



***Twitter* and Election Campaigns: Measuring Usage in Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election**

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Abstract: This study put the effectiveness of *Twitter* on the radar in Southeast Nigeria with regard to the 2015 presidential electioneering campaigns of the two leading candidates. The need existed to understand if the online platform used by the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and challenger Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC), as part of a complimentary media strategy, was effective in shaping voter behaviour in that part of the country. Data generated from 200 respondents showed that although *Twitter* provided the information needed via voters' interaction with political candidates, it did not significantly alter voter interest nor affect voting decision. Voters could not recall their use of *Twitter* as a factor in casting their ballot owing to post election time lapse.

Keywords: Presidential election, *Twitter*, campaign, social networking, voters, southeast Nigeria.

Introduction

Twitter's relevance in politics can be seen in its ability to make the politician connect with the electorate through text, audio or video without the gatekeeping interference of the journalist. Candidates and their campaigns can gauge reactions to their messages in real time. Voters can easily share their standpoints while politicians can track and respond to voters' evolving views in the course of the campaign (Kapko, 2016). Twitter helps voters understand political issues as they emerge. Voters use the Twitter platform via the Internet to read political news, share political knowledge through information exchange and obtain responses that enable them situate their participation in politics. Twitter is not new to presidential electioneering campaigns around the world. The 2015 presidential election in Nigeria enabled us to ascertain if the use of Twitter did influence voter-behaviour.

Writers (Palser, 2007; Darly, 2008; Pal & Gonawela, 2017) confirm that Twitter is a source of political news as it provides new opportunities for unmediated dialogue between candidates and voters, and when the ensuing messages are accepted by these voters, they offer a powerful form of endorsement. The result is that voters' access to information increases, leading to "a revitalized democracy, characterized by a more active informed citizenry" (Levin,

2003, p. 82). The online interactive option on the platform makes presidential campaigns especially more notable, easier and faster (Owen and Davis, 2008) compared to other campaigns. This observation about Twitter as a New Media communication channel prompted this investigation on the extent to which the relatively new channel, used complementarily to the conventional ones, influenced voter interest in the 2015 presidential elections campaign in Nigeria.

Conversely, some scholars (Bentley College, 2006; Wojcieszak and Muntz, 2009; Bushey, 2010; Kapok, 2016) have argued that though Twitter makes political discourse more accessible, the 140-character limit makes it difficult or impossible for campaigners to share detailed policy proposals on the platform, thereby preventing an in-depth campaign discourse – an action that can limit awareness (Oresanya, et al., 2017) This they argue makes it difficult for people to get a greater understanding of the candidates' cornerstone ideas. Among these scholars, Kopek particularly notes that social media outlets like Twitter are popular for publishing contentious political conversations which fuel widespread polarization and partisan animosity, as the debates at issue turn off more people than they attract. These negative compliments are further proof that Twitter should be investigated to

determine its relevance to a nation during election periods.

Statement of the Problem

How to provide credible and relevant online information to influence voting decisions is a hot topic among scholars and political observers of Nigeria's political space. Which platform should be deployed: Is it Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp or the other one, to stimulate voters' decision and participation toward a candidate? Voters need authentic communication channels to access the information that could provide them with comparative narratives necessary to encourage partisan considerations. This paper zeros in on Twitter and the way it shaped voters' decision in Nigeria's 2015 presidential election which had two main candidates – the incumbent Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP and the main challenger - Mohammedu Buhari of the APC.

An effective political communication medium should be capable of providing information that can guarantee a well-informed citizenry, competent to participate in governance (Sawant, 2000). Political decisions emerge from credible and adequate information about policies, programmes and activities which the electorate requires to vote wisely. The drawbacks of Twitter as asserted by Kopek and co-critics made it imperative to study the platform

with regard to how it contributed to vote-wiseness. The foregoing assertions have been problematized into specific objectives and research questions as stated below.

Objectives of the Study

- To determine the extent to which candidates in Nigeria's 2015 presidential candidates utilized Twitter in their electioneering campaigns to induce voter participation.
- To ascertain the relationship between the political information provided by Twitter during the campaigns and citizens' voting decision during the 2015 election.
- To ascertain voters' recall of political information about Nigeria's 2015 presidential candidates on Twitter and its influence on voter behaviour.

Research Questions

- To what extent did 2015 presidential candidate in Nigeria utilize Twitter in their election campaigns to induce voter participation?
- What is the relationship between the relevance of political information provided by Twitter during the 2015 presidential election campaigns and decision making by voters?
- What is the level of voters' recall of political information on Twitter about presidential

candidates and its influence on voter behaviour?

Significance of the Study

Social media is an evolving area of study in communication, especially as it relates to political communication. We should be able to tell if the platform enhanced democracy and disparaged it. The 2015 presidential election in Nigeria provided that opportunity to determine if the political information Nigerians received through Twitter influenced their voting decisions. This is especially timely as Nigeria has scheduled another presidential election for the first quarter of 2019.

The study is beneficial to political campaigners, desirous of reaching a larger number of information seekers, outside the realms of the conventional media. It would explain how Twitter can be extensively used to propagate needed information that can lead to the expected change in attitude, opinions and political behaviour. The study explains the efficacy of the Twitter as a veritable interactive communication tool that can influence voter appreciation of politics and political issues. The research report shall also contribute to emerging literature in political communication, particularly, as it relates to Twitter use in presidential campaigns.

Literature Review

Twitter Community

Twitter, sometimes described as the SMS of the Internet (D'Monteis 2019), is basically a website operated by an organization - Twitter Inc. A technology entrepreneur Jack Dorsey started the company in March 2006 and launched the platform in July of the same year. Twitter offers social networking and microblogging services, enabling its users to send and read messages called tweets, which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters, displayed on the user's profile page. Tweets are publicly visible by default, though senders can restrict message delivery to just their followers. Users may subscribe to or "follow" other users' tweets (Stone 2009). As a social network, Twitter operates the followership principle. When you choose to follow another Twitter user, the user's tweets appear in reverse chronological order on your main Twitter page. It allows users the ability to update their profile via text messaging or by some apps meant for that purpose.

Twitter is regarded by many users as the best social media platforms for conveying political messages in bite-size pieces to an electorate with an ever-decreasing attention span (Moore, 2015). Nigerians who were at the forefront of Internet users in

Africa (Ayodeji, 2016; Okorie, Loto & Omojola 2018; Okorie et al., 2017) keyed into this platform to increase their voices and visibility in the 2015 presidential election, held in March 28, 2015. The key players in the 2015 presidential election were - the Independent National Election Commission (INEC), Goodluck Johnathan, Muhammadu Buhari and their respective parties as well as the electorate - used Twitter visibly in the build-up to the election and during the election and 2015.

The Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), a body in charge of conducting elections in Nigeria set up a Twitter handle account (and hash tags at *#nigeriadecedes*, *#nigeriaelection* *#2015INEC* etc.) through which it educated people on the voting process, debunked rumours about the commission, and sent reports from polling booths. It was also used by both the political parties and voters to communication election issues. Key activists and influencers who were already popular on Twitter leveraged their popularity among the socially connected voting population to inform and persuade voters to elect respective candidates, and most importantly do so peacefully (Moore, 2015). According to Oluwatola (2015), in the build-up to the election day - December 1, 2014 through March

24, 2015, a total of 2.6 million tweets related to Nigeria's elections were recorded, either through hash tags or handles.

Mohammadu Buhari who only joined Twitter in December 2014 had over 160,000 followers prior to the election, and was active on the platform with tweets personally drafted by him and signed with his initials (Moore, 2015). He operated on the following harsh tags; *#Thisisbuhari*, *#Febuhari*, *#Iamready*, *#Ichoosebuhari*, *#march4buhari*, *#IchooseGMB*, *#MBuhari*, *#GMB15*. His election campaign kicked off with regional gatherings in each of the six geo-political zones. These tags provided the opportunity for people to follow him across Nigeria as he delivered the message of "Change".

Goodluck Jonathan also had hash tags like; *#GEJWins*, *#Goodluck* *#gejnigeria*, *#GEJ2015*, *#forwardnigeria*, *#continuity@pregoodluck*, *#ichoosegej*. However, Moore (2015) notes that Jonathan abandoned his official Twitter account set up in May 2011. Nevertheless, his media advisor who was a robust Twitter user with a huge following served as Jonathan's mouthpiece, pushing the President's message of 'Continuity', keeping people updated about his political plans, and responding to campaign issues.

Twitter and Presidential Campaign

Effective communication is crucial to politics. The ability to communicate has always been a useful political skill and politicians use persuasive communication to canvass an issue or a cause. This is particularly important in Nigeria where unemployment, security, terrorism, etc. (Morah & Omojola, 2011) are the main issues of discussion in the public space that need to be clarified by political leaders. They use specific communication channels to reach a particular target audience with a pre-determined message to generate the knowledge that can influence political behaviour of their audience. The message and target audience will determine, to a large extent, the most efficient communication medium to be deployed in influencing voters (Ezeh, Chukwuma & Enwereuzo, 2015).

The emergence of the Internet as a medium of mass communication has elicited competition among the conventional media, like radio, television, newspaper and magazine among others (Ezeh, Chukwuma & Okanume, 2017) as noted earlier. The place of the social media to rally political support is no longer in doubt. To advance the conversation and mobilize political support, social media have become a critical political tool for campaign planners. The microblogging service Twitter,

has been widely used in recent years to support electoral campaigning. Twitter reinforces political messages and build online and offline support that help drive interesting debates about any politician or political party. Twitter can validly mirror the political landscape offline and can be used to predict election results to a certain extent (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2014). Yardi and Boyd (2010) suggest that, in political context, although the Twitter users are more likely to interact with others who share the same views as they do in terms of retweeting, they are also actively engaged with those with whom they disagree. However, replies between like-minded individuals would strengthen group identity, whereas replies between dissimilar views could reinforce in-group and out-group affiliations.

Ahmed, Joidka and Cho (2016) assesses the use of Twitter in the 2014 Indian general elections, which was the first time the country used social media for electioneering campaigns. The findings suggest that the new-and-upcoming parties used Twitter for self-promotion and media validation, while established parties used the platform to supplement their offline strategies. The authors also observe that the winning party's electoral success was significantly associated with their use of Twitter for engaging voters.

Ifukor (2010) examines the linguistic construction of textual messages in the use of blogs and Twitter in the Nigerian 2007 electoral cycle comprising the April 2007 general elections and rerun elections in April, May, and August 2009. A qualitative approach of discourse analysis is used to present a variety of discursive acts that blogging and microblogging afforded social media users during the electoral cycle. The data were culled from 245 blog posts and 923 tweets. The thesis of the study is that citizens' access to social media electronically empowers electorates to be actively involved in democratic governance. Electronic empowerment is a direct result of access to social media (and mobile telephony) by more citizens who constitute the electorate. This encourages more public discussions about politics and makes the democratic process more dynamic than in the pre—social media era. An analysis of the data shows that there is a dialectical relationship between social media discourse and the process of political empowerment.

Twitter is an important platform for political expression that has helped people find their voices. The leading presidential candidate for America's presidency used Twitter to energize their supporters and draw citizens who wouldn't have followed

political discourse. Analyzing how Donald Trump used the power of Twitter to defeat his closest rivalry, Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential election in America, Kpako, (2016) asserts that Trump was also particularly adept at using simple language to share his unfiltered views on Twitter in a way that matched his campaign branding. When you read a tweet by Donald Trump you could almost hear Donald Trump's voice, whereas if you were reading tweets by Hillary Clinton from her Twitter account you could obviously see that it was coming from campaign staffers. You have a sense that every single tweet came from Donald Trump to some extent and this had a very persuasive value to the public.

The expressed view about Donald Trump's use of Twitter in 2016 election shows that self-representation matters in political communication via Twitter. Essoungou, (2011) notes that one of the most striking novelties of the 2011 presidential election in Cameroon was the impressive number of candidates who incorporated social media into their campaign strategies, the meager five per cent Internet penetration in that country as of then notwithstanding. The 2015 Nigeria's presidential election also featured this new trend in political campaigns as candidates upgraded their message delivery with the new communication tools

that Twitter offered. The popularity of Twitter was such that it presented considerable hope for a more informed and active citizenry with the attendant conducive media environment for candidates to promote themselves, articulate their positions, and interact with voters in fundamentally different ways unlike what obtained in the previous elections.

Ayodeji, (2016), examines how Nigerian youth formed socio-political networks on social media platforms of Facebook and Twitter, and how these media influenced the 2015 general elections. The findings show that not all followers of political parties and politicians on Facebook and Twitter were their supporters. Moreover, the platforms raised the consciousness of Nigerian youth during the 2015 elections in the area of constructive and destructive arguments directly with politicians, which gave birth to new socio-political movements of followers and antagonists. The results also show that youth networks helped to shape the 2015 elections in terms of exposing and preventing insecurity and fraud.

Conversely, other studies (Larsson and Moe, 2011; Stoddart, 2013; Shannon, McGregor & Logan 2017) suggest that Twitter use has limited power to engage voters and predict electoral outcomes and that its usage and the outcome of that usage may be predicted by other factors such as

money spent, race characteristics and so forth (Shannon, McGregor & Logan 2017). Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan's (2014 cited in Larsson and Moe, 2011) study on Twitter use during the 2011 Swedish general election found that Twitter served as a channel for disseminating political contents and not for political dialog. Stoddart (2013) suggests that the brevity of the 140-character tweet limit has meant that Twitter is being used by politicians for little more than broadcasting sound bites. He notes that rather than Twitter attracting more potential voters, it seemed to simply report what had already been decided. Rather than using Twitter to establish a two-way dialogue which bypasses the media and provides a direct connection with citizens, Twitter merely reinforced the existing old media model of one-way communication and sound bites.

Graham et al. (2013) present a study on political candidates' behaviour on Twitter during the 2010 UK General Election campaign, focusing on four aspects of tweets: type, interaction, function and topic. The study insists that although there were a group of candidates who used Twitter to interact with voters by, mobilizing, helping and consulting them, thus tapping into the potential that Twitter offers for facilitating a closer relationship with citizens, the politicians mainly used it as a unidirectional form of

communication. This corroborates with (Grant, Moon & Grant 2010) findings that Twitter is used more for *broadcasting* than *conversing* in Australia. This, Stoddart (2013), believes is because politicians are often not confident enough to use social media in an engaging way, perhaps because of fear of losing message control.

Theoretical Framework

This study is predicated on the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1962). The core of this theory is that political action is steered by the public sphere, and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public sphere. Habermas refers notionally to his public sphere as a space that provides more or less autonomous and open arena or forum for public debate. He states that the public sphere is like an intermediary system of communication between formally organized, and informal face to face, deliberations in arenas at both the top and bottom of the political system (Habermas, 2006). To him this type of deliberation is the hallmark of the liberal or participatory democracy. Public sphere as he explains further, is “rooted in networks for wild flow of messages – news, reports, commentaries, talks, scenes and images, and shows and movies with an informative, polemical, educational or entertaining content” (p. 415). These contents do not

come from one central source as in the conventional media, but from multiplicity of sources - all trying to influence the opinion of one another especially that of those in position of authority.

Political participation does not take place in a vacuum but within a public realm (Polat 2007). Deliberative democratic theory gives political organizations an important role in the public sphere. Habermas (1989) defines the public sphere as a network for communicating information and points of view about the common good. According to Calhoun (1992), a genuine public sphere should have the following common features:

- The focus of the discussion in the public sphere is on issues of common concern to the Public.
- It is inclusive in principle and should be equally accessible to all who may be interested in those issues or may be influenced by those issues.
- The proceeding of this communicative action is based on rational and critical deliberation.
- The deliberation itself is subject to normative standard of evaluation, and should be solely judged on the validity and rationality of the communication, rather than on the identity of the speaker or the decision from an arbiter. This is

reiterated by Omojola (2009; 2011).

McQuail (2005) observes that the actors in this sphere of deliberation are politicians and political parties, lobbyists, pressure groups or actors of civil society. This deliberation has impact on the decision-making process in national legislatures and in other political institutions as there is for the learning effects of ruminating political conversations among citizens in everyday life. "The media, when organized in an appropriate way, especially when open, free and diverse, can be considered one of the most important intermediary institutions of the civil society" (McQuail, 2005, p. 181). But unlike the mass media that manipulate the people rather than help them form opinions in a rational way, access to Habermas' space is free and freedoms of assembly, association and expression are guaranteed. This is because of the gatekeeping process which makes the media selective about the people and issues that pass through their 'gate'.

A number of scholars have identified the possibilities created by the Internet and digital media technologies to develop a virtual public sphere for greater horizontal or peer-to-peer communication; an unrestricted medium for the exchange of information, easy access to cultural products (e.g. in

the form of digital music distribution); a greater freedom of choice, less constrained by geography; the capacity to disseminate, debate and deliberate upon issues and to challenge professional and official positions; and ability to circulate information, ideas, and debate freely as well as the opportunity for eliciting political will (Dahlgren 2005; Szabó 2007). Twitter is a classic example in this regard and the centre of the focus of this study.

Method

A total of 200 respondents from a population of 12,123 academic staff that worked in the nine universities (selected out of 18 of such) in southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria, completed the questionnaire. The academia was preferred as respondents because research has shown that they use the Internet very well and spend more time online especially with regard to the use of Twitter in Nigeria.

The multistage sampling procedure was adopted in this study. The first stage involved the selection of universities. The researchers made a list of the universities in each of the three categories (private, state and federal) in the five states in southeast zone of Nigeria. Two universities were randomly selected from each type. Of the six selected universities, two were privately owned; two were state universities

while the other two were federal universities.

The second stage of the sampling involved the selection of the colleges in the marked institutions. We made a list of all the colleges of which two were selected from each of the nominated university using the simple random method. The third stage involved the selection of the two departments from each college also using the simple random method. This amounted to 12 departments selected from the 12 colleges that emerged from the six universities. Of the 200 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 171

were valid for analysis. We observed prima facie that the return rate could have been higher but for the issues respondents had with recalling their experience on Twitter.

Results

General Twitter use for political participation and voting behaviour

The study sought to know the percentage of the respondents that had access to Internet for online communication as a prerequisite for the use of Twitter in political communication. Table 1 below presents the percentage

Table 1: Respondents' Access to Twitter

n=171	Internet for on-line communication	Access to Twitter account
Yes	98.4%	48.7%
No	1.6%	52.3%

Table 2: Respondent's Extent of Use of Twitter

n=171	Extent of tweeting
Frequently	13.7%
Not too often	61.2%
When necessary	14.1%
Not at all	11.0%

Table 3: Respondents' extent of following tweets of presidential candidates during the 2015 presidential campaign

n=171	Following the tweet of presidential candidate
Regularly	5.5%
Moderately	6.3%
Not sure	74.4%
Not at all	13.7%

Table 3 shows the extent to which the respondents followed the presidential candidates' tweets, during the 2015 presidential campaign. The result suggests that most respondents did not follow the presidential candidates on Twitter as 74.4 percent of the respondents were not sure of the extent of which they followed the presidential candidates on Twitter. Another 11.8 percent moderately followed the presidential candidates while 13.7 percent of the respondents did not follow the tweet of any presidential candidate during

the 2015 presidential election campaign.

Presidential candidates' use of social media

Many scholars assert that the Internet is a significant component of the sequence that enables a candidate win a presidential election (May Joyce, 2010; Morgan-Besecker, 2011). The study put this assertion to the test with regard to the use of Twitter to solicit votes by Messrs Jonathan and Buhari, the two leading candidates during the 2015 presidential election.

Table 4: Use of Twitter by Jonathan and Buhari according to respondents

	Jonathan	Buhari	None of Them	Others
Candidates that use Twitter more extensively	24.3%	7.8%	52.5%	15.3%
Candidates that appeal to respondents contact with Twitter	38.4%	2.4%	41.6.8%	6.7%

Table 4 shows the two leading presidential candidates used Twitter more extensively than others. Some 24.3 percent of the respondents claimed that Goodluck Jonathan used the social media more than Muhammadu Buhari at 7.8 percent.

However, majority of the respondents believed that neither Goodluck Jonathan nor Muhammadu Buhari extensively used the social media, while 15.3 percent of the respondents believed that some political candidates not

mentioned on the questionnaire used the social media more extensively during the said campaign. However, Goodluck Jonathan appealed more to them through Twitter than Muhammadu Buhari. Next, the

study sought to find out other reasons that might have persuaded respondents to vote in the 2015 presidential election. Table 4 presents the figures.

Table 4: Reasons that Influenced Vote

n=171	%
Believable information	9.8
Satisfies my religious preference	3.9
Likeable personality	48.6
Credible information	31.0
None	6.7
Total	100.0

Table 5: Respondents' opinion measurement on social media use in political campaign and participation

n=171	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
Candidates use Twitter to reach some voters	3.5%	5.1%	32.2%	45.9%	13.3%
Candidates use of social media to persuade voters to participate in election	2.0%	3.1%	34.1%	45.5%	15.3%
Social media provided political information that persuaded voter-participation	.4%	2.4%	36.9%	40.0%	20.4%
Social media provided an interaction platform for chatting with candidates	16.9%	7.5%	30.2%	40.0%	17.3%
Voting decision influenced by the interaction from social media network	6.7%	16.9%	41.6%	24.7%	10.2%

The Table 5 above implies that more respondents believed that Twitter was used by the presidential candidates in the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria, to reach some voters. Again, majority of the respondents at 60.8 person agreed that candidates used Twitter to urge some voters to participate in election; and nearly two-thirds of the respondents believed that the social media platform provided

persuasive political information to influence voter behaviour. It means that more persons and in fact, majority of the respondents, agreed that the social media provided an interactive platform through which voters were able to chat with the presidential candidates during the 2015 presidential election. It shows also that social media interactions influenced the voting decision of about one-third of the respondents.

Table 6: Provision of Political Information by Twitter and Voter Decision Making

n=171	Twitter provided political information that persuaded voter-participation	Twitter provided political information that persuaded voter-participation	Interaction from Twitter influenced your voting decision	Twitter largely influenced voting behaviour
Social media provided political information that persuaded voter-participation	1.000	.805** .000	.326** .000	.401** .000
Social media provided political information that persuaded voter-participation	.805** .000	1.000	.349** .000	.368** .000
Interaction from Twitter influenced your decision making	.326** .000	.349** .000	1.000	.524** .000
Twitter largely influenced voting behaviour	.401** .000	.368** .000	.524** .000	1.000

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

The result on Table 6 shows that Twitter provided relevant political

information but had no significant relationship with voter decision

making during the 2015 presidential election. The insignificant value of the correlation testified the assertion from the obtained results. Table 5 was also used to substantiate that Twitter provided political information to voters, capable of influencing their vote decision to participate in the election. This view was substantiated by the calculated mean value of 3.75 which is greater than the decision point value of 3.0. However, the insignificant value of 0.000 obtained in Table 6 against the mean value of 0.0 showed the low level of those exposed to such political information and the expected influence on voter-interest

and participation in the election. The result therefore, confirmed political information provided by the social networks during the campaigns did not influence decision making by voters during the 2015 presidential election.

Recall of content of political information shared on Twitter

Recall capability frees content from becoming transient and ephemeral, since user of the media remembers them and crave repeated access to such communication channels that provide the said content. Table 7 sheds light on this.

Table 7: Content recall on social media as influencing voter behavior

	Count Expected Count	Recall content of political information posted in the social media network				Total
		Yes	Not sure	Faintly	NO	
Twitter largely influenced voting behaviour	Strongly agree	2.1	6.5	4.8	19.7	33.0
	Agree	5.4	16.9	12.5	51.3	86.0
	Not sure	6.3	19.8	14.7	60.2	101.0
	Disagree	1.8	5.7	4.2	17.3	29.0
	Strongly disagree	.4	1.2	.9	3.6	6.0
Total		16.0	50.0	37.0	152.0	255.0

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	88.603 ^a	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	84.948	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	22.307	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	255		

The result above shows that there is no relationship between any likelihood that the voter behaviour was recalled. At best, the experience was faintly recalled. It means, in a nutshell, that the respondents did not recall their use of Twitter as medium that influenced their voting decision in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. The result therefore accepted the null hypothesis and rejected hypothesis three in respect of the third research question.

Discussion of findings

The first objective of the study was to investigate the extent 2015 presidential candidate in Nigeria utilized Twitter in their election campaigns to induce voter participation. It is understandable that the choice of which platforms used for e-campaigning is determined by how and where citizens spend time on the internet. The study therefore sought to know the percentage of the respondents that had access to Internet for online communication as a prerequisite for the use of Twitter in political communication. There was an

appreciable number of respondents (98.4%) who had access to Internet, but low use of Internet to access Twitter (48.7%) for online communication was recorded. it is interesting to know that Internet accessibility is no longer a major problem to Nigerian academics as many of them now have access to the Internet, though their extent of utilization of Twitter is still very low as most of them are not regular tweeters

None of the presidential candidates under study used Twitter extensively to court voters. However, Jonathan appealed more to 38.4% of those who accessed the Twitter platforms compared to Buhari’s 2.4%. The use of Twitter by the two candidates facilitated democratic participation in the political process through communication that could lead to voter decision during the election. The public sphere theory applies to this finding since the political candidates partook of the public sphere through chatting with Twitter users. Through those chats ideas were shared as part of the

communication process. The social media platform of Twitter, therefore, enabled citizens to gain knowledge of political issues of public significance.

The opinions of the respondents were also surveyed to determine if the use of Twitter during the 2015 presidential electioneering campaign helped them obtain the needed information that induced their participation and decision to vote in the election. It was found that majority of the respondents agreed that Twitter provided an interactive platform through which voters were able to chat with the presidential candidates at the 2015 presidential election. The individual needs and preferences were freely expressed and published as opinions through chats which was a clear demonstration of freedom of assembly and association and freedom to express and publish their opinion, according to Habermas (1962).

Caution is imperative at this point with regard to the foregoing finding. Though Twitter platform users had the freedom to associate with the presidential candidates, this usage did not influence them entirely to participate in 2015 election. The insignificant value of 0.000 obtained in Table 5 against the mean value of 0.0 showed the low level of those exposed to the political information and the influence of that exposure

on voter-interest and participation in the election.

Recall that likeability of the candidates is the major factor that influenced the decisions of the respondents as voters according to the finding. This may explain succinctly why voters in South-east geo-political zone in Nigeria voted Jonathan (Moore, 2015) in spite of the record showing that Buhari also used Twitter appreciably as an electioneering campaign medium.

The study also determined if the respondents recalled the use of the Twitter for the assessment of the presidential candidates through the information disseminated to influence voting decision. The outcome was that the respondents' rate of recall of the posted electioneering information was low. This translated to low voter participation and insignificant influence on voting decision and election results.

There is an issue of note here. The time lapse prior to this 2017 study - nearly two years - is a critical factor in the recall sequence and a vital component of the outcome of this investigation. This shows time as an intervening variable in studies that relate to recall. The result accepted the null hypothesis that voters did not recall their use of Twitter as an influence on voting decision - an acceptance shaped by the passage of time.

Conclusion

Academic staff, as prospective voters, used the Internet extensively for online communication but they were no regular tweeters. The 2015 presidential candidates did not use Twitter extensively and therefore did not appeal to the voters. Though Twitter provided an interactive platform on which voters could chat with the presidential candidates in the build up to the election it did not significantly influence voters' decision. The effectiveness of Twitter as a platform for voter engagement is visible but its use and the way its content is recalled by users remains issues of note.

Recommendations

Twitter should be used to present public service agenda in order to provoke civic vitality. It should not

be trivialized as a chat medium but be used as medium for transmitting political issues of public concern. Politicians should maximize the benefits of Twitter as a political channel to improve their relationships with voters as part of the overall commitment to revitalizing democracy and civil engagement. When usage is frequent - regular, engaging and consistent in the presentation of persuasive political information - voter participation can be assured. There is need, therefore, to determine how best to use Twitter platform for effective inducement of voter participation in elections. It also important for researchers to know that time is a critical element of posteriority in research.

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