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## Reactions of Users to the 2015 Presidential Election on Facebook

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### ABSTRACT

*The use of Facebook and other social media platforms for elections and democratic process is embraced all over the world as a result of user generated content emanating from new media technologies. The elitist nature of mainstream media deprives most electorates the opportunity to air their views regarding political matters. Thus, the emergence of Facebook enable user's communicate and interact before, during and after elections. This study sought to examine the reactions of users regarding the application of Facebook during the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria, the survey method was employed to elicit data. Questionnaires were distributed to Facebook users from which their opinions were sampled in line with the research questions. The results of the study, among others, reveal that wide and divergent reactions to the elections were due to the credibility and transparency of the elections. The study also reveals that campaign messages on Facebook do not change the voting decisions of the electorates, most electorates on Facebook post, share, like or comment on what is in tandem with their individual interest. However, the study discovered that although Facebook has changed the political landscape in Nigeria, most users are sceptical of the authenticity of election results posted on Facebook, to them television exudes more conviction and is seen as a better option. This assertion is predicated on the fact that some Facebook users have fake accounts and most users don't take responsibility for their posts. The study recommends that all the stakeholders should create, make public and utilize their Facebook accounts to ensure its effective usage with accurate and verifiable information for users' consumption.*

**Keywords:** Reactions, Users, Presidential, Election and Facebook.

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### INTRODUCTION

The potency of social media as a veritable communication medium has endeared it to a lot of users across the globe. In Nigeria, the flexibility and cost-effectiveness of social media networks have attracted a multitude of users cutting across religious, social and demographic divides, making social media a critical tool for political engagement and

participation. Unlike the conventional mass media, social media allows citizens the opportunity to participate in political debates without frontiers other than their ability to own and operate a mobile device and afford internet connectivity.

In Nigeria, politics is seen by a number of people as a dirty game played only by those who achieve their political desires by getting their hands dirty. This is as a result of the undemocratic tendencies, deception, violence and uncertainties that characterize the political system as such resulting in voter apathy (Falade, 2014) [1]. To corroborate this assertion Olowojolu and Ake (2015)[2], note that since pre-independence, Nigeria's election has been characterized by malpractices, government's interference, money politics and ethno-religious identity that shape the political perception amongst the electorates. Falade (2014)[1] insists that citizens should be active players in party politics, electioneering campaigns, voting and community affairs in order to determine those who will take decisions on their behalf and as well manage their resources.

Conventional media critics Graber, Fallows, Blumler and Gurevitch cited in Abubakar (2011) [3] were of the view that traditional media such as radio, television, newspaper and magazine do not give the electorates enough access to the media to express their views or opinions. They limit the access in terms of time and space, often dominated by the elite and middle class. In Nigeria for instance, government media outfits do not allocate same airtime and space between the ruling party and the opposition. The emergence of social network ushered in new era of political participation via new media of communication that are faster, cheaper, easier and without any means of control [4].

While countries like USA, UK and some European countries have adopted the use of social media for electioneering campaigns, Nigeria's former president Goodluck Jonathan's decision to officially announce his intention to run in 2011 via his Facebook page attracted the attention of electorates in Nigeria, Nnanyelugo and Nwafor (2013) [5]. Also, Udejinta (2011)[6], corroborates this fact that "the importance attached to social media in the 2011

general elections was better explained by President Goodluck Jonathan's decision to declare his intention to run for the highest political office in the land on Facebook". It happened at a time when northerners in the PDP feel that Jonathan was not eligible to run in view of the zoning arrangement adopted by PDP. Nigeria has witnessed an exponential growth in internet and social media use. From a modest 200,000 users in 2000, by 2015 around 30 per cent of the population is online, increasingly on smart phones (Bartlett, Krasodonski-Jones, Daniel, Fisher, Jespersen, 2015) [7]. Since, then other politicians saw the need to take advantage of the medium to reach out to mass users on Facebook.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research work is hinged on the tenets and propositions of the Uses and Gratification theory. The theory sprang from the functionalist paradigm resulting from the works of Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler in 1974. McQuail (2000)[8] observes that uses and gratification theory is a sub-tradition of the media effects theory which do not view mass media audience as docile but active participants in the communication process.

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch cited in Ruggiero (2000)[9] note that chief tenet of U&G theory of audience behaviour is that media use is selective and motivated by rational self-awareness of the individual's own needs and an expectation that those needs will be satisfied by particular types of media and content. This is embedded in the fact that mass media audiences have the right to switch to different communication channels to find what not only satisfy their needs but gratifies them. This implies that audiences of mass media are significant to the communication process due to their ability to select media content, respond to it, get motivated by the content to either change or stick to a particular media channel.

Ruggiero (2000)[10] observes that the theory seeks to explain the gratifications consumers seek from a particular medium and their perceptions of and affinity for that

medium and its content. According Cummings (2008)[11]. "Uses and Gratifications is a model of media study that examines why people use media and what they gain from putting forth the effort and energy to do so". He adds that Uses and Gratifications' purpose is to identify and explain the appeal of certain media, and why a consumer chooses one medium and disregards the others. Roy cited in Jere and Davis (2011)[12] add that individual use and choice and that different people can use the same medium for different purposes. Also, Eighmey and McCord cited in Jere and Davis (2011)[12] points that although people's initial encounter with a medium might be accidental, due to curiosity about its novelty, continuing use would be highly unlikely if the medium did not provide them with specific benefits.

Ruggiero (2000)[10] citing Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch proposed five elements guiding uses and gratification theory; The audience is assumed to be an active user of mass media; each audience member must discern which medium will best gratify his or her needs for a given use; media outlets compete with other sources of gratification, and media cannot satisfy all human needs; empirical data assessment can help determine the goals of mass media consumers since users are self-aware enough to accurately describe their motives and judgments about the cultural relevance of mass media must be withheld in order to avoid speculation on popular culture.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Social Media and social Networking are used interchangeably but they have some differences. Prior to 2010, social Network was more widely used than Social Media, Veerasamy (2013)[13]. The main purpose of social Networking is to create inter-connectivity between and among users. He added that the ability to publish information isn't a core function of a social Network but absolutely fundamental to Social Media.

“Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter were launched in 2004 and 2006; they allow users to register and create profiles, upload media, contribute to message threads, and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues”, (Raouf, et al.). According to Mayfield (2008) social networks are sites that allow people to build personal web pages and then connect with friends to share content and communication. Wellman cited in Williams and Gulati (2007)[14] see social network as “a set of people, organizations, or other social entities connected by a set of socially meaningful relationships”. When a computer network connects people, it is a social network. Social networks enable users to create virtual communities to interact and relate with others via cyberspace. This suggests that the term social Networking metamorphosed into Social Media in view of the unanticipated shift in its function from mere communication or interaction to the quest for information; ‘what’s happening’ instead of ‘what are you doing’. Users were not concerned about using social networking sites for sending news information but profiling co-users. Again Veerasamy (2013)[13] is of the view that Social Media evolved as a result of the transformation of social Networking sites into new media platforms that allow the dissemination or publication of news worthy information.

### FACEBOOK AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Facebook is one of the social networking sites available around the world. It was established in 2004, and since then, it has grown stronger. It provides technological

features that allow users to present their identity with personal information to others such as friends, family members, co-workers or even strangers, (Omolayo, Balogun and Omole 2013, Boyd and Ellison, 2007, Jones and Soltren, 2005) [15]. Yousif and Alsamydai (2012: 85)[16] observe that “Facebook is one of the modern communication means which were adopted by the politicians to disseminate their ideas, influence the individuals’ opinions, induce them to adopt their ideas, and vote for them in elections”. Facebook users interact with other users, or Facebook friends by updating their “status”, writing on other members “walls” or sending direct personal messages. Users are able to create and join interest groups, “like” pages, import and search for contacts, and upload photos and videos, Storck (2011)[17]. Researchers such as Khane, Middaugh, Nyasulu, Opeyemi, Olusola, Victoria, Wimmer, & Dominick, (2014)[18],[19],[20],[21]. Note that: “Researchers have found that Facebook is considered by politicians as a chance to attract people to use social networking as a public venue to meet others and to form groups to exchange political information, as well as to communicate with other users who share the same viewpoints. Forming such groups on Facebook helps many users who are seeking political information.”

Although, Facebook enables mass political participation, influence political self-expression, information seeking and real world voting behaviour of millions of people (Bond, Fariss, Jones, Kramer, Marlow, Settle and Fowler, 2012), some scholars Adeyajua and Haruna (2011) and Olowojolu and Ake (2015) point that Facebook attracted provocative and inciting messages that contributed to the post election violence in 2011.

In a recent study conducted by Hampton, Goulet, Marlow and Rainie (2012) entitled “*Why Most Facebook Users Get More Than They Give*”, note that other political activities, such as voting and trying to influence others to vote for a specific candidate, are associated with a more specific set of Facebook activities. Participation in Facebook groups, either by being added to a group or adding someone else, was weakly associated with trying to influence someone to vote in a specific way.

In another study conducted on Facebook by Williams and Gulati (2007)[14] titled “social networks and political campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 midterm elections which investigated the extent of Facebook profile use in 2006, and analyses which congressional candidates were more likely to use them, with what impact on their vote shares. The study

revealed that active engagement by the candidate and a well maintained site can make the candidate more accessible and seem more authentic. It also can encourage a more professional discussion among supporters.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

Kahne (2014)[18] youth are often experts and highly engaged with new media and, the affordances of new media enable youth to have political voice and influence without being 18, having money, or even being a citizen. Thus, the opportunities afforded by participation with new media may be particularly valuable for youth. He further suggests youths dominate the category of people accessing information via Facebook and the new media. Adelekan (2010)[22] emphasized that ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that involves one's life. In a democratic system, there is the necessity for the citizenry to be fully involved in the democratic procedures of the choice of rulers and effective communication of the public policies and attitudes. Any claim to democratic regime or state must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, and enjoyment of civic and political liberties and political participation,[1].

Kahne cited the 2005 Black Youth Project survey, a number of young people indicated that airing their own cable television show was a political act (Cohen 2010). Others commented that building a website and voicing their opinions was a political act. Falade (2014) notes that in Nigeria, politics is influenced by money, ethnic and religious factors.

### **THE PROBLEM**

Facebook serves diverse functions as a result of its potentials (Adaja and Ayodele, 2013)[23]. Messages posted on Facebook targeting electorates may not influence the political decisions of users, being a social media platform that allow users control what to post or receive. Comments by most Facebook users after the 2015 presidential election in

Nigeria were tailored along the path of ethnic, religious and regional sentiments. This negates the ideals of democracy and united Nigeria especially during a period when the unity of the country was threatened. During 2015 presidential election most Facebook users in Nigeria posted information that were bias, defamatory, not credible or sensationalized. This brings into question the credibility of Facebook messages by its heterogeneous users.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The broad objective of this study is to assess how Nigerian Facebook users reacted to campaign messages on the 2015 presidential election. Specifically, the study is set to:

1. Find out the reactions of Facebook users in Nigeria to the political campaign messages on Facebook during the 2015 presidential election.
2. Ascertain whether the use of Facebook during the 2015 presidential election has affected the political orientation and campaign methods in Nigeria.
3. Determine if political campaign messages on Facebook affected users' voting decisions during the 2015 elections.
4. Examine whether Facebook was significant in breaking the outcome of the 2015 presidential election to its users.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Based on the problem being investigated and the objectives set out, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What were the reactions of Facebook users in Nigeria to the political campaign messages on Facebook during the 2015 presidential election?

2. Has Facebook usage during the 2015 presidential election affected the political orientation and campaign methods in Nigeria?
3. How have political campaign messages on Facebook affected users' voting decisions during the 2015 elections?
4. Was Facebook significant in breaking the outcome of the 2015 presidential election to its users?

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study used the descriptive survey method. This is due to the fact that “survey research which studies both large and small population is done by selecting and studying samples chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelation of sociological and psychological variables”, [24].

### **POPULATION OF THE STUDY**

This study focused on Nigerian youths. The researcher opted for the youths because they constitute the fulcrum of active users on Facebook. The population of this study is restricted to users both males and females who are disposed actively on Facebook during the 2015 presidential election. This is because the research work is not interested in the gender of the users and there are other users on Facebook who were not or were interested on the election but did not follow it diligently. Hence, the need to assess only those that offered credible information.

### **SAMPLE SIZE DETERMINATION**

Sampling techniques and statistics were used to determine the sample size of the users. This is because of the large size of the users spread across the areas of study. Multistage sampling was used to select the 384 representing one-third of an estimated Facebook user's population of One million.

**Table 1: Table for Determining Sample Size from a Given Population**

<b>N</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>10</b>	10	220	140	1200	291
<b>15</b>	14	230	144	1300	297
<b>20</b>	19	240	148	1400	302
<b>25</b>	24	250	152	1500	306
<b>30</b>	28	260	155	1600	310
<b>35</b>	32	270	159	1700	313
<b>40</b>	36	280	162	1800	317
<b>45</b>	40	290	165	1900	320
<b>50</b>	44	300	169	2000	322
<b>55</b>	48	320	175	2200	327
<b>60</b>	52	340	181	2400	331
<b>65</b>	56	360	186	2600	335
<b>70</b>	59	380	191	2800	338
<b>75</b>	63	400	196	3000	341
<b>80</b>	66	420	201	3500	346
<b>85</b>	70	440	205	4000	351
<b>90</b>	73	460	210	4500	354
<b>95</b>	76	480	214	5000	357
<b>100</b>	80	500	217	6000	361
<b>110</b>	86	550	226	7000	364
<b>120</b>	92	600	234	8000	367
<b>130</b>	97	650	242	9000	368
<b>140</b>	103	700	248	10000	370
<b>150</b>	108	750	254	15000	375
<b>160</b>	113	800	260	20000	377
<b>170</b>	118	850	265	30000	379
<b>180</b>	123	900	269	40000	380
<b>190</b>	127	950	274	50000	381

<b>200</b>	132	1000	278	75000	382
<b>210</b>	136	1100	285	<b>1000000</b>	<b>384</b>

Note. - *N* is population size. *S* is sample size, (Nyasulu 2014)

### INSTRUMENTS OF DATA COLLECTION

The study used a structured questionnaire for the collection of data. A questionnaire is a set of systematically structured questions used by a researcher to get needed information from respondents (Ong'anya and Ododa, 2013). The questionnaire is divided into two sections. Section A seeks to find out demography while section B is psychographic data that focuses on the reactions, feelings, perception and attitudes.

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

**Table 2: Distribution of responses on the prediction of users is correlated to the outcome of the election**

Predictions Correlated with Election Outcome	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Agreed	165	47.3
Disagreed	81	23.2
Strongly Agreed	41	11.7
Strongly Disagreed	22	6.3
Undecided	40	11.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Survey 2016

Majority of the respondents 165 (47.3%) were of the view that their predictions matched the outcome. Whereas 81 (23.2%) believed that views contradicted the outcome and 40 (11.5%) were neutral. This shows that most of the users were expecting the opposition to win.

**Table 3: Distribution of the respondents on Facebook changed the political orientation and campaign methods in Nigerian polity.**

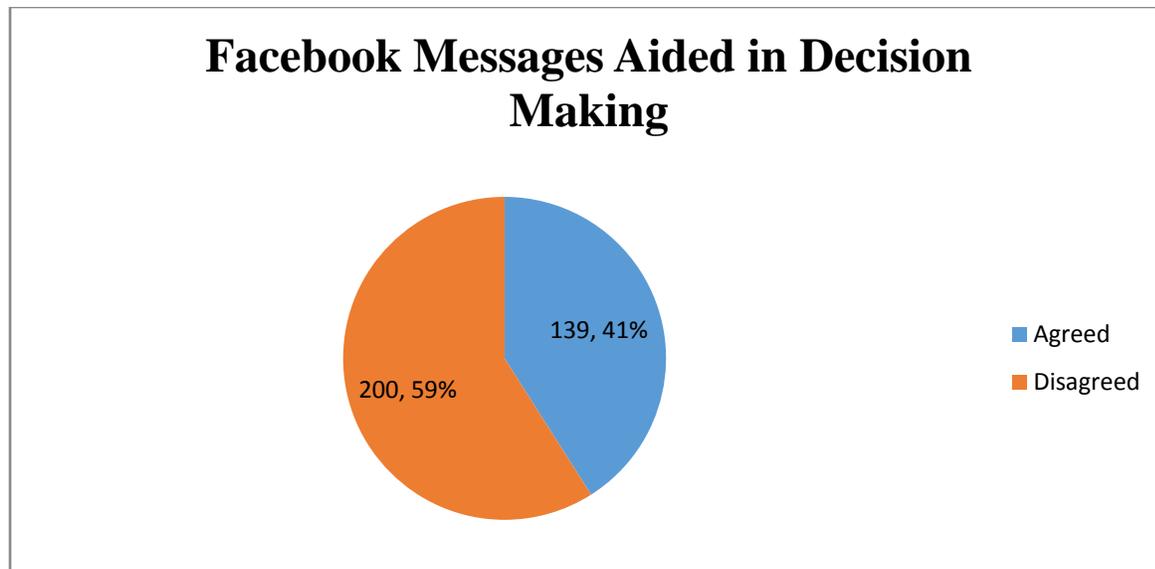
Facebook Changed Political Orientation and Campaign Methods	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agreed	178	50.3
Agreed	77	21.8
Undecided	56	15.8
Disagreed	16	4.5
Strongly Disagreed	27	7.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Survey 2016

The statistics in table 14 above shows that the introduction of Facebook for electioneering campaigns has changed the political orientation and method in Nigeria. Most of the respondents, (agreed plus strongly agreed) constituting over 65% of the respondents. This is an indication that Facebook has offered alternative means of communication to large audiences who could not ordinarily access the mainstream media. This is corroborated by Newman (2009) who observes that mainstream media is dominated by the elites and thus difficult to be accessed by the masses.

**Table 4: Distribution of the respondents on whether Facebook messages have aided users' choice of candidate**

Facebook Messages Aided Decision	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Agreed	139	41.0
Disagreed	200	59.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>100.0</b>



**Figure 1**

Source: Field Survey 2016

From the Pie Chart representation, majority of the respondents 200 (59%) affirmed that Facebook messages did not aid them in deciding which candidate or political party to vote for. Generally, the media is to provide the avenue for voter education and enlightenment regarding the entire electoral process in order to avoid voter apathy. This implies that the users have their own choices to make as such have the power to decide what suit their interest. So many messages were posted online to discredit or lure support for one candidate or the other; at the end the users have exclusive right to make the decision. This further signifies that the media to some extent have the power to influence the audience.

Furthermore, other factors may influence users to make political decisions not necessarily the messages posted online. Those messages will compete with users social, political, religious, cultural and economic interests.

**Table 5: Distribution of the medium the respondents got the outcome of the election**

Medium You Got Election Outcome	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Facebook	61	17.2
TV	221	62.4
Radio	52	14.7
Others	20	5.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Survey 2016

The table above indicates that majority of the respondents 221 (62.4%) got the outcome of the election through television, followed by Facebook with 61 (17.2%), radio 52 (14.7%) while others constituted 20 (5.6%). This implies that television is still instrumental in information dissemination despite the wide acceptance of Facebook.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first research question sought to evaluate the reactions of Facebook users in Nigeria to the political campaign messages on Facebook during the 2015 presidential election, the answers were revealed in Table 2. Table 2 indicates that more than 50% of the respondents opined that the outcome is the true reflection of the election. This shows that most of them expected a shift of power from the ruling party to the opposition, thus, attracted wide reactions.

Answer to research question 2 revealed that most of the respondents agreed that Facebook has changed the political orientation and campaign methods in Nigerian polity. The masses who could not access the mainstream media resorted to using the Facebook to make public their views in view of the absence of gate-keeping or regulation. Politicians and several other stakeholders such as INEC, political parties, Government, religious organisations, local and international NGOs targeted the youths who constituted majority of the users as captured in Table 3 of this study. Asuni and Faris cited in Aleyomi and Ajakaiye (n.d) corroborated this fact in their study "*The Impact of Social Media on Citizens' Mobilization and Participation in Nigeria's 2011 General Elections*". They observed that social media has assumed a new dimension in politicking with 44 million Nigerians having access to internet facilities during the 2011 elections and also described it as a step in the right direction for Nigeria's democratic engagement.

To answer question 3 which sought to find out how political campaign messages on Facebook affected users' voting decisions during the 2015 elections, indicates that most of the respondents were not interested in political matters and majority of them rejected the fact that Facebook aided them in deciding who to vote for as represented in Tables 4 and 5.

This implies that politicians can package their campaign messages but at the end it is the user that decides who to vote for or those that may decide not to vote at all.

Question 4 revealed that during the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, Facebook as represented in Table 5 was not the major medium through which the respondents got the outcome of the results, most of them opted for television. This signifies that despite the minute by minute post showing the outcome of the election, the respondents were more reliant on television.

### CONCLUSION

Evidence from the research findings suggests that the use Facebook for electioneering campaigns is of paramount importance as it gives voice to the voiceless and power to the electorates most of whom were grossly under-represented by mainstream media that give more preference to the elite. No significant difference exists between female and male usage of Facebook, Hampton, Goulet & Rainie, (2012)[25]. However, posting information on Facebook is not enough to influence users to decide who to vote for or change their views and perception on a particular candidate or political party. Indeed, Facebook has changed political orientation across the world. Instant posting and messaging as well as cheap and easy access enable millions of users to communicate and interact. Wider political participation ensures sustenance of democracy that represent the will of the electorates. Appadorai (2004)[26] notes that representative democracy rests on the assumptions that the citizens possess and demonstrate some civic capacities.

Consequently, it is the position of this study that Facebook users need more than packaged messages to convince and influence political decisions amongst them. There is need for politicians to upgrade by interfacing with users on personal level to create impression that users as stakeholders are important in participating in political matters by interacting with politicians and aspirants especially on issues that bother on their social and economic well-being.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is imperative to recommend that Politicians, political parties, candidates and all the relevant stakeholders should employ the services of social media experts to tackle the challenge of hackers and should always discredit hacked messages instantly in order not to mislead Facebook users. Any researcher who wishes to conduct studies on Facebook and election must first and foremost plan to record and keep data during the period in question. Otherwise, users use privacy and cookies to deny researchers access to their accounts. The research work suggests a training workshop for politicians and other stakeholders to enable them operate the platform the way it works. This enables them to operate Facebook the way the users do and create better interactions.

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