Social Media As A Political Platform In Nigeria: A Focus On Electorates In South-Eastern Nigeria

Chinedu-Okeke, Chinonye Faith[1] , Obi, Ijeoma[2]

[1](Department of Mass Communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Nigeria)
[2] (Department of Mass Communication, Odumegwu Ojukwu University Igbariam, Nigeria)

Abstract: *The place of social media to rally political support is no longer in doubt. To advance the conversation and mobilize political supports, social media has become a critical political tool for campaign planners. The 2011 general elections in Nigeria arguably marked a significant milestone in the use of social media for political communication in the country. Motivated by President Barrack Obama's successful use of Facebook to win the United States elections in 2008 as the first black American president, Nigerian politicians are indeed, gradually taking their campaigns to the social networking sites and other online platforms. Within the election period, political aspirants were disposing of all means to gear up their support base, following the realization that electioneering requires more than just handshakes and physical persuasion. This study is anchored on the theoretical frameworks of technological determinism and social judgment theory which suggest that exposure to Political campaigns encourages people to "assimilate" or equate their feelings about related target attitudes. Using electorates in the South-East of Nigeria, the paper explores the extent of youth involvement with the social media for electioneering process. The data generated were analyzed using frequency distribution and simple percentage. The findings indicate that the political campaigns through the new media had significant effect on the electorate's decision-making and participation in Nigerian elections. The study therefore recommends the embracing of social media for successive political campaigns that grants the electorate the interactive opportunity with the political candidates.*

Key Words: Social Media, Political Campaign, Electorate, Knowledge and Perception

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The media (print and electronic) in Nigeria especially the privately-owned ones have always been strong instruments of sensitization and mobilization of people towards democracy even in the dark days of brutal military dictatorship (Ajayi, 2007). However, their reach was limited by such factors as government intimidation and harassments, logistics, limited resources and their elitist ownership and control. But with the widening of the communication media space through improved technology, information dissemination and sensitization of people now have a widespread immediacy and more diligent follow up of events. This is as a result of their easy accessibility and availability irrespective of social status. Even with the cheapest mobile phones one can still access some social media platforms at reasonable cost for information, education and entertainment. Fundamentally, the media exists as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, social enlightenment and mobilization. These functions set the media apart as an important factor in the relationship between the government and the governed thereby making them indispensable for good governance, the deepening of democracy, societal growth and development generally (Olujide, Adeyeimi, & Gbadeyan, 2010).

However, the emergence of social media is a major phenomenon in the 21st century that has transformed the interaction, communication and sharing of information between people throughout the world in. Social media most often refers to as activities that integrate technology, telecommunications and social interactions, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. This interaction and the manner in which information is presented, depends on the varied perspectives and "building" of shared meaning among communities, as people share their stories and experiences (Wattal et al. 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.60). Some of the popular and widely used social networking sites include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Blogs, MySpace, LinkedIn, among others.

Today, social media have become a natural part of the everyday lives of people all over the world. In the past few years, social media have shown a rapid growth of user counts and have been object of scientific analysis (Wigand et al., 2010; McAfee, 2006). For example, more than 800 million people worldwide are members of the Facebook network (Facebook, 2011) while Twitter counts more than 200 million accounts in total (HuffPost Tech, 2011). This development makes social media fantastic tools for communicating with large audience. The arrival of these social media platforms have continued to change the way people communicate with one another around the world. For example, mobile phone penetration rates, in particular, have resulted in a

plethora of ideas for new media platforms aimed at bridging the information divide between the well-connected and the disconnected (Unwin, 2012, p.7).

In addition, Internet-based communication has equally started to gain importance in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Both mobile phones and the internet provide exciting new opportunities for one-to-one as well as one-to-many communication. The much reported rapid spread of mobile connectivity and services, as well as different forms of public and shared internet access like social media have allowed a growing number of people who may not have access to a computer or a fixed connection to take part in "the global conversation" (André-Michel, 2010, p.4). Thus, the use of social media in politics has continued to grow in many parts of Africa including Nigeria since the 21st century. For instance, 2011 general elections marked a significant milestone in the use of social media for political communication in Nigeria. Motivated by President Barrack Obama's successful use of Facebook to win the United States elections as the first black president, Nigerian politicians are indeed, gradually taking their campaigns to the social networking sites and other online platforms. Within the election period, political aspirants were disposing of all means to gear up their support base, following the realization that electioneering requires more than just handshakes and physical persuasion (Omenugha, Ukwueze, & Malizu, 2011).

More so, 2015 witnessed a massive use of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs in the general elections in Nigeria. Due to their participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature, social media have become veritable and significant instruments for political campaign planners in carrying out election campaigns and other electioneering activities, political engagement and mobilization among others. Thus, the place of social media in rallying political support is no longer in doubt.

London (Prsync) November 04, 2010, as cited in Eledan (2011*)* stated that:

> Politics is not a spectator sport, and now people have more and easier ways to get
> involved. Nigeria voters have the opportunity to participate and potentially help design
> a new conversation at the political level, something that has not been possible for years
> in the political landscape in Nigeria. Social media has allowed people to go back to
> building communities on a much larger scale, making the world smaller in the process
> for many.

The above assertion acknowledges a new media platform for politics in Nigeria. In the past, the politicking process has been dominated by the use of conventional mass media, regardless of the obvious disadvantage of providing one-way non-interactive messages to a large audience. However, the latest resort to the use of "old" and new media for political communication has added impetus to the electorate/candidate relationships due to the interactive nature of the new media. Just as social media has opened a dialogue between businesses and consumers, its value is apparent to those in political office, whose work and professional survival hinges on the needs and perceptions of their constituents.

As it stands, the social web according to Farrell and Drezner (2008) is ripe with opportunities for candidates and office holders alike to connect with voters, foster transparency, and even spar with opponents in the same ways they have been in the conventional media for hundreds of years. As a result, the potentials of social media appear to be most promising in political context as they can be an enabler for more participation and democracy. According to Creighton (2005), public participation is the process by which public concerns, needs and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision-making. E-participation focuses not only on this process but also on using the Internet as an additional or exclusive instrument to create dialogs between the elected and the electorate. Related to that, Karpf (2009) introduces the notion of "politics 2.0", which can be understood as the harnessing of the Internet's lowered transaction costs and its condition of information abundance, toward the goal of building more participatory and interactive political institutions. Thus, social media had been adapted by some political aspirants in Nigeria to contact and discuss with voters as well as to disseminate important information to them. Especially young people were inspired to political topics using social media as communication platform (Chen et al., 2009; Kushin & Kitchener, 2009).

Social media technologies could be used to make an impact in the political environment by achieving the following:

- Providing sufficient illuminating political information.
- Guiding targets' voting decision by shaping their opinion and setting political agenda for them.
- Educating the targets about election procedures.
- Creating awareness about a candidate and his campaign messages vis-à-vis the overall unfolding political issues and processes (Nwodu, 2007 as cited in Nwabueze & Ezebuenyi, 2012).

It becomes imperative to note that the increasing advantages of new media can be harnessed in the direction of curbing electoral fraud and subsequently enhance Nigeria's democratic fortune. This is the

underlying idea behind the concept of "teledemocracy", which Becker (2009) describes as "democratically aided, rapid two-way political communication." Teledemocracy simply means the application of modern communication hardware and software in the overall democratic process with a view to bringing about faster, far-reaching, easily accessible and more accurate report of election results. It is a clear indication that there is a future for ideal democracy in the world of humans and Nigeria in particular. The Nigerian political environment may not have fully realized the full effect of the new media adopted in the electoral process and overall political environment, but has no doubt responded positively to the new development.

Despite the advantages in the adoption of social media in Nigerian political campaigns and elections, the worries regarding the respondents' level of exposure to social media political platforms, their knowledge and effective use of such platforms, as well as the influence of such platform messages on electorates' voting pattern, prompted this study.

II.   STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

It has been widely observed that new media have enhanced the communication process used in creating and disseminating political messages in recent times in Nigeria. The 2011 general elections held in April, was characterized by an appreciable use of the new media especially the Facebook for political advertising and election campaigns (Hamilton & Daramola, 2011; Omenugha, Ukwueze, & Malizu, 2011, p.2).

The election campaign that saw Barack Obama voted in as the President of the United States of America (USA) in 2008 was characterized by the use of new media (Facebook, Twitter etc.) to attract the electorates; commonly known as the friends of Obama, with the Slogan "Change is Possible". However, political strategies and analysts have dubbed Barack Obama's 2008 presidential victory as the "Twitter election" "a triumph of new media in politics" and "the election decided by Facebook" (Alex-Budak, 2008).

Following the same trend, President Goodluck Jonathan adopted the use of Facebook in his presidential election campaigns and actually became the first in Nigeria to adopt such strategy that has increasingly made an inroad into our electoral process and in the overall political environment (Ezebuenyi & Ejezieh, 2012). The foregoing notwithstanding, this study intends to investigate the effectiveness of the use of social media as a political platform in Nigeria and how the increasing advantages of social media can be harnessed and applied in making the electorate to possess their political sovereignty by transparently voting – in and voting – out political office holders and governments democratically without undue interference or hindrance.

III.   OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of this study therefore include:
1. To assess Nigerian electorates' level of exposure to political campaign messages on social media.
2. To examine Nigerian electorates' level of understanding and use of political campaign messages on social media.
3. To ascertain Nigerian electorates' perception of political campaign messages posted on social media.
4. To find out how political campaign messages via social media influences Nigerian electorates' choice of votes.

IV.   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To effectively carry out the research, the following research questions were posed for investigation:
1. To what extent are Nigerian electorates exposed to political campaign messages posted on social media?
2. Do Nigeria electorates understand and use political campaign messages posted on social media?
3. How do Nigerian electorates perceive these political campaign messages on social media?
4. How do political campaign messages on social media influence Nigerian electorates' choice of votes?

V.   REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There has been a growing recognition of and utilization of social media by the current Nigerian political and opinion leaders. This is a sharp contrast to what has been obtained in the build up to the past two general elections (2011) where the traditional media was dominant. Although the dependence on the traditional media for political campaigns will certainly be noticeable and cannot be completely discarded, modern trends of the New Media seem to be eroding the gains of the traditional media. Barack Obama's presidential election campaign in the US has changed the rules of political marketing and since then electoral campaigns have been more about social networking sites; using the existing and emerging social media platforms than the conventional media approach which emphasized more of one-way communication with its shortcoming to generate feedbacks.

These media according to Arhewe (2011) connect politicians with voters and sell to them the transparency associated with their manifestoes. Social media is also utilized to spar opponents and sway the electorate with an explanation why they should vote for them and not their opponents. "So much of social media

is non-partisan, it can make government better. The key is to make sure people...are making an authentic impact on the process. The new media will be useful not only for mobilizing voters, but also in integrating all other facets of campaigns, including rally organizing and delivering campaign messages to potential voters on a consistent basis, at relatively no cost to them.

2011 Nigerian General Elections: A Significant Milestone in the Use of Social Media as a Political Platform in Nigeria

The emergence of social media has changed the way in which political communication takes place in most countries of the world, including Nigeria. Political institutions such as politicians, political parties, foundations, institutions, and political think tanks are using social media, Facebook and Twitter, as a new way of communicating with voters. Individuals and politicians alike are able to voice their opinions, engage with their network, and connect with other likeminded individuals (Kearney, 2013).

However, the active participation of social media users has been documented as an increasingly important element in political communication, especially during political elections (Eli & Arne, 2015). Users are able to connect directly to politicians and campaigns and engage in political activities in new ways. By simply pressing the like button on Facebook or by following someone on Twitter, users have the ability to connect in new ways. Thus, the option for users to share, like, or retweet political messages instantaneously has opened up a new avenue for politicians to reach out to voters. Politicians in their bid to use social media for elections were mindful of the developments and the new vista of consciousness in the practice of citizen journalism in Nigeria. In the last decade, the rise of Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Blogs and other social networking sites has witnessed citizen journalists armed with video camera and beginning to show up everywhere. Following this, politicians wanted to check the negative publicity that may come from any of the networks by reaching out to sites and blogs that can affect their prospects (Eledan, 2011).

The former Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan joined the fray when at the 26th convocation ceremony of the University of Port Harcourt, he promised that he would open a Facebook Page to interact with millions of Nigerians and also said:

> As I said on that day, there is an unchangeable power of good in the Nigerian nation and her youth and through this medium. I … want Nigerians to give me the privilege of relating with them without the trappings of office.

To achieve this dream of reaching out without the bureaucracies associated with his office, he set up the web page (www.goodluckjonathanfor2011.com) that is similar to Facebook on September 15, 2010 and thereafter declared his interest to contest for the number one person in the country. President Jonathan, apparently aware of the tremendous impact of social networking sites, chose to bid his electoral fortune through digital interface.

The former Governor of Lagos State, Raji Fashola was also one of the social media savvy. His Facebook page draws a lot of accolades on his performances, and points out things Lagosians want to see or change. Other candidates like Nuhu Ribadu of ACN and some Governors joined the bandwagon with varying degrees of impact.

Whereas dependence on the traditional media for political campaigns will certainly be noticeable and cannot be completely discarded, modern trends of the New Media seem to be eroding the gains of the traditional media. As the new media gradually reshapes the advance phase of political strategists and marketing experts are quick to wonder whether newspapers, TV, Radio and other traditional media forms still command the degree of relevance that made them indispensable in the years past for developing credible form of political communication.

Nigeria with a population put at over 150 million and about 60 million active young voters, near 43 million internet users and approaching 80 million mobile connections, political campaign managers are sure to have test their abilities in finding new media methods to get their political message out faster, easier, cheaper and stronger (Eledan, 2011). The new media is useful not only for mobilizing voters, but also in integrating all other facets of campaigns, including rally, organizing and delivering campaign messages to potential voters on a consistent basis, at relatively low or no cost to them. However, Facebook, Twitter and other social networks reinforce political messages and build online and offline support that will help drive interesting debates about any politicians and the party.

The new media according to Flew (2008) was also to a large extent useful to the electoral umpire - INEC, numerous international and local observers, the traditional media operators and ordinary people who monitored the election and in checking electoral fraud. It also provides easy access to needed evidence by the Tribunals. The participatory nature of social media encourages contributions from everybody, provides opportunity for feedback from every interested person, it blurs the line between the media and the audience, changing the shape from MEDIA to "WEDIA" (p.4).

More so, the use of social media in 2011 elections apart from its merits also witnessed varying degrees of abuses ranging from outright deception to ignoring of people's questions on both Facebook and Twitter by the candidates and their representatives. The unlimited freedom the social media permits led to flagrant abuses in form of hate messages and unethical practices. Close to election date, text messages purportedly written by some candidates were flying indiscriminately to people's mobile phones. Funny enough, a candidate resident in Awka, Anambra State may be addressed as a "Lagos voter" also revealing some possible sharp practices by telecom providers. Few of these texts captured by the researchers are instructive:

> Dear Lagos Voter, 6.1 million Lagosians will vote to end Tinubu's
> oppression. Vote Labour Party for senate, House of Reps and
> House of Assembly. Labour supports Fashola for Governor (Lagos
> voter, April 06, 2011, 03:11am).

Another one reads:

> Fashola says NO to Tinubu's juju oath swearing, let us all pray for
> Fashola's protection from evil Tinubu god father (Lagos voter,
> April 05, 2011, 04:45am).

In Anambra State, the winner of the Anambra Central Senatorial seat, Dr. Chris Ngige was once quoted in an SMS as saying:

> Beloved, after careful consideration of events of the last wks, I will
> no longer run for senate for Anambra Central but support ANNIE
> OKONKWO, Accord Party (Dr. Ngige, April 01, 2011;
> 07:27:48pm)

In a similar way, presumed opponents of the incumbent Governor Peter Obi demonstrated a lot of hate messages when they circulated the text below:

> Ndi Anambra Central, Gov Peter Obi needs help. He has gone mad. He bribes voters with bags of rice, abada, huge cash sums (name your price) redeems N6,000,000 bounced cheques, buys sch. buses for abandoned schs. etc Installs and commissions emergency transformers to forgotten communities. His threat to collapse the treasury for Dora, his Agulu sister is now a reality. Governance is at a standstill and comatose Reject Dora and Emperor Peter on Tuesday 26th with your vote (Anambra 2011, April 24, 2011; 14:47).

A similar one came from another anonymous group – Vote Right:

> Ndi Anambra, Reject the desperate god-father, Gov Peter Obi and his failed govt - judiciary workers on strike and court closed, medical workers on strike, Anambra State University closed for 6 months and re-opened with hiked school fees of 250%, Water Corporation destroyed, FADAMA frustrated. (VOTE-RIGHT, April 09, 2011; 22:47).

Irrespective of the fact that some of these SMS and some internet Skype calls were used to mobilize and educate different levels of voters for participation in the elections, some were orchestrated to incite, deceive and play on their intelligence. An incisive one for example was on Sunday, November 7, 2010 when Mrfix Nigeria sent a tweet stating that Dele Momodu campaign was offering N5million in exchange for writing a party manifesto. Although there is nothing illegal about this, many Nigerian Twitter users found this unethical. They are concerned about attaching material gain to a campaign no matter how well intended (Lawal, 2010).

Reflecting on the frequent abuse of the social media in his book "The Cult of the Amateur" stating that:

> Out of this anarchy, it suddenly became clear that what was governing the infinite monkeys now in putting away on the internet was the law of digital Darwinism, the survival of the loudest and most opinionated. Under these rules the only way to intellectually prevail is by infinite filibustering (Keen 2007, p.13).

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MOBILIZATION FOR ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

The new media technologies have arguably enhanced the communication process in a wide range of human endeavours and the political environment no doubt is experiencing a great deal of the impact of new media phenomenon (Nwabueze & Ezebuenyi, 2012). However, the growing recognition and utilization of social media and their application in the political process underscore the role which social media have assumed in the world today. In Nigeria for instance, the unwholesome reliance on godfatherism is gradually giving way to

online tactical crafting and packaging of persuasive messages by campaign managers and political parties with an aim to consciously persuade Nigerian voters to vote in their candidates (Ezebuenyi & Ejezieh, 2012).

According to Dunu & Oraka (2004), the tremendous fact of the new media technologies has definitely furnished the communication industry with revolutionary positive changes unprecedented. According to them, Nigeria, like other countries of the world, has also benefited in terms of improved technology output, variety offerings, improved resources and quality output occasioned by the new media revolution. This art and science of information management through the new media seem to be gaining more grounds in our political landscape. Thus, political advertising is today carried online (Kur & Melladu, 2007, p.31). The election campaign that saw Barack Obama become the President of the United States of America (USA) in 2008/ 2012 was characterized by effective and efficient information management ability interfacing the deployment of the new media technologies by his ability to use online platforms to attract the electorate commonly known as friends of Obama with the slogan 'change is possible'. Following the same trend, President Goodluck Jonathan also adopted an online information management skills in his 2011 presidential election campaigns and actually become the first in Nigeria to use such strategy that has increasingly made an inroad into our electoral process and in the overall political environment (Ezebuenyi & Ejezieh, 2012).

Social media help large groups to gather in a short amount of time. They also provide a platform for people to express their solidarity both within the country and with others in the region and beyond. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter are being credited with helping to propel the Arab Revolution (Hunter, 2011). Still harping on the role of the new media, Ikem (2011, p.5) argues:

> The place of social media (new media) to rally political support is no longer in doubt. To advance the conversation and mobilize political support, social media have become a crucial political tool. Facebook, Twitter and other social networks reinforce political messages and build online and offline support that will help drive interesting debates about any politician and/or political party. In fact, the social media provide a potential to stream and broadcast real live political rallies and party conventions online, in such a way that supporters, who cannot participate physically can be involved from a distance effortlessly.

Commenting further, Ikem (2011) observes that whereas the dependence of the politicians on traditional media for political campaigns will certainly be noticeable and cannot be completely discarded, modern trends of the new media seem to be eroding the gains of the traditional media. In a changing world, it is impossible to advance democratic change and development with old tools. Today, leaders need to understand the role of changing communication technology for politics and society. This is the use of the new media in the field of governance and political development to increase citizens' participation in the political process. The topic, "e-government" was presented as a vision that will give impetus to greater socio-political interactivity.

Furthermore, through the diffusion of the Internet, new media have been variously involved in the restructuring of socio-cultural economic and political relationships and environments all over the world (Nkala, 2012). This has been evident in the pervasiveness of user-generated content and the ways it is used to support social networking. The diffusion of this development is already revolutionizing all facets of human endeavour and the political process is not left out (Nwabueze, 2005). With the rise of social networking technologies, isolated actors with common aims increasingly use online tools to connect, share, discuss and organize.

Impoverished Hierarchies of Participatory Influence in the April 6th Youth Movement Facebook Group", seeks to better understand the mechanisms of influence and participatory structures of a single, open political Facebook group that has successfully organized offline action without relying on a defined hierarchical structure. The April 6th Youth Movement Facebook Group has over 80,000 members and no leader, yet it is still capable of acting in concert with the intent of reforming the repressive offline political sphere in Egypt (Saharan reporters, 2011).

Exploring quantitative data collected in 2009/2010 by Alexandra Dunn to investigate the role of social media on the Egyptian crisis, the analysis found a small group of highly active users that directed discussion on the Facebook wall - the central hub of organizational activity (Saharan reporters, 2011). The volume of participation increased significantly on sample days of heightened offline political activity and when the top participants were prevented from contributing to the wall on these days (because of demonstration, detention or arrest), another small subset of users filled the leadership vacuum. These findings indicate that there is the possibility for Facebook and other Social Networking Services (SNSs) to act not only as complementary spaces for political discussion or campaigning, but as platforms for organizational structures that exist independently of any party and act to successfully secure collectively defined goals (Munson & Resnick, 2011; Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Kushin & Kitchener, 2009; Utz, 2009; Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Schmidt, 2007).

Social Media and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: A Discourse on Its Uses and Potentials

The role of social media in the democratization process in terms of strengthening Nigeria democracy cannot be overemphasized. This positive relationship is being interrogated here by considering the individuals' attitudes, beliefs and behaviours to democratic governance. It is imperative to point out here that since the birth of modern democracies, freedom of speech and Press independence has been regarded as crucial and indispensable conditions for the effective functioning of a democratic political system. The demise of authoritarian regimes and spread of democracy in Nigeria and other parts of the world in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, which Samuel Huntington (1991) called 'the third wave of democratization' has even further increased researchers' interest in the role of social media in facilitating democratic transition and enabling subsequent democratic consolidation (particularly in Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America) (Štetka, & Örnebring, 2012, p. 55).

Recent socio-political upheavals in North Africa popularly known as Arab Spring, which resulted in the toppling of some authoritarian leaders are reportedly organized through new communication technologies and social networks (Lim, 2012; Youmans & York, 2012), thereby reinforcing the belief that social media is a veritable instrument for the establishment and consolidation of democracy. Bratton and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) and Mattes and Bratton (2007) argue that for non-democratic regimes to transit to democracy, and for young democracies to consolidate and stabilize, a majority of citizens need to be committed to democracy as their preferred form of government through the help of information technologies like internet. They emphasize that the attitudes of citizens and information technologies are important components of the democratization process. Almond and Verba (1963) describe the Internet as one of the online tools having great democratic potential because it does allow for feedback and encourages the development of "participant" citizens. They said that rather than acting as passive receptors of political information, participant citizens are more sophisticated and engaged with political information provided to them and subsequently respond or make ''demands'' from it. There is no doubting the potential of the Internet, especially when utilized by organizations such as political parties or movements, to promote the formation of ''mass'' public opinion that demands political change within democratizing states. Other scholars who equally emphasize the Internet's capacity to promote political change by serving as a pluralistic media platform include Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005), Groshek (2009) and Lei (2011). For instance, Bratton and his colleagues argue that new social media use in transitioning or emerging democracies "expands the range of considerations that people bear in forming their political and economic attitudes," and promotes democratic citizenship and greater demand for democratic processes and reform (Bratton et al., 2005, p. 209).

One important major role of this new social media in democratic consolidation could be seen in the area of information circulation during electioneering process. From available data collected from the interviews which were conducted on the role of new social media on democratic consolidation in Nigeria (especially with respect to 2011 general election) by Ojo (2014), majority of respondents submitted that social media has helped to overcome previous scarcity of information during the electioneering process, leading to increased transparency and reduced tension. Moreover, social media based monitoring shows encouraging signs of robustness concerning information quality and mobility. Findings show that social media remains an effective tool for electoral scrutiny and can help build public trust in the electoral process (Thomas & Michael, n.d, p.3). The frustration felt by some Nigerians in relation to the high rate of corruption and ineffectiveness of Nigerian governments led them to create a Nigerian pro-democracy group in 2010 known as "Enough is Enough" (EIE) which is geared towards promotion of good governance and public accountability in Nigeria. The group seeks to achieve their objective by mobilizing young Nigerians of voting age (18–35), with an emphasis on the use of social media technologies. Several of the group's leaders are among the best known social media personalities in the country. It orchestrated a major voter education and election monitoring initiative in 2011, dubbed "RSVP" acronym for Register (to vote), Select (your candidates), Vote, and Protect (your vote from fraud). This campaign had a strong presence on social media, and a special Social Media Tracking Center (SMTC) was also established to monitor popular social media platforms for signs of trouble (Asuni & Farris, 2011).

Prompt reporting of incidents through camera-cell/mobile phones, twitter, facebook, YouTube among others is an important role of social media in consolidating democracy in Nigeria. For instance, there were several recorded cases of electoral irregularities and malpractices which led to the arrest of some people during the 2011 general election by security operatives. Specifically, an SMTC staff gave a first-hand report he received from a National Youth Service Corps member that worked as a polling officer in the 2011 general election. The worker claimed to have been forced to register under-aged children to vote. He sent several photos of the ineligible voters to the SMTC. A reference was also made to a facebook post of one of the polling officers which read as follows:

> Na wao! This CPC supporters would have killed me yesterday, no see threat
> oooo. Even after forcing under-aged voters on me they wanted me to give them

the remaining ballot paper to thumb print. Thank God for the police and am happy I could stand for God and my nation. To all corps members who stood despite these threats especially. In the north bravo! Nigeria! Our change has come (Kolawole, 2011, p.10).

Although the non-prosecution or lack of diligent prosecution of electoral offenders exposed through the social media has been whittling down, its influence there is no doubting the fact that the utilization of the new social media by Nigerians is fulfilling a watchdog role in the electioneering process and this has been boosting the drive towards an increased measure of transparency and checkmating excesses and corruption in the system. In fact, social media has gained global recognition as revolutionary tools for effecting drastic changes. This is especially true of the facebook and twitter platforms which have been facilitating massive communication online on an unprecedented large scale. Apart from their catalytic role in the uprisings in the Arab world (Arab Spring) which culminated in the enthronement of democracy in Tunisia and Egypt, they also assisted profoundly in exposing and spreading details of the evil of the government of Turkey as a result of which their usage was temporarily banned there (Chikero, 2014). Even in Nigeria presently, corrupt and inept government functionaries are becoming apprehensive of the social media because of its expository and infectious nature. Chikero believe that, "What a corrupt nation needs is just a powerful platform where citizens can uninterruptedly communicate their common experiences, share ideas on the way out..." (Chikero, 2014, p.4).

One other important area of consolidating Nigerian democracy through the aid of social media is to defuse tension and reduce the incidence of post electoral violence through prompt release of election results. It has been argued that the greater availability of prompt information on social media on Election Day has done much to mitigate tension and post election violence. Therefore, politics has taken a new dimension in recent times with the advent of the new technologies. Information sharing has become instant, vivid and comprehensive (Bettina, 2009). For example, while the facebook which is the most popular among social media allows campaigners to send out mass messages, post pictures, videos and interact with the public; twitter is used to send short and targeted messages to thousands of followers and to interact with others (Omenugha, Ukwueze & Malizu, 2011). YouTube is used to post campaign videos. These social media platforms now give the electorate a competitive voice. With social media, politicians appeal to citizens; it makes them seem more personable and gives them advantage of keeping in constant touch with their supporters. Social media grants many people the chance to participate actively and get fully involved in the political discourse by adding their voices to issues posted on social media sites. Thus, it advances the frontiers of participatory democracy as a debate avenue and an indispensable aid in actualizing public sphere journalism. It affords electorates a friendlier avenue of assessing candidates for political offices and promoting transparency in governance. These represent the strength of social media (Odoemelam & Chibuwe, 2012, pp.10-13).

More so, social media platforms are also indispensable tools of sensitization and conscientization in advancing political engagement and mobilization. The challenge of voter apathy which was experienced during the 2011 general elections in some parts of the country can be averted in future elections through the optimal utilization of new social media platforms. The governments at all levels through its agencies and the politicians can spread political messages directly to citizens' mobile phones to encourage them to vote in particular ways. The ubiquitous access of these online devices has a democratizing effect as they offer citizens opportunities of full engagement in the political process. The implication of the emergence of these media platforms is that voters/electorates have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages, but also creators of the messages. Owing to the positive effect of these social media platforms, Nigerian politicians can take full advantage of this instant form of communication to reach the masses with the aim of assessing the political atmosphere before venturing into the campaign. Social media could be a tool to assess the popularity of a candidate especially by the young people. Social media also provides politicians with the opportunity to be free with and accessible to the general public.

Abubukar (2011) observes that social media has created online platforms that serve as a new "political capital" where people resort to and participate in a political discourse. Kweon and Kim (2010) therefore, emphasize that social media has become a main source of personal orientation, anonymous interactivities and social community on variety of issues that involve politics and political discourse. Social media therefore has the capacity of boosting participation because of its openness, interactive nature, connectedness, textual and audio-visual characteristics appeal (Mayfield, 2010 and Bradley, 2009).

The Challenges in the Use of Social Media as a Political Platform in Nigeria

In spite of the numerous advantages of social media advantages in fostering politics, democracy and good governance in Nigeria, they equally have their challenges. No doubt, social media platforms can be misused in disseminating unfiltered/unverified information, hate messages and rumours which are inimical to

strengthening democracy. The increasing use of social media and other online tools has indeed led to greater privacy, monitoring as well as regulation challenges (Ekwe, et al, 2011 as cited in Ajayi & Adesote, 2015).

For instance, a viral video of immoral conduct or lurid sex photo can instantly infect a political campaign or career, dooming it to untimely termination. Anonymity of sources makes it difficult for strict regulation, monitoring and prosecution of illicit acts. This makes it a vulnerable instrument for perpetuating fraudulent acts. It also promotes piracy. This is partly because the question of copyright and intellectual property are more complex and difficult to define and even more difficult to regulate online.

Similarly, images and sounds can be digitally manipulated, so truth and reality are difficult to ascertain. Social media is addictive in nature, making work/life balance hard to achieve. With the new technologies, users get more than they bargain for because of their information overload and social network overload.

Kidafa, Odoemelam and Elechi (2011) observe that "regulating traditional media in the face of issues like obscenity, copyright, right to privacy, was upheaval (sic), but have become more difficult with the emergence of social media". How to effect censorship without being seen as abridging rights and derailing democracy is a dilemma for the politicians and government officials. It is also important to reflect on the ways that ICTs are actually being used to counter democratic processes, because so doing can help develop understanding of the policies that need to be in place to resist such actions. There is increasing understanding that it is not just companies and governments that can use social media for negative purposes, and that individuals and small groups could use it for bullying, digital 'monstering', or violent actions, not to talk of fraudulent or criminal activities (419 in local parlance).

Another challenge is the issue of relatively low penetration and access in the country. Writing on penetration of new media in Africa, Osuala in Adibe and Odoemelam (2011) notes that:

> The diffusion of new technologies in Africa is still at a snail speed such that the gap between the information rich developed countries and African countries continue to increase everyday….. Africa has 13% of world population but only 2% of the world telephone lines and 1% internet connectivity. Consequently, most African countries have not been able to reap the abundant benefits of the global information revolution in many areas of life.

The picture painted above is still largely unchanged. Again, in many parts of Nigeria where social media (such as, twitter, facebook) is in use, it is still mainly an urban affair and mostly elitist. This development must have informed the Nigerian government's promotion of e-government through the establishment of a Ministry of Communication Technology to drive this initiative by deploying ICT to enhance transparency, efficiency, productivity and citizen engagement (Aginam, 2014). Two flagship projects – Government Service Portal (GSP) and Government Contact Centre (GCC) have been initiated to achieve the following objectives:

i. Deploying GSP to create a single point of entry to Federal Government Services;
ii. Enhancing accountability and improving the delivery and quality of public services through technology-enabled civic engagement (Mobile Technology, Facebook, Twitter, Interactive Mapping, Bloggs, wiki etc);
iii. Transforming government processes to increase public administration efficiency;
iv. Increasing end-user productivity by integrating many different services or data access paths of ministries, departments and agencies (MDA); and,
v. Facilitating efficient response to citizens through the Government Contact Centers (GCC) being set up in the six geo-political zones of the country (Aginam, 2014).

So far 10 government processes from the Federal Ministries of Education; Health; Agriculture; Industry, Trade and Investments; and Communication Technology have been automated while the pre-incorporation and post-incorporation processes of the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and online payment on the Government Service Portal are currently being automated (Aginam, 2014). Furthermore many top government officials, including the President, now have websites and do interact with people on facebook and twitter either directly or through their assistants. Without doubt these efforts must have assisted Nigeria's upward movement in the 2014 UN e-government ranking from 162 in 2012 to 141 out of 193 countries (Aginam, 2014).

VI. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
This study is anchored on the Technological Determinism Theory and Social Judgment Theory.

Technological Determinism Theory

The concept 'technological determinism theory' explains the setting of this study. The theory which was propounded by Marshall McLuhan (1964), a Canadian communication scholar, who observed new media technologies in communication, would soon determine social changes, turning the world into a global village. He believes socio-political, economic and cultural changes are inevitably based on development and diffusion of technology.

McLuhan argued technology undoubtedly causes specific changes on how people think, how society is structured and the form of culture created. This theory portends that, given the emergence of Internet and its adoption and relevance in mobilizing people for political activities, there is bound to be an impact on the electoral process and overall political environment. Communication is the basic tenet of technological determinism theory. The theory seeks to explain social and historical phenomena in terms of the principal determining factor (technology). The theory states that communication technologies in general are the prime causes of changes in society. Reinforcing this position, Chandler (1995) affirms that technological determinists interpret technology in general and communication technologies in particular as the basis of society in the past, present and even the future. However, as far as communication is concerned, we are increasingly dealing with a world without frontiers. The amazing technological revolution, which McLuhan was so fascinated about, has not stood still, same goes to the people that handle the process and what they do (Oliver, 2011).

According to Baran (2004, p. 22), technological determinism is the thinking in some quarters that it is machine and their development that drive historical, economic political and cultural changes. There is however, a perspective to technological determinism, which sees technology as more neutral and claim the way people use it is what gives it significance. This perspective that accepts technology as one of the many factors that shape historical, economic, political and cultural changes is ultimately determined by how much power it is given by the people and cultures that use it (Baran, 2004).

These two perspectives of technological determinism pose an important question: are we more or less powerless in the wake of technological advances like Internet? If we are at the mercy of technology as the former perspective argues, the culture that surrounds us will not be of our making, and the best we can hope to do is to make our way reasonably well in a world outside our own control. But if these technological advances are indeed neutral and their power resides in how we choose to use them as maintained by the latter perspective, we can utilize them responsibly and thoughtfully to construct and maintain whatever culture we want. In relation to this study therefore, the theory presupposes that since there are other countervailing factors that restrain and shape the effect or influence of new media, the latter perspective of this theory is more appropriate in this study.

Social Judgment Theory

Social Judgment Theory suggests that exposure to political campaigns encourage people to "assimilate" or equate their feelings about related target attitudes. According to Iyengar and Prior (1999), negative or positive reactions to political advertising or campaigns is coloured by the attitudinal disposition of the target audience at the point of exposure.

The theory is of the view that Nigerian voters as rational stakeholders should make necessary judgment on how to perceive or react to these messages depending on how it conforms to their pre-existing attitudes on their expectations from politics. Social media messages targeted at ensuring democracy, eradicating poverty, providing of employment and guaranteeing security which are the basic expectation of the youths in the present day Nigeria stand a chance of being accepted by them and get influenced thereafter. Likewise messages emphasizing some lapses of the government in power may trigger negative reactions from the electorate. This theory is therefore apt in explaining some of the messages emanating from political sources and the accompanying feedback in different social media interactions during the 2011 and 2015 elections in Nigeria. This also informed their level of use of the social media at that point in time.

VII. METHODOLOGY

The research design used for this study was basically survey method, which involved eliciting information from electorates in South-Eastern Nigeria. South-Eastern Nigeria, which is made up of 5 states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo) were equally represented by randomly selecting 80 electorates to represent each state, thus making a total of 400 respondents for this study. This representation was also ensured at the state level and even at the community level of the sampling. In order to elicit data that will help to answer the research questions, a 25-item questionnaire was administered to the respondents.

VIII. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Out of the 250 copies of questionnaire administered to the respondents, 396 were completed and returned, representing a 99 percent response rate. The data collected is presented and analyzed using the frequency tables and simple percentages. The data is hereby presented below:

Respondents' Demographic Data

Table 1: Sex of Respondents

Sex	Percentage
Male	55%
Female	45%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

The table indicates that, 55 percent of the respondents are males while 45percent represents the female gender. The gap between the male and female is so close which is an indication that both sexes patronize the social media almost on equal proportion.

Table 2: Respondents' Age Distribution

Age Bracket	Percentage
18-24	20%
25-30	38%
30-35	17%
40-45	15%
50 and Above	10%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

The data in table 2 shows the age distribution of respondents. Thus, 38 percent of the respondents are under the age range of 25-30, 20 percent of the respondents are 18-24years, 17 percent of the respondents are 30-35 years, 15 percent of the respondents are 40-45 years, while only 10 percent of the entire respondents are under the age range of 50 years and above. The analysis shows that the majority of the respondents are youths. This confirms the findings by most scholars as reviewed in the literature that the youths use social media more than other ages under study.

Table 3: Marital Status of Respondents

Response	Percentage
Single	58%
Married	35%
Divorced	7%
Total	**100% (N=396)**

The data in table 3 shows that more than a half (58%) of the respondents are singles, slightly above a one-third (35%) are married, while less than one-tenth (7%) of the entire respondents are divorcees. The analysis shows that the majority of the respondents are singles, followed by those who are married.

Table 4: Respondents' Occupation

Age Bracket	Percentage
Employee	25%
Self-Employed	20%
Unemployed	25%
Student	30%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

The data in table 4 above shows the occupational distribution of the respondents. The statistics from the table shows that, 30 percent of the respondents are students, 25 percent of the respondents are employees, another 25 percent are unemployed, while 20 percent of the entire respondents are self-employed.

Respondents' Level of Awareness and Exposure to Social Media

In order to answer research question one which sought to find out Nigerian electorates' level of exposure to political campaign messages on social media, respondents were asked a battery of question and the data gathered are presented in the tables below.

Table 5: Respondents' Knowledge of Social Media

Response	Percentage
Yes	89%
No	9%
Not Sure	2%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

Information in table 5 shows that more than two-third (89%) of the respondents know what social media is all about, 9 percent of the respondents do not know what social media is all about, while only 2 percent of the entire respondents are not sure of what social media is all about. The analysis therefore suggests that greater percentage of the respondents have knowledge of what social media means.

Table 6: Respondents' Exposure to Social Media

Response	Percentage
Yes	81%
No	19%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

The data in table 6 shows that 81 percent of the respondents are exposed to social networking sites, while only 19 percent of the entire respondents are not exposed to social media. This analysis shows a high level of respondents' exposure to social networking sites.

Table 7: Respondents' Exposure to Various Forms of Social Media

Forms of Social Media	Percentage
Facebook	37%
Twitter	17%
YouTube	5%
Myspace	4%
Podcasts	3%
SMS (Text messages)	28%
Others	6%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

The data in table 7 shows various forms of social media, which the respondents exposed themselves to. 37 percent of the respondents are exposed to Facebook, 28 percent of the respondents are exposed to SMS, 17 percent of the respondents are exposed to Twitter, 6 percent of the respondents are exposed to other social networking sites apart from the ones stated on the table above, 4 percent of the respondents are exposed to Myspace, while only 3 percent of the entire respondents are exposed to Podcasts

Respondents' Level of Understanding and Use of Social Media as a Political Platform
In order to answer Research Question Two, which sought to find out Nigerian electorates' level of understanding and use of political campaign messages on social media, respondents were asked a number of questions. The data gathered were presented in the tables below:

Table 8: Respondents' Involvement in Political Discussions on Social Media

Response	Percentage
Yes	75%
No	25%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

The data in table 8 shows that three-quarter (75%) of the respondents were involved in political discussions on social media, while only one-quarter of the entire respondents are not involved in political discussions on social media. The analysis therefore suggests a high level of respondents' involvement in political discussions on social media.

Table 9: The Most Frequently Used Social Media during 2011 & 2015 Nigeria Elections

Media	Percentage
Facebook	68%
Twitter	9%
GSM skype calls/texts	20%
Others	3%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

Information in table 9 shows that a little above two-third of the entire respondents said that Facebook was the most frequently used social media in 2011 and 2015 Nigeria elections, 20 percent of the same respondents said GSM Skype calls/SMS are the most frequently used social media, 9 percent of the respondents said Twitter is the most frequently used, while only 3 percent said that social media other than the ones mentioned above are the most frequently used social media during 2011 and 2015 Nigeria elections. This therefore suggests that Facebook is the most frequently used social media in Nigeria elections, followed by GSM Skype calls/SMS.

Respondents' Perception of Political Campaign Messages Posted On Social Media
In order to answer research question 3 which sought to examine Nigerian electorates' perception of political campaign messages posted on social media, respondents were asked a number of question. The data collected were presented in the tables below:

Table 10: Respondents' Media Preference for Political Mobilization in Nigeria?

Response	Percentage
Interpersonal/Face-to-Face Communication	42%
Conventional Mass Media	35%
Social Media	23%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

the data in table 10 shows that majority (42%) of the respondents prefer face-to-face/interpersonal communication as the best tool for political mobilization in Nigeria, 35 percent of the respondents prefer the conventional mass media, while only 23 percent of the entire respondents prefer social media as tool for political mobilization in Nigeria. analysis of the data therefore suggests that despite the massive use of social media among the respondents especially the youths, the respondents mostly prefer interpersonal/face-to-face communication, followed by conventional mass media.

Table 11: Impediments against the use of social media as political platforms in Nigeria

Response	Percentage
Lack of internet access	35%
Low ICT literacy	22%
Lack of credibility on the web	18%
Lack of Constant Electricity Supply	20%
Poverty	5%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

Information in table 11indicates that all the factors listed above threaten the effective use of social media as political platforms in Nigeria. The data shows that 35 percent of the respondents sees low internet access as a challenge in the use of social media as political platforms, 22 percent of the respondents sees Low ICTs literacy level as a challenge, 20 percent of the respondents sees lack of constant electricity supply as a challenge, 18 percent of the respondents sees lack of credibility on the web as the challenge, while only 5 percent of the entire respondents sees poverty as a challenge facing the use of social media as political platforms. The statistics is an indication that all the factors listed impede effective use of social media for Nigeria democratic process.

Table 12: Respondents' level of believability of political campaign messages posted on social networking sites

Response	Percentage
Very High	15%
High	50%
Moderate	25%
Low	10%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

Information in table 12 shows that a half of the respondents (50%) to a large extent believe the political campaign messages on social media, one-quarter (25%) of the respondents moderately believe political campaign messages on social media, 15 percent of the respondent very highly believe political campaign messages on social media, while only 10 percent of the entire respondent barely believe political campaign messages on social media.

Respondents' Perception on How Political Campaign Messages Posted On Social Media Influences Nigerian Electorates' Choice of Votes
In order to answer research question four which sought to find out how political campaign messages posted on social media influences Nigerian electorates' choice of votes. The data collected were presented in the tables below:

Table 13: Respondents' Perception How Political Campaign Messages on Social Media Influences Nigerian Electorates' Choice of Votes

Response	Percentage
Propagandistic	53%
Deceitful	27%
Credible	20%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

The data in table 13 shows that 53 percent of the respondents believe political campaign messages on social media influences Nigerian electorates' choice of votes due to the nature of the message being propagandistic, 27 percent of the respondents believe the message is deceitful in nature, while only 20 percent of the entire respondents believe the messages are credible.

Table 14: Respondents' Perception on the Level of Social Media Influence On Political Processes In Nigeria

Response	Percentage
To a great extent	70%
Limited influence	27%
No influence	20%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

The information in table 14 shows that 70 percent of the respondents believe political campaign messages posted on social media influence Nigerian electorates to a great extent in their choice of votes, 27 percent of the respondents believe it has limited influence on Nigerian electorates' choice of votes, while only 20 percent of the respondents do not believe political campaign messages on the social media has influence on the Nigerian electorates' choice of votes. The analysis therefore suggests that social media played a major part in influencing youths' participation in Nigeria's political process.

Table 15: Respondents' Perception on Mobilizing the Youths for Political Participation using Social Media Platforms

Response	Percentage
Yes	88%
No	12%
Total	**100% (N = 396)**

The table showed that social media played a major role in mobilizing the youths for political participation especially in the 2011 and 2015 elections in Nigeria. This is represented by 88 percent of the respondents while those that felt there was no contribution are represented by 12 percent of the entire respondents.

However the result of the general elections showed that the then PDP Presidential Candidate Goodluck Jonathan who used the social media had more national support base than his closest rival, the CPC Presidential Candidate Gen. Mohammadu Buhari (Rtd.) who did not use the social media.

IX.   DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Apparently, it may not be preposterous to laud the huge impact of the new media phenomenon and information management vis-à-vis their application in the conduct of socio-political activities in Nigeria particularly, and the world over. It becomes imperative to infer based on this analysis that new media have restructured our socio-political relationship and environment leading to a well managed information creation and dissemination process. Our political process, like never before, has responded to the sophistication brought about by the deployment of the new media for awareness creation and mobilization.

However, while highlighting the impressive influence of the new media on the political information management process, it is equally note worthy to state that the influence of technology (new media) on society is constrained by countervailing forces that restrain and shape the effects. Such countervailing forces will differ from one political system to the next depending on the features of the political environment. New media promise a whole new and interesting political horizon characterized by boundless possibilities and opportunities for proper participatory political process. This emerging trend transcends the old order and tends to bring both the politicians and the electorate into a closer bond without physical contact, leading to a more robust and sophisticated political process (Nwabueze & Ezebuenyi, 2012).

Primarily, because the new media have the potential to drive Nigeria's socio-political and economic development and build a robust democracy according to MacArthur Foundation (2012), this paper recommends among others that cyber-politics should be enshrined in our body polity and in all the process of politicking in Nigeria. The Nigerian electorate should be encouraged to key into the unending advantages provided by the new media in monitoring and reporting elections and other political activities in Nigeria. This is information management in action, which if well incorporated into our polity, will practically minimize electoral fraud and other malpractices during elections in Nigerian. The Nigerian government and its agency (INEC) charged with the responsibilities of conducting elections in Nigeria should not only embrace the adoption of new media in political information management but also give it a legal framework.

X.   CONCLUSION

The foregoing discourse has established the potential of social media platforms for the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The study established the fact that in spite of the challenges of social media, it represents a veritable avenue for political change by socializing citizens into the political beliefs required for democratic citizenship, and thereby promote sustainable democracy. It argued that the widespread use of the Internet for social networking, blogging, video-sharing and tweeting has a functional relationship with participatory democracy. We are also in total agreement with Bonin (2013) that social media platforms are the newest lenses through which we are experiencing the products of journalism. They facilitate online communities created by readers, listeners and viewers to discuss issues, have their voices heard, and get feedback in record time. The fact that social media is a supportive avenue for sharing views and opinions and discussing political life in the country implies that the social media can play an important role in deepening democracy, if conscientiously and patriotically utilised for that purpose.

However, in practical terms, there is a need to translate the "rantings" on the social media to concrete impactful actions that could checkmate anti-democratic tendencies. This may not be long in coming given the rapidly evolving synergy between right campaigners/activists, journalists and the expanding tribe of social media enthusiasts. Not only will Nigerians be influenced by media outlets that report the news, but by each other while conversing on the current political climate through social networking sites and forums. No doubt some of those with politically motivated ambitions will develop a platform such as a blog or a page on a social networking site for delivering their political message and agenda to people.

This study has established that the social media due to their interactive nature have introduced a paradigm shift in the electioneering process in Nigeria. They have also brought a new wave of influence on the mindsets of the teaming electorate in Nigeria. On the other hand, the non-regulation of the operations of social media and citizen media has made some miscreants to exploit them to perpetrate campaigns of hate and gossip politics. However, a populist leader who can rally pro-democracy groups, embrace and coordinate genuine social media operations to put the government on its toes is needed to safeguard and consolidate Nigeria's fledgling democracy.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government should think of trying to regulate the operations of social media. They should think out a way of verifying or regulating "who posts what" in these media urgently.
2. The embracing of social media for successive political campaigns that grants the electorate the interactive opportunity with the political candidates.
3. The National Communications Commission should introduce stiff sanction on telecoms and service providers that engage in nefarious activities of arranging faceless internet Skype calls/texts messages for desperate politicians. The indiscriminate release of people's phone directory by these providers should be matched with sanctions or legal actions. These should wipe out the fears of the public about the use of the new media and their contents but rather encourage them to utilize the gains.

REFERENCES

[1]. Ajayi, A.I. (2007). *The Military and the Nigerian state, 1966-1993: A study of the strategies of political power control.* New Jersey: Africa World Press.
[2]. Facebook (2011) Facebook Official Statistics. http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics
[3]. Alex-Budak, B.A. (2010). "Facebook, Twitter and Barack Obama: New Media and the 2008 Presidential Elections". M.Sc. Thesis submitted to the Department of Public Policy, Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. April 1, 2010.
[4]. Arhewe, P. (2011). *2011 Elections: Politicians and social network media*. Retrieved October 10, 2011 from http://prsync.com/arheweforcom/.
[5]. Baran, S. J. & Davis, D. K., (2000). *Mass Communication Theory, Foundation, Ferment and Future.* U.K.: Wadsworth.
[6]. Baumgartner, J.C., Morris, J.S. (2010). Myfacetube politics: social networking web sites and political engagement of young adults. *Soc Sci Comp Rev*, 28, 24–44.
[7]. Becker, T. C. (2009). *The Future of Teledemocracy.* www.utwente.nl/gw/mco/besttandent/the...Retrieved Nov. 12, 2012.
[8]. Brenda, L. (1990). The Art of Human Computer interface Design. Wokingham: Addison Wesley.
[9]. British Broadcasting Corporation (2011). BBC Hausa Link, available on http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/bbchausa?sk=app_2309869772 [accessed 28/05/11].
[10]. Chen, D., Tang, J., Li, J., & Zhou, L. (2009). Discovering the staring people from social networks. WWW'09: Proceedings of the 18th international conference on World Wide Web. ACM, New York, pp 1219–1220
[11]. Creighton, J.L. (2005). *The public participation handbook: making better decisions through citizen involvement.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
[12]. Dix, et al (1998). Human Computer Interaction. London: Pretence Hall.
[13]. Dominick, J. R. (2009). *The Dynamics of Mass Communication, Media in the Digital Age* (10th Edition). London: McGraw-Hill.
[14]. Dunu, I. & Oraka, (2004). "The New Communication Technology and the Nigeria Media in the 21st Century", *Global Communication,* 1 (1), 93-115.
[15]. Eledan, P. (2011*). Dr. Goodluck Jonathan's Use of Social Media Campaign.* Retrieved 27 March 2011 from http://prsync.com/goodluckjonathanforcom/.
[16]. Eli, S. & Arne, H. K., (2015). "Newspapers, Facebook and Twitter: Intermedial agenda setting in local election campaigns," *Journalism Practice* (2015) 9#3 DOI:10.1080/17512786.2014.950471
[17]. Estes J., Schade, A. & Nielsen, J. (2009). Streams, Walls, and Feeds. Available on: http://www.nngroup.com/reports/streams accessed on 07/05/2011
[18]. Ezebuenyi, E. E. & Ejezieh, L. N. (2012). "The Mass Media. Political Advertising and Nigerian Voters: An appraisal". 1st International Conference of the Department of English, Anambra State University, Igbariam Campus, Pp. 283-291.
[19]. Farrell, H., & Drezner, D. (2008). The power and politics of blogs. *Public Choice,* 134(1), 15–30
[20]. Flew, T. (2008). *New Media, an Introduction.* U.S: Oxford University Press
[21]. Gauntlett, D. & Horsley, R. (2004). *Web Studies.* New York: Oxford University Press.
[22]. Gingsberg, B. (2009). Political Campaign. *Microsoft Encarta*. WA: Microsoft Corporation.
[23]. Hamilton, K. & Daramola, Y. (2011). New Media and Democracy: A Study of President Goodluck Jonathan's 2011 Political Campaign on Facebook. A Paper Presented at Professor Onuorah Nwuaneli International Conference in Awka, Anambra State.
[24]. HuffPost Tech (2011). Twitter: we now have over 200 million accounts (update)
[25]. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/28/twitter-number-of-users_n_855177.html

[26]. Hunter, E. (2011). *The Arab Revolution and Social Media* http:bit.ly/ge NYXJ. (February 6, 2003)

[27]. Ikem, V. (2011). *Responses to Social Media and the New Dimension to Nigeria Politics.* ikemvctr@yahoo.com. November 17, 2012.

[28]. Iyengar, S. & Prior, M. (1999). *Political Advertising, what effect on Commercial Advertisers?* Accessed March 19, 2010.

[29]. Kaplan, A.M., & Haenlein, M. (2010) Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Bus Horiz*, 53(1), 59–68.

[30]. Karpf D (2009) Blogosphere research: a mixed-methods approach to rapidly changing systems. *IEEE Intell Syst* 24(5), 67–70

[31]. Kearney, M. (2013). Political Discussion on Facebook: An Analysis of Interpersonal Goals and Disagreement. A Thesis submitted to University of Kansas.

[32]. Kur, J. T. & Melladu, B. B. (2007). Mass Media Technology and Politics of International Communication. In I. E. Nwosu & O. Soola (Eds). *Communication in Global, ICTs and Ecosystem Perspectives: Insights from Nigeria* (pp.126-137). Enugu: African Council of Communication Education.

[33]. Kushin, M., & Kitchener, K. (2009). Getting political on social network sites: Exploring online political discourse on Facebook. First Monday 14(11).

[34]. Lawal, U. (2010). Impacts of Social Media on political awareness in Nigeria Umar. Retrieved 27 March 2011 from http://prsync.com/goodluckjonathanforcom/.

[35]. Lerner, D. (1958). *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*. New York: Free Press.

[36]. McAfee, A. (2006). Enterprise 2.0: the dawn of emergent collaboration. *MIT Sloan Management Rev,* 47(3), 20–28

[37]. McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory.* London: Sage Publications.

[38]. Munson, S., & Resnick, P. (2011). The prevalence of political discourse in non-political blogs. In

[39]. Proceedings of 5th International Conference on Weblogs and Social Media (ICWSM 2011).

[40]. Nkala, D. A. (2012). "Influence of the New Media on the Voting Behaviour of Awka South Electorate: A Study of the Short Message Service (SMS) in 2011 Nigeria's Presidential Elections". M.Sc. Thesis, Department of Mass Communication, Anambra State University, Igbariam Campus.

[41]. Nwabueze, C. D., & Ezebuenyi, E. E. (2012). Appraising the Relevance of ICTs in Awareness Creation During Election. *Journal of Linguistics and Communication Studies,* 2 (1), 293-302.

[42]. Nwodu, L. C. (2007). Using Information and Technologies (ICTs) to Check Electoral Fraud in Nigeria. *Mass Media Review: An International Journal of Communication*, 1 (3), 23-41.

[43]. Olujide, J.O., Adeyemi, S.L., & Gbadeyan, R.A. (2010). Nigerian Electorates' Perception of Political Advertising and Election Campaign. *Research Journals for Social Sciences*, 1(5), 52-60.

[44]. Omenugha, K.A., Ukwueze, C.A. & Malizu, C.F. (2011). Analysis Of Electorate's Knowledge, Perception And Use Of Social Media In 2011 Nigeria Elections. A Paper Presented at Professor Onuorah Nwuaneli International Conference in Awka, Anambra State.

[45]. Schmidt, J. (2007). Blogging practices: an analytical framework. *J Comput Mediat Commun*, 12(4), 1409–1427.

[46]. Social Media (2011). Retrieved from http://www.wikipediafreeencyclopedia.com

[47]. Utz S (2009) The (potential) benefits of campaigning via social network sites. *J Comput Mediat Commun,* 14, 221–243

[48]. Wattal, S., Schuff , D., Mandviwalla, M., & Williams, C. (2010). Web 2.0 and politics: the 2008 U.S. presidential election and an e-politics research agenda. *MIS Q,* 34(4), 669–688

[49]. Wigand, R.T., Wood, J.D., & Mande, D.M. (2010). Taming the social network jungle: from web 2.0 to social media. In: Proceedings of the Americas Conference on Information Systems, Paper 416.