social media aids development in communication through the world wide web (www) and digitalization. Also, the social media gives people the power to actively participate in political communication during elections.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This work depends on secondary data analysis of 3 categories or results: The released opinion polls, predicted percentages of results and finally, the Independent National Electoral Commission results. The sources of the results of the opinion polls before the election include: Sahara Reporters; Building Up Nigeria; Afrobarometer; Nigeria FM, World Stage New Online; Nigerian Eye; and the INEC results. The early release of results would be downloaded as secondary data from @ tarhtalks NG that also controls a blog www.tarhtalks.blogspot.com.

These results are subjected to tests and the results analyzed to buttress the points raised by the results of the tests carried out on the data. The tests include: analysis of percentages and Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient Correlation.

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, also known as r , summarizes the relationship between two variables that have a straight line or linear relationship with each other. If the two variables have a straight line relationship in the positive direction, then r will be positive and considerably above 0. If the linear relationship is in the negative direction, so that increases in one variable are associated with decreases in the other, then $r < 0$. The possible values of r range from -1 to +1, with values close to 0 signifying little relationship between the variables.

Table 1: Compilation of inec results, social media results and percentages of predicted outcome of the presidential poll

STATES	APC	PDP	APC	PDP	APC	PDP	APC	PDP
Abia	13, 394	368, 303	13, 394	368, 303	13%	83%	25%	75%
Adamawa	374, 701	251, 664	374, 701	251664	52%	35%	55%	45%
Akwaiabom	58, 411	953, 304	58, 411	953, 304	52%	88%	22%	78%
Anambra	19, 926	660, 762	17, 929**	660, 000**	3%	85%	N/A	N/A
Bauchi	931, 598	86, 085	931, 598	86, 085	85%	7%	75%	25%
Bayelsa	5, 194	361, 209	5, 194	361, 209	1%	93%	10%	90%
Benue	373, 961	303, 737	373, 961	303, 737	50%	40%	70%	30%
Borno	493, 543	25, 640	473, 543	25, 640	86%	4%	90%	10%
Cross-river	28, 368	414, 863	28, 368	414, 863	5%	82%	23%	77%
Delta	48, 910	1, 211, 405	48, 910	1, 211, 405	31%	89%	25%	75%
Ebonyi	19, 518	323, 653	19, 518	323, 653	5%	76%	N/A	N/A
Edo	208, 469	286, 869	208, 469	286, 869	34%	47%	55%	45%
Ekiti	120, 331	176, 466	102, 560**	151, 124**	37%	54%	55%	45%
Enugu	14, 157	553, 003	14, 157	553, 003	2%	89%	20%	80%
Gombe	361, 253	559, 185	381, 245	95, 873	70%	18%	75%	25%
Imo	133, 253	559, 185	133, 253	559, 185	16%	69%	70%	30%
Jigawa	885, 988	142, 904	885, 988	142, 904	76%	12%	90%	10%
Kaduna	1, 127, 760	484, 085	1, 127, 760	484, 085	64%	27%	60%	40%
Kano	1, 903, 999	215, 779	1, 903, 999	215, 779	80%	29%	90%	10%
Katsina	1, 345, 441	98, 937	1, 345, 441	98, 937	85%	16%	90%	10%
Kebbi	567, 883	100, 972	567, 883	100, 972	71%	34%	87%	13%
Kogi	264, 851	149, 987	264, 851	144, 987	55%	31%	45%	55%
Kwara	302, 146	132, 602	302, 146	132, 602	61%	27%	85%	15%
Lagos	792, 460	632, 327	686, 924**	533, 735**	47%	57%	90%	10%
Nasarawa	236, 838	273, 460	236, 838	273, 460	42%	48%	65%	35%
Niger	657, 678	149, 222	657, 678	149, 222	70%	15%	70%	30%
Ogun	308, 290	207, 950	308, 290	207, 950	51%	34%	85%	15%
Ondo	299, 889	251, 368	299, 889	251, 368	48%	40%	40%	60%
Osun	383, 603	249, 929	383, 603	249, 929	56%	36%	70%	30%
Oyo	528, 620	303, 376	528, 620	303, 376	49%	28%	70%	30%
Plateau	429, 140	549, 615	429, 140	549, 615	39%	51%	65%	35%
Rivers	69, 238	1, 487, 075	69, 238	1, 487, 075	4%	90%	55%	45%
Sokoto	671, 926	152, 199	671, 926	152, 199	67%	15%	88%	12%
Taraba	261, 326	310, 800	261, 326	310, 800	40%	48%	65%	35%
Yobe	446, 265	25, 526	446, 265	25, 526	85%	4%	92%	8%
Zamfara	612, 202	144, 833	612, 202	144, 833	69%	16%	80%	20%
FCT	146, 399	157, 195	146, 399	157, 195	16%	45%	55%	45%

Source: INEC, (2015)

Table 2: Opinion polls and inec result

Candidates	Sahara Reporters	Build up	Afro Barometer	Nigerian Fm	World Stage	Nigerian Eye	INEC
Buhari	79%	48.41%	42%	54%	35.53%	72%	53.96%
Jonathan	21%	49.3%	42%	46%	64.48%	25%	44.96%

Table 3: Pearson product–moment coefficient correlation of inec final results and social media prediction for president buhari (apc)

		INEC	MEDIA
INEC	Pearson correlation	1	.831**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	35	35
Media	Person correlation	.831**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	35	35

Table 4: Pearson product–moment coefficient correlation of inec final results and social media predictions for former president goodluck jonathan (pdp)

		INEC	MEDIA
INEC	Pearson correlation	1	.840**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	35	35
Media	Person correlation	.840**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	35	35

Presentation of Tables: Table 1 above shows 4 categories of results in one table. The First set of the results are the real figures of the collated results from the INEC summary sheets. The second category represents the collated results from a social media source; the third presents INEC's results in real percentage, while the last category represents the predictions in percentages as found in the social media. The tables presented only the results of 2 political parties that are directly connected to this study. The row results from the social media is almost the same as the INEC results. There are differences in Anambra, Ekiti and Lagos states, but one can easily deduce that the social media concluded their results in a hurry. Except for Anambra, in the other 2 states (Lagos and Ekiti) it can be deduced that some other results were still being awaited, when the social media broadcasted the results. The case in Anambra state arose out of mathematical error associated with hasty addition. The corrections for the results for these two candidates were derived from early predictions and the final results the correlations were to ascertain whether there was a correlation between the predicted results and the final results of each of these candidates.

Table 3 above shows the correlation between the social media prediction and the Final results of the presidential Election. Specifically, Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient was carried out on the polling results and predicted results for president Buhari. There was a correlation between the two variables with $r = 0.831$, $n = 35$ and $P = 0.000$. There is uniform undulation in the trend of the results. This trend was accounted for by the value 0.000. As a result, it is safe to conclude that there is significant correlation between the Predicted results from the social media and the final results of the presidential Election in the case of the APC candidate. As the results changed in the predicted results so did they in the INEC results.

Table 4 shows the correlation between the media predictions for the presidential Election and the final result for the PDP candidate former president Good Luck Jonathan. Like in the case of Muhammadu Buhari, The Pearson product moment correlation was carried out and the results revealed that there was a significant correlation between media predictions and the final results with $r = 0.840$, $n = 35$ and $P = 0.000$. It is also safe here to conclude that the social media was a viable predictor of the outcome of the Nigerian presidential Election. The same flow was observed and the undulation followed same rhythm further statistical analysis of the scatter plot would have produced similar results.

Table 2 is a juxtaposition of opinion polls of 6 different sources with the final results in percentages. Although, the opinion poll of Nigerian FM had no sample population, the eventual results, produced the closest result to the final results published by INEC. Four other opinion polls declared Buhari as president, except that of Word stage new on line. we can assert at this point that in favor of sampling, Sahara Reporters, Build up Nigeria, Afrobarometer, Nigerian FM, Nigerian Eye produced a representative sample, with the closest being the Nigerian Fm.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the work will discuss the findings of the tables presented. Research question 1 focused on the extent to which the usage of the social media determined the success of the elections. From the tables presented, it was obvious that 5 out of the six opinion polls recorded produced a representative sample that declared Buhari as president. Although, a certain prediction on the social media on the power of incumbency to play a vital role in determining who wins the election at the presidential level, the reverse was the case as the opinion polls declared the opposition candidate as winner. Another prediction believed that Muhammadu Buhari was a different man from the one painted by the social media during the previous elections he contested. The opinion polls helped prove that this time, due to the defection of many stake holders from the ruling party, PDP to APC, Buhari was in pole position to win the polls.

Research question 2 was designed to find out whether the collation of results by the social media did affect the outcome of the election. It was discovered on table 1 that despite having differences in the results from Anambra, Lagos and Ekiti States, the raw results presented by the social media did tally with INEC results. The votes from southwestern Nigeria, the support of the people of the northern Nigeria and the defection of different stake holders from PDP to APC won the election all together for President Muhammadu Buhari. In the face of the dwindling popularity of president Good luck Jonathan and disequilibrium within PDP pointing at the inability of the former president to handle the undesirable conditions created by PDP in government.

CONCLUSION

This work was carried out to find how the social media usage by youths influenced the success of the 2015

general elections. Specific interest was placed on the presidential election and two research questions were designed, "To what extent did the usage of the social media determine the success of the election? Did the collation of results by the social media affect the outcome of the election"?

A comparative analysis of social media opinion polls, results released via social media and the final result from INEC was carried out using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. The tables presented showed that the results and predictions from the opinion polls was a 2-horse race. The findings from the research also show that since the prediction of the social media favored the APC candidacy, there would have been problems in the country had the final result swayed in favor of the hitherto ruling party-violence, war, media reports and so many other things would have affected the progress of the nation.

The interactive system of the social media allows freedom of speech. This aided the participation of all sundry including the youths in the electioneering process that preceded the elections.

Recommendations: From the research work carried out and the conclusion made, the researcher recommends that for the political culture in Nigeria to thrive, the social media should be explored by political institutions to ensure that the political socialization and political participation have more audience. This can be achieved through the creation of forums where specific topics and interests can be dwelt upon.

Also, it is recommended that the youths who mostly used the social media should be allowed to air their views on different issues in the political circle using blogs and microblogging.

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