

Social Media Participation and Pollution of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria.

By

Adedeji Saheed Oyenuga
Department of Sociology,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
Lagos State University,
Ojo, Lagos.

Adedeji.oyenuga@lasu.edu.ng

+2348037269268

Abstract

The influence of the social media in the modern day society is immeasurable. In fact, it has become the most accessible source of information in the present day society. These information on the social media are unregulated and sometimes, they tend to be biased, presumptuous, and might even be tentative. Aside from these, the population of bloggers is uncontrolled as many have the ability to create blogs and channels, where information can be circulated. Unfortunately, the majority of the accessible population to these information are unaware of these maladies. This paper examines the influence of the social media on the 2015 general election through the opinion polls and eventually, the broadcasting of the results, before the final release by INEC. This is a quantitative research that adopts secondary data analyses. It is comparative analyses of social media opinion polls, results released via social media before the final release of results, and the final result from INEC using product moment multiple correlation. Findings revealed that social media results were sourced from wards and participating youth corps members in the electoral procedures. The release of the results via social media increased political participation as most people had first hand results, before the final release. These results were not just transmitted from the social media blogs, but were also recirculated via social networking sites and applications. As a result, the process added value to the Nigerian political culture and facilitated other issues that might have ensued from the electoral process.

Introduction

The social media has become almost an inseparable part of human life in places where they exist. In recent times, social media have evolved new forms of democracy, government, and have become a clear and more effective voice of many. In fact, social media have influences on all spheres of human life. The impacts of the social media are felt most in the 2015 general elections. It was felt in the electioneering processes-campaign, and eventually the polling procedures. According to Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2012), the 2011 elections in Nigeria witnessed a remarkable use of the social media as a tool for political communication. It was used for campaigns via personal websites, blogs, all social media applications, and several other media. Aside from this, the social media was equally used as a weapon to undermine and even destroy the image of 'other' political parties, especially the People's Democratic Party and All Progressive Party.

In the 2015 general election, 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 Senator Bola Tinubu. Ordinarily, these videos might have ended the political ambitions of these individuals in some other places.

The social media have become the most accessible source of information, particularly in the last two general elections. Before the day of the election, the social media disseminated many messages to the public that went viral. The social media communicated to the public a lot of information that 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. 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 the power of the electorates would amount to nothing. This

sort of report can cause anarchy in some volatile countries, that are not stable. Nigeria not being totally exceptional in this case.

The social media pass information freely, because they are unregulated. The information can come in the form of broadcast on social media application, like WhatsApp and BBM, blogs; or even text messages. With the unregulated nature of the social media, it is certain that many of the information are not subject to scrutiny and may be conjured, misrepresentation, or even misinformation.

These traces of misinformation were felt in the opinion polls, releases of early results, until the panic was subdued by the tension-easing tactic adopted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). With the tactics, the tension created by the social media was adequately handled and it diminished gradually. This paper is discussing the roles played by the social media in making or marring the entity “Nigeria” in the 2015 general elections, with specific interest in the presidential election.

The Meaning and Nature of Social Media

The concept “social media” has attracted many definitions from different disciplines. In a lay man’s explanation, it may simply connote “within group interactive communication”. The “group” in this definition represent “social” content of the definition. According Suomen Toivo–Think Tank (2012), social media are new information network and information technology using a form of interactive communication skills, where users produce the content of information and interpersonal relationships are established and maintained in the process. A typical social media services could be content sharing, web communities, or an Internet forum (Sanastokeskus, 2010). In the same vein, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), defined social media as a group of Internet-based application that are built upon the ideology and technology of web 2.0 and allows the generation and exchange of its content. On the social media, the users are not passive like in the case of Television, Radio, and Newspaper, rather they are active in the formation and exchange of information (Sweetser and Laricsy, 2008).

An information that emanated from a member of the forum might become topical and even spread beyond where it was first discussed. Typical examples of social media include Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Google+, MySpace, Skype, Instagram, Flipagram, and Hi5. All these sites and applications have interactive options that facilitate broadcasting and rebroadcasting of information. Aside from these websites, these are also application that people are even more accessible to on smartphones and androids. The applications include: BBM on which there are BBM channels, where news and other information are created, broadcasted, and even modified. There is also WhatsApp application that facilitates the formulation and dissemination of information. Others are Nimbuzz and 2go. They are not just for news, but are also for gossips and rumours. In so many cases on social media, what started out as rumours, gossip, or even speculation that are reproduced and rebroadcasted as real, even though it was fake ab-initio. This particular problem emanates from the user-to-user interaction found on social media and distinguishes from the traditional media. In social media, the gate keeping role of traditional media is eliminated.

In social media, there are 5 major features that are easy to identify. According to Suomen Toivo- Think Tank (2012), the features are social networking and social interaction, participation, the use of social providers, openness, and collaboration. These features are linked to the six classifications of social media postulated by the same author. There classifications are: Social Networks (Facebook, Google+, Myspace, LinkedIn); Media Products Community (Youtube, Flickr, Slideshare); Blog Services (wordpress, blogger, Twitter); Information Community (Wikipedia and Wikispaces), which is also referred to as Collaborative Project (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2012); Virtual Community also called Virtual Game Worlds PLAC (2012) includes Second Life and World of Warcraft; and Link Sharing Services (Digg and Diigo). The social media is a body of packages that users would find attractive and even hard to do without.

Benefits and Consequences of Functional and Versatile Social Media

From the classification above, it can be deduced that the social media is a part of the whole body of activities consisting of Internet communication and online interactions (Suomen Toivo- Think Tank, 2012). As such, on the social media several things are communicated: songs, videos, tweets, comic, blogs, stories and others. These

information are most commonly communicated on blogs, Twitter, Wiki, Youtube and Facebook.

These social media have peculiar uses and many at times, the uses blend together. On many occasions, users operate Twitter and Facebook for example from Blackberry Messenger application (BBM) and with ease, users can upload videos from smartphones on to Youtube. The social media do not just operate as sites, but also as applications that are user-friendly and easily accessible. In fact, young children can access and use these applications via the home computers and on the phones of their parents.

According to Wasswa (2013) on the role of social media in the Kenyan 2013 election, social media can provide another avenue, where unscrupulous politicians and supporters can spread hate speech, propagate falsehood, and insidiously incite their members to violence. In another vein, social media play vital roles in exposing potentially violent comments, and action before they get out of control. Social media is very effective, because they have no speculated time for news or information, rather it is round the clock official and unofficial news channel. As a result, social media have the ability to serve two edged purposes to the electorates and eventually to the public during the electoral process. More people are switching to this new media for information as they spend more time in the virtual platform (Nielsen, 2012).

Collin (2011), highlighted the benefits of the social media to include media literacy, education, creativity, individual identity and self expression, strengthening of interpersonal relationships, sense of belongingness, and collective identity, strengthening and building of communities, civic engagement and political participation and well being. Indeed, the social media fulfilled all these roles in the 2015 general elections.

Theoretical Orientation

As observed from the writings, the world is tilting towards dependence on the social media. Eventually, the dependence would become total. According to postmodernism, the total dependence on social media would destroy the information. According to Jean Baudrillard, reality of information has 4 historical phases. The first phase is

characterised by the transmission of profound reality. That is, reality as the original presentation. The second phase presents masked reality. This might come as a result of the gate keeping duties. The reality remains the same, but the presentation made more attractive and catchy. More like a packaging of social reality of information. The third phase is characterised by masked unreality. This is the dissemination of information that are not true behind a catchy title, while the last phase is characterised by total replacement of reality.

The role of the social media in the transmission and the circulation of information in the present day Nigeria is somewhere between the 2nd phase and the 3rd phase. The social media are always in a hurry to circulate information, as a result, we usually have conflicting information being transmitted. Sometimes, the information is filled with heresy or even untrue information. Many have access to Linda Ekeji's blog, but one cannot say that all information presented there are true. What we experience is either masked reality or masked unreality. The prediction of the total replacement of reality might come eventually as social media no longer take cognisance of the gatekeeping of information and with the society tending towards the dependence on social media, social reality of information would surely be replaced.

Methodology

This study depends on secondary data analysis of 3 categories of results one, is the released opinion polls, predicted percentages of results, and final Independent National Electoral Commission results. The sources of the results of the opinion polls before the election include Sahara Reporters; BuildingUp Nigeria; Afrobarometer; Nigeria FM; World Stage NewsOnline; Nigerian Eye; and the INEC results. The early release of results would be downloaded as secondary data from @tarahtalksNG (twitter handle), that also controls a blog www.tarahtalks.blogspot.com. These results are subjected to tests and the results analysed 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. In addition to the above, two different positions on the predictions of the elections were also brought into the discussion of results. These two positions were also circulated via the social media.

Table 1: Compilation of INEC Results, Social Media Results, and Percentages of Predicted Outcome of the Presidential Poll

STATES IN NIGERIA	INEC RESULTS IN FIGURES		SOCIAL MEDIA RESULTS IN FIGURES		INEC RESULTS (%)		SOCIAL PREDICTION (%)	
	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	251,664	52%	35%	55%	45%
Akwaibom	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%

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

... correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

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

..correlaton is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

Presentation of Tables

Table 1 above presents 4 categories of results in one table. The first set of 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 raw 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 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 correlations for the results for these two candidates were derived from the early predictions and the final results. The correlations were to ascertain whether there was a correlation between the predicted results and the final results for 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 in 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 Nigerian presidential election in the case of the APC candidate. As the results changed in the predicted results, so did they in the INEC results. Further statistical analysis of the scatter plot would have reiterated their correlation.

Table 4 shows the correlation between the media predictions for the presidential election and the final result for the PDP candidate former President Goodluck Jonathan. Like in the case of President 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, excepting that of WorldStage NewsOnline. We can assert at this point that in favour of sampling, Sahara Reporters, Buildup Nigeria, Afrobarometer, Nigerian FM, NigerianEye produced a representative sample, with the closest being the Nigerian FM. If there had been more polls, President Muhammadu Buhari would have still won.

Discussion of Findings

This section of the paper will discuss the findings in relation to two different publications on the social media. On the one hand, is the publication and prediction of Dele Momodu and the other is the prediction of a doctoral candidate at the Oxford University, Zainab Usman and Dr. Olly Owen. These two predictions were published on the social media naija.com. The latter favoured former President Goodluck Jonathan as the eventual winner while the former favoured President Muhammadu Buhari.

The position of Zainab Usman and Olly Owen is hinged on the belief that the power of incumbency plays vital role in determining who wins in Nigerian elections. According to them, it was 85% successful in the 2011 election. Party power was also considered as a vital reason for favouring GEJ in their analysis. State level incumbency is also in favour of Jonathan as PDP has the majority of the states. According to them, even if PDP had presented another candidate, it would have still won the election. Although, the popularity of Jonathan had reduced by 14%.

Dele Momodu came up with his own position after his first interaction with President Muhammadu Buhari. According to him, Buhari was a different man from the one painted by the social media. In all of the presidential elections that he has contested in, the power of the media had been used against him. Despite the image created by the media, President Muhammadu Buhari had a spread scoring 25% or more in 16 states, but got a cumulative result of over 12 million votes. Former President Jonathan got more than 20millions and 25% or more in 31 states. Jonathan might have won in some of the states in the Northern part of Nigeria in the last election, there was no promise of the same feat in the 2015 general elections.

As beautiful as the summation above had sounded, the election was won by President Muhammadu Buhari, because many stakeholders defected from PDP to APC. Although, the final result showed that despite the defection of governor Amaechi in Rivers state, PDP still won by a landslide in that state and PDP was also able to steal victory from the territory perceived to be of APC in Edo state. The votes from southwestern Nigerian, the support of the people of the Northern Nigeria, and the defection stakeholders from PDP to APC won the election all together for President

Muhammadu Buhari. In the face of the dwindling popularity of president Goodluck Jonathan and disequilibrium within PDP pointing at the inability of former President Goodluck Jonathan to handle the undesirable conditions created by PDP in government.

Conclusion

The 2015 general election was a 2-horse race. The social media that marred the image of the APC Presidential candidate for many years, were adopted by both parties as the tools for good and evil. While a party was busy making itself, it was also tarnishing the image of the other party. In the real sense of it, parties were not attacked directly the attacks were on the personalities. Not just at the Presidential level, but also at the other levels.

The campaign of calumny could have disintegrated the country, if Nigeria were a more volatile nation. Indeed, the results showed that the majority of the people in some section of Nigeria stood solidly behind the former President and if war had erupted at that time of the election, that segment would have gladly parted their way from the “Nigeria” entity and have the opportunity to form the another nation that they have always desired. As much as the social media has always reiterated the need for the establishment of the Oduduwa nation, the results still showed some level of Unity in the Western part of Nigeria. Although, the support some section gave to PDP costed them the seat of the Senate President.

With the prediction favouring the candidacy of the opposition APC in the majority of the social media reports, there might have been several problems in the country if the final result had swayed in favour of the hitherto ruling party- there would have been violence, war, media reports, and so many other things that would have affected the progress of the nation. There would have been a public outcry of mass rigging, even if it could be observed that the votes could have been rigged in some states in the Northern and the Eastern parts of Nigeria. Specifically, Akwa-Ibom and Rivers states and in Kano state.

The interactive system of the social media allows freedom of speech. With the freedom of speech, people’s view can be aired and examined. The access to the views of the people provided the understanding that the social media needed to predict the outcome of the results as it were. Although, the turn out of the electorates was poor,

the social media ensured that the political socialisation and political participation have more audience and eventually gave the people the hope that Nigeria can conduct credible election that is devoid of any form of violence. It is hoped that the political culture would thrive in Nigeria and electioneering process would become better.

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