

# Social Media and Political Effects: A Case Study of the 2015 Nigeria's Presidential Election

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**Abstract:** The main focus of this paper is to examine the influence and role played by social media in the 2015 presidential election of Nigeria that marked a historic transfer of power for Africa's most populous nation. The paper discussed in detail the theory, concept and objectives of Social media. It also analyses how Social media is better off Traditional media by differentiating the two and also discussed some criticism of Social media. The paper analyses the contemporary media use in Nigeria and specifies which of the media is commonly used and from which group of individuals in Nigeria. It argues however that in spite of some advantages of Traditional media, Social media contributed positively in the areas of "Guaranteed meeting place", "Keeping in touch with families", "Professional networking", and "Staying informed about the world "and" Being a two-way communication system" In this regard, the objectives of this work is to ascertain the extent of involvement of Social media to the success and transparency of the 2015 Nigeria's presidential election ,and giving Social media privilege over Traditional media in the aspect of advertising or in any political involvement.

**Keywords:** Social media, Traditional/Industrial media, Political effects.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The popularity of getting political news from social media platforms is greatly increasing. A 2014 study showed that 62% of web users turn to face book to find political news. This social phenomenon allows for political information, true or not, spreading quickly and easily among peer networks. Furthermore, social media sites are now encouraging political involvement by uniting like-minded people, reminding users to vote in elections, and analyzing users' political affiliation data to find cultural similarities and differences.

Social media can help taint the reputation of political figures fairly quickly with information that may or may not be true. Information spreads like wildfire and before a politician can even get an opportunity to address the information, either to confirm, deny, or explain, the public has already formed an opinion about the politician based on that information. However, when conducted on purpose, the spread of information on social media for political means can help campaigns immensely.

Open forums online have also been the root of negative and positive effects in the political sphere. Some politicians have made the mistake of using open forums to try and reach a broader audience and thus more potential voters. What they forgot to account for was that the forums would be open to everyone, including those in opposition. Having no control the comments being posted, negative included, has been damaging for some with unfortunate oversight. Additionally, a constraint of social media as a tool for public political discourse is that if oppressive governments recognize the ability social media has to cause change, they shut it down.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows after the introduction. Section (II) examines Social Media : Theoretical Background, Concept and Objective. Section (III) Discusses the Criticisms of social media. (IV) Discusses Social Media Versus Traditional/Industrial Media (V) Examines the Contemporary Media use in Nigeria. (VI ) Examines Social Media

in Nigeria (VII) Discusses how social media 'decided, dominated and directed' the Nigerian elections, while the last section is the conclusion.

## II. SOCIAL MEDIA: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND, CONCEPT AND OBJECTIVES

### *(Theoretical Background and Concept of Social media):*

Social media are computer-mediated tools that allow people to create, share or exchange information, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks. "Social media is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration". Websites and applications dedicated to forums, micro blogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, and wikis are among the different types of social media. Furthermore, social media depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.

### *(Objectives of Social media):*

#### **(a) Guaranteed Meeting Places:**

When attempting to plan meetings with colleagues or friends, having access to social networking sites expands the available times and places in which meetings can occur. Individuals can meet each other and chat over Face book, or open a video chat through Google+. Rather than having to travel to specific locations, or try to work times out in which everyone is near a central location, people can plan to meet at times that work for all of their schedules.

#### **(b) Keep in Touch with Family:**

Keeping in contact with family through the phone or even over email presents a challenge. Instead, social networking sites allow the individual to share their day to day life in a secure but public forum, which family can watch and experience. Face book, for example, allows people to share events, images, and thoughts in real time, during the course of any day. Family and friends can then experience all the things that someone does, and comment on them. Then, they share in the experience, rather than just being "informed" about them during weekly phone calls.

#### **(c) Professional Networking:**

For professionals and academics, social networking sites allow users to create networks of like-minded people. Academics find other scholars to share research or ideas, or simply to talk to and "get their name out there." Professionals find mutual friends and possible clients, employers, or business partners. Social networking expands the horizons of what sort of contacts people can make in their professional lives.

#### **(d) Staying Informed About the World:**

People on social networking sites share what interests them, such as news on current events. People who share those interests, or who just want to stay informed, can read these stories and share them as well. Eventually, these stories make their way to users who may have never read them. Since stories are shared through "word of mouth," smaller news outlets such as blogs can get exposure, and social network users are overall connected to a larger pool of new information and opinion.

These are just a few of many objectives of social media, and are also the advantages of social media. The ability to increase our networking potential or work with others regardless of distance presents new ways for us to do business. Furthermore, the ability to stay in contact with friends and family allows us to maintain closer ties to our loved ones across long distances and get information of what is happening around the world.

## III. CRITICISMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Criticisms of social media range from criticisms of the ease of use of specific platforms and their capabilities, disparity of information available, issues with trustworthiness and reliability of information presented, the impact of social media use on an individual's concentration, ownership of media content, and the meaning of interactions created by social media. Although some social media platforms offer users the opportunity to cross-post simultaneously, some social network platforms have been criticized for poor interoperability between platforms, which leads to the creation of information silos- isolated pockets of data contained in one social media platform. However, it is also argued that social media have

positive effects such as allowing the democratization of the internet while also allowing individuals to advertise themselves and form friendships. Others have noted that the term "Social" cannot account for technological features of a platform alone, hence the level of sociability should be determined by the actual performances of its users.

There has been a dramatic decrease in face-to-face interactions as more and more social media platforms have been introduced with the threat of cyber-bullying and online sexual predators being more prevalent. Social media may expose children to images of alcohol, tobacco, and sexual behaviors. In regards to cyber-bullying, it has been proven that individuals who have no experience with cyber-bullying often have a better well-being than individuals who have been bullied online.

Twitter is increasingly a target of heavy activity of marketers. Their actions, focused on gaining massive numbers of followers, include use of advanced scripts and manipulation techniques that distort the prime idea of social media by abusing human trustfulness.

British-American entrepreneur and author Andrew Keen criticizes social media in his book *The Cult of the Amateur*, writing, "Out of this anarchy, it suddenly became clear that what was governing the infinite monkeys now inputting 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." This is also relative to the issue "justice" in the social network. For example, the phenomenon "Human flesh search engine" in Asia raised the discussion of "private-law" brought by social network platform.

Comparative Media professor José van Dijck contends in her book "The Culture of Connectivity" (2013) that to understand the full weight of social media, their technological dimensions should be connected to the social and the cultural. She critically describes six social media platforms. One of her findings is the way Facebook had been successful in framing the term 'sharing' in such a way that third party use of user data is neglected in favor of intra-user connectedness.

In as much as many researchers have criticized social media, it still plays greater roles as to improving communication, connecting family and friends, improving professional networking and making everyone staying informed about the world easier.

With the advent of social networking, social scientists and media experts have wondered about the benefits social networking brings to communication. While some of these are obvious, some others have only become apparent as users have become familiar with social networking.

#### IV. SOCIAL MEDIA VERSUS TRADITIONAL/INDUSTRIAL MEDIA

Social media introduce substantial and pervasive changes to communication between businesses, organizations, communities, and individuals. These changes are the focus of the emerging field of techno self studies.

Social media are different from traditional or industrial media in many ways, including quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence. Social media operates in a dialogic transmission system, (many sources to many receivers). This is in contrast to traditional media that operates under a mono-logic transmission model (one source to many receivers). Social media describes websites that allow users to share content, media, etc. Common examples are the popular social networking sites like Friendster, Facebook, MySpace, etc. Social media also includes YouTube, Photo bucket, Flickr, and other sites aimed at photo and video sharing. News aggregation and online reference sources, examples of which are Digg and Wikipedia, are also counted in the social media bucket. Micro-blogging sites such as twitter can also be included as social media.

##### **Traditional media:**

Social media is really a paradigm shift or change in world view rather than simply a new set of tactics.

Traditional media relied heavily on a one-to-many paradigm — the brand creates a message and transmits that message to the masses through broadcast, print, radio, or signage. Traditional media is a one-way communication system that doesn't create engagement or work toward promoting word of mouth — the hallmarks of social media.

***Why should brands care about engagement and word of mouth?***

Because consumers don't believe brands.

Now, maybe at one point consumers DID believe brands, but they don't anymore. Will that toothpaste make your teeth whiter, that laundry detergent make your clothes brighter, that fertilizer make your grass greener than competitors? After years of testing out your claims, we found too many of them lied, so we're immune to your propaganda.

And, your generic message shows you don't really care about ME and it doesn't give me a way to talk back to you. I am a passive consumer of your message, which doesn't really provide strong motivation for me to get out there and do anything, let alone buy your brand.

Because I can't talk back, you never learned I would love your brand if it only came in a smaller (larger) size, a different color, or was simpler (had more features). Your brand failed because you didn't know what I wanted, so you didn't give it to me.

***Social media:***

Social media (done right) gives you all this because it's inherently a two-way communication system.

Rather than getting brand messages, you get recommendations from friends in the form of reshares and recommended posts, which de-commercializes the brand message. De-commercialization, while a mouthful of a word simply means that brand messages no longer carry the patina of the brand, but reflect the endorsement of your friends.

***Don't believe me? An example may help.***

If you're old enough to remember when you used to go to the store to rent videos, you likely experienced de-commercialization. Remember, you'd wander aimlessly through the wall of new releases looking for something to rent. Someone (often a perfect stranger) would walk up behind you and recommend one of the titles. Now, even though you might not know the person, you give their recommendation serious consideration because you value their opinion a lot more than the movie studio or some professional reviewer.

Social media exists to create word of mouth advertising by encouraging reshares that not only amplify their message (thus increasing reach), but make brand claims more believable. And we know word of mouth is much more powerful than traditional brand messages. According to Nielsen, 92% of consumers believe word of mouth more than traditional advertising.

Of course, this is nothing new. Marketers always knew word of mouth was much more powerful than brand messages. In the days of traditional media, however, you didn't really have the tools to generate word of mouth. Sure, you could use catchy jingles and bizarre images in hopes people would talk about your brand, but generating word of mouth from commercials was hard to control, develop, and measure.

**Traditional Media**

One-way conversation

Closed system

Opaque

Mass marketing

About ME

Professional content

Polished content

Paid platform

Metric: Reach/ frequency

Actors/ Celebrities

**Social Media**

Two-way conversation

Open system

Transparent

One-on-one marketing

About you

Brand and User-generated Content

Authentic content

FREE platform

Metric: Engagement

Actors: Users/ Influencers

Economic decision-making	Community decision-making
Controlled communication	Unstructured communication
Pre-produced/ scheduled	Real time creation
Top-down strategy	Bottom-up strategy
Formal language	Informal language
Passive involvement	Active involvement

With all the 16 attributes and many more that has differentiated Traditional media from Social media contributed immensely to the defeat of the incumbent president of Nigeria in the "2015 Presidential Election". Marking Social media a great player to the transparent, fair and successful election.

## V. CONTEMPORARY MEDIA USE IN NIGERIA

Nigerians are avid consumers of news, with two-thirds saying they access news at least once a day (66.6%). This rate is even higher among men (72.8%) and those living in urban areas (72.4%). Radio is the dominant news platform in Nigeria, with 77.4% overall and more than seven in 10 across all major demographic groups saying they listen to the radio for news at least weekly. Word of mouth (66.1% weekly) and TV (64.0% weekly) follow as the most common means of getting news. The Internet ranks fourth with 28.2% of Nigerians using it as a source for news at least weekly.

More than half of Nigerians aged 34 or younger receive news via SMS as do more than three-quarters of those with at least a secondary education. Younger and more educated Nigerians are also the group that is most likely to get news through the Internet, social networking websites, and mobile apps, but these sources are less commonly used for news overall.

### **Traditional Media:**

Most Nigerian households have both a working radio (83.4%) and a television set (74.6%). There is little demographic variation in ownership rates, but urban households are more likely to have a TV (83.7%), and TV ownership rates are considerably lower among those with less than a secondary education (60.6%).

AM and SW use declined Three-quarters of Nigerians overall say they listened to the radio in the past week (78.4%). Hausa speakers are even more likely to have done so (86.6%). In terms of waveband, FM is by far the most commonly used (90.4%), while AM (30.2%) and SW (19.7%) use fell in 2014 (from 45.3% and 28.7%, respectively). However, these wavebands remain somewhat more popular among Hausa speakers, 52.7% of whom say they have listened to AM while one-third have listened to SW (36.4%). Nonetheless, while FM is less heavily used among Hausa speakers (81.9%) than the general public, it is still the dominant waveband among this group as well. Most Nigerians report past-week usage of a conventional radio (64.7%). Nearly four in 10 say they listen to the radio weekly using a mobile phone (37.3%) and 12.0% report listening on a car radio. Other methods of listening are relatively rare, with no more than one in 20 listeners saying they have used a satellite receiver (5.1%), cable TV (4.0%), or the Internet (3.4%) to listen to the radio in the past week. Three-quarters of radio listeners (75.3%) say they regularly listen to the radio in English, more than double the rate for any other language.

### **Cable overtook satellite TV:**

Nearly two-thirds of Nigerians say they watched TV in the past week (62.6%). The vast majority of TV owners receive their broadcasts using an antenna (84.9%) while just 20.8% say they have cable TV. Even fewer TV owners have either an individual (16.8%) or shared satellite dish (2.7%). Antenna users appear to be adopting cable faster than satellite TV – cable access increased from 12.9% in 2012 (matched by a decline in antenna use from 93.0%) whereas satellite access rates remained the same. Most cable and satellite owners pay extra to access more channels (80.8%) instead of relying on just those channels that can be accessed for free. DSTV/Multi choice (47.5%) is the leading provider among this segment, while roughly one in five subscribe to one or more of the country's second-tier cable/satellite providers.

***New Media:***

Mobile phone ownership (87.0%) surpassed ownership rates for both radios (83.4%) and televisions (74.6%) at the household level. Most individuals also own a personal mobile phone (83.0%) with half of those who do not reporting that they have access to a mobile phone owned by someone else (55.1%). Mobile ownership is likely to be virtually universal in the near future as the personal ownership rate increased by 10 percentage points over the past two years (73.1% in 2012). Home Internet access also increased sharply— nearly tripling from 7.5% in 2012 to 22.9%. This growth is directly linked to the continued spread of mobile technology, as 95.7% of weekly Internet users say they accessed the Web using a mobile device in the past week, and the rate of household computer ownership (9.5%) was unchanged in 2014.

***Younger and more educated Nigerians lead the way in mobile phone ownership and Internet use.*** More than nine in 10 of those with at least a secondary education personally own a mobile phone compared with 71.3% of those with less than a secondary education. Personal mobile ownership rates across age groups are highest among those aged 25 to 34 (89.3%) – well ahead of those aged 35 or older (78.8%) and also leading those aged 15-24 with a relative lack of purchasing power likely suppressing the rate among younger Nigerians. Higher mobile ownership rates among men (87.8%) are likely due to their greater individual purchasing power (men are more likely to be employed 48.2% vs. 36.6% of women). This is also due to the tendency in developing societies for men to outpace women in the adoption of new technology.

***Internet cafés are no longer a primary means of Web access:***

The growth in home Internet access has led to a rapid decline in the use of public/shared access points such as Internet cafés (19.7%) and school/universities (19.9%) among weekly Internet users. The shift in Internet café use is particularly stark – while 28.2% of weekly Internet users said this was the location from which they accessed the Internet most often in 2012, just 2.0% said that was the case in 2014. Instead, the majority of Internet users access the web from home (83.2%) or from multiple locations using a mobile device (66.7%). Meanwhile, Internet use at work remained relatively low at 33.8%. Finding out the latest news remains one of the most common Internet activities in 2014 (79.3%) among weekly Internet users. Reading blogs (63.6%) and sharing photos or videos (61.4%) are more popular than they were in 2012, while the majority of weekly users also reported posting comments on a blog in the past week (60.3%). The percentage of users who said they used the Internet to send or receive email declined sharply. While two-thirds of Nigerians have heard of social networking services (65.1%), just 29.2% of Nigerians have used one in the past week. Awareness and use rates are much lower among older and less educated Nigerians – 50.9% of those 35 and older have heard of social networking services and just 13.1% of this age group said they used such a service in the past week. Face book (93.2%) is by far the most popular social networking service, although substantial number of past-week social network users also use 2GO (68.3%).

*[The analysis here is based on 4,000 face-to-face interviews with adults aged 15 and older living in Nigeria. Trained interviewers conducted interviews Jan. 27-March 21, 2014, in English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Pidgin. Security concerns prevented interviewing from being conducted in Borno state, which excluded 2.2% of the population. All results are weighted by age, gender, region, and educational attainment to reflect the characteristics of the national population. These findings are representative of the views and opinions of 95,077,248 Nigerian adults.]*

## VI. SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA

**SOCIAL MEDIA (AND MOBILE):**

Nigeria counts 56 million Internet users as of December 2012, roughly the 33% of a total population of 167 million people.

In August 2013 the "Business Day" came up with a research about Internet and mobile users in Nigeria, also explaining the demographical reasons behind these numbers:

“Of the 115 million mobile telephone subscribers in the country, 35 million use their handheld devices to access internet data services. With a large youth population (one-third of the population is between the 10-24 years age bracket) and a growing middle class (appx. 39 million), Nigeria has a fast-growing number of the two classes which traditionally drive internet usage around the world.”

The biggest African country counts today 11.8 million Face book users. In order to get the actual importance of the Face book in the country, we have to look at local independent news portals: Face book pages like "Information\_Nigeria" and "Naij.com" count well over a million followers each, together with high levels of interaction.

Yet the social network has apparently been losing about a million active users in Nigeria over the course of 2013 (source: Techloy), especially in favor to mobile-based platforms.

The country counts 35 million people accessing the Internet through smart phones and feature phones (source: Business Day).

IM apps like WhatsApp and Black Berry Messenger count several million users each in Nigeria, still leaving space to more local players like "2go" and "ESKIMI"; WeChat is growing in Nigeria too.

As per the other global social networks – according to web sources – Nigeria counts 1.8 million Twitter users, and in early 2013 LinkedIn announced it reached a million accounts in the country (source: Naija Tech Guide).

## VII. HOW SOCIAL MEDIA ‘DECIDED, DOMINATED AND DIRECTED’ THE NIGERIAN ELECTIONS

The recent election of Muhammadu Buhari as president of Nigeria has been hailed internationally as a historic transfer of power for Africa’s most populous nation. It was the first in which a sitting president was defeated at the ballot box.

According to Sunday Dare, an ICFJ Knight Fellow who worked in Nigeria in 2011 and 2012, is currently chief of staff and media adviser to the head of Buhari’s political party, former Governor Bola Tinubu.

Dare chats with ICFJ’s Jerri Eddings about the media’s role in the election and the power of social media in ensuring transparency.

Thus; **Sunday Dare:** There was little scrutiny of political advertising in newspapers and on television. The content was reckless, inaccurate and irresponsible. In terms of the advertising, it was easy to know which side the media were on, whether for the ruling party or the opposition. Ordinarily that should not be the case. They should be objective. In that regard, the media came short of performing professionally.

In terms of comprehensive coverage, I think the media did well. They covered the campaigns, the issues, the personalities. They did a good job.

But I think this election was decided, dominated and directed by social media. The power of social media came out for this country. Social media played a central role as a watchdog in keeping the integrity of the process. Within minutes of votes being counted at a polling unit, the results were all over social media. Ordinary people with Excel sheets were doing tallies. At the end of the day when it was announced officially, the results matched. So social media were central because of the immediacy, because it was in the hands of so many citizens who were involved, who were interested. In a way, social media seized the day from the legacy media. You had almost everyone depending on social media for the breaking news. Social media came alive for us this time.

SD: Went forward proclaiming how social media is more important than traditional media

Thus; Social media with all their flaws had the power of immediacy. They’re also very participatory. In an election where you have citizens who are participating, they were also providing the news and information surrounding the elections. It was an empowerment of people through their votes, and also through their ability to disseminate information. That is not to say the legacy media didn’t play a role. But the social media role was central. Legacy media played its traditional role, in terms of analysis and punditry. Also they had to keep alive the social media bloggings on their websites. People wanted to make comments, write their views, post pictures. So you had a convergence. But social media were media in the hands of the electorate.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The recent election of Muhammadu Buhari as president of Nigeria has been hailed internationally as a historic transfer of power for Africa’s most populous nation with social media playing greater role or influenced the fairness of the election. Social media with all their flaws had the power of immediacy. They’re also very participatory. In an election where you

have citizens who are participating, they were also providing the news and information surrounding the elections. It was an empowerment of people through their votes, and also through their ability to disseminate information. That is not to say that traditional media didn't play a role. But the social media role was central.

The world is becoming increasingly connected via the power of the Internet; Face book launched internet.org an initiative to gain even the most remote parts of society access to the World Wide Web. Political movements have begun to see social media as a major organizing and recruiting tool and the reverse can be said for society.

Social media (done right) gives you all this because it's inherently a two-way communication system.

Rather than getting brand messages, you get recommendations from friends in the form of reshares and recommended posts, which de-commercializes the brand message. De-commercialization, while a mouthful of a word simply means that brand messages no longer carry the patina of the brand, but reflect the endorsement of your friends.

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