

The Impact of Social Media on Citizens' Mobilization and Participation in Nigeria's 2011 General Elections

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of social media on citizens' mobilization and participation in Nigeria's elections with emphasis on political communication as it affects participation in political activities, most especially in the 2011 general elections. There have been controversial opinions on the role of the Mass Media in elections. Some scholars have argued that the social media creates the platform for all to be part of democratic governance through public opinions, while others think otherwise. The objective of this study is to unfold the above discrepancies, using the 2011 General Elections as focus. The paper explains the importance of social media in the electioneering process of Nigeria and suggests that political participation will be more effective with the use of indirect political mobilization. The study adopts primary and secondary methods of data collection. In the primary method, questionnaires were administered to four hundred and fifty-two (452) respondents to find out if the social media were effectively used in citizens' mobilization and participation in the last Nigerian general elections, while the Secondary data were sourced from journals, relevant academic textbooks, newspapers and internet materials. The data generated were analysed descriptively using chi-square method. One of the findings of the study is that the social media had positive influence to some extent, on the outcome of the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, considering its usage by various electoral stakeholders. It is therefore recommended that Social Media should be encouraged in political mobilization and participation of citizens considering its unique advantages to democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democracy; Social Media; Citizens' Mobilization; Election

Introduction

Democratic governance requires an informed and participating population. The research focuses on the paramount role of the social media in determining political and electoral issues and their importance to the members of the society. The media helps in the formation of political ideas and attitudes, and thus represents a major determinant of a nation's political culture. An individual's political ideas are influenced by all the groups of which he or she is a member, as well as by social

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categories, such as race and income level, and larger historical events and political issues. The traditional and commonest platforms for the formation of political views and ideas include the family, the school and peer group. However, in recent decades, the media have proven to powerfully influence the socialization process in both direct ways and in more subtle indirect ways. An individual's social class and occupation may also provide strong signals about political party membership, as will race and religion. Additionally, the area where an individual lives and the political events that a person experiences (or that simply occur during that person's lifetime) can strongly influence his/her opinions on political issues.

The mass media have emerged as the most common source of information about election campaigns in democracies and societies in transition around the world (Macnamara, 2008). In terms of the sheer volume of information available to citizens via the media on issues - political parties and leaders - electioneering campaigns often represents a high point for political communications. Concerns about political bias in the mass media are at the heart of debates about the roles and responsibilities of the media at election time. Behind these concerns is the assumption that there may be effects, intended or unintended, on public opinion and political behaviour and, ultimately, electoral outcomes (BBC, 2008).

The 2003 and 2007 general elections were particularly characterized by dissatisfaction exhibited by candidates, voters and observers. The elections were trailed by complaints of irregularities such as disenfranchisement of prospective voters, snatching of ballot boxes from election officials and stuffing of the boxes with invalid ballot papers, as well as allegations of collusion between election officials and politicians to alter election results and subvert popular mandate (Ibrahim and Ibeanu, 2009:6). The flaws that characterized the conduct of the 2007 elections in Nigeria severely dented the integrity of the elections and triggered demands for freer, fairer, and more transparent elections. The traditional media which includes: TV, Radio and Print have not lived up to expectations in terms of making genuine information available to the electorate before, during, and even after elections. One of the reasons for this is that most these traditional media are owned and controlled by the political elites in Nigeria, thus, the need for a shift to a more interactive media that allows for user-to-user generated contents which has eliminated the gatekeeping and agenda setting monopoly of the traditional media.

The significance of this study lies in its timeliness and recency (most especially as 2015 general elections are around the corner), as findings have shown that new media are very essential in the success of modern elections, survival and sustenance of democracy in the ethno-political cum religious crisis-ridden African continent of which Nigeria is not left out. Secondly, this study will contribute to scholarship in an unending study of the role of the media in influencing election outcome in Nigeria. Thirdly, this study will help Nigerian electorates to appreciate that, in a democratic setting sovereignty lies with the people and the sovereignty can only be exercised through participation in political activities generally and elections in particular. Finally, the only way to have a legitimate government is to allow the

electorates to decide who leads them. This can only be done through participation, and the social media provides one of the platforms for active participation in political affairs of one's country.

Conceptual Clarifications

Civic and political participation is an important element of contemporary democracy (Bernard et al, 2011). It is generally assumed that within a democratic political system, citizens should have sufficient opportunities to communicate their preferences toward political decision makers. Of equal importance, however, is the mobilization aspect. Citizens have to be mobilized and recruited in order to be able to participate in the electoral process. With the emergence of the internet, various authors, parties and organizations have identified new possibilities for mobilizing citizens. Moreover, many researchers have claimed that the use of this new medium could lead to a more democratic functioning of society (Eva, 2009; Arthur, 2012). With the boost and the growing importance of the internet, this medium comes to play an important role in contemporary political communication, campaign and elections. Many political parties, institutions and organizations nowadays invest a lot of effort and money to be present online. We may even go further and claim that the boom of new information and communication technologies (ICT's) have really reshaped current political communication and mobilization strategies.

Ideas about support for the political system are too often muddled in the literature. For example, when distinguishing citizens' orientations that culminate into mobilization and participation towards elections and government, common language often skims over, or fails to acknowledge some important distinctions such as: confidence (which can be understood to represent belief in the capacity of a person or party to perform effectively); trust (reflecting a rational or effective belief in the benevolent motivation and performance capacity of another party); skepticism or suspended judgment; and cynicism which is jaded negativity. However, the normative implications of each of these concepts remain ambiguous mostly to the media (social media inclusive). Given the complexity of the ideas at the heart of this study, it is pertinent to establish clarity about the core concepts in the study.

a. Election and Citizens' Mobilization Explained

i. *The Concept of Election*

An election is usually brought about when people, in order to fill a position, collectively and voluntarily put their consent for the choice of a candidate through voting. Through voting, the candidate with the highest vote gets elected. Elections are primarily mechanism for selecting certain governmental leaders, as well as removing leaders from office, and preventing others from gaining office through democratic means (Flanigan and Singale, 1998:186). In some countries, election brings about stability and instability. At the most abstract level, elections are mechanisms capable of translating the popular will into institutionally defined roles. At the concrete level, elections are about the choice of individuals. The word election derives from a Latin

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word 'eligere', meaning to pick out, to choose. Election constitutes the major process for instituting governments and for holding public officials accountable for their actions and keeping them responsive to the people's needs and interests in democracies (Suberu, 1996; Wayne 2001:7).

From the foregoing, it can be argued that one of the fundamental mainstays of good and democratic governance is free and fair election. Elections allow citizens to exercise their civic and constitutional rights to elect or appoint their representatives and confer legitimacy on those who are responsible to rule or govern them in a democratic society. The representatives could be endowed with the executive or legislative powers by the electorates. Qualified citizens in a democratic society possess legal rights to vote for politicians and the political party of their choice through free, fair and credible election based on their coherently articulated policies. The political significance of any candidate in a democratic setting is measured through the quality of expression of the citizens that is not devoid of free, fair and credible elections (Alemika, 2011). In such a society, every vote must count. Since 1960, when Nigeria joined the comity of independent states, the conduct of elections held so far have been generally marred and characterized with violence and other electoral flaws based on several factors.

ii. Citizens' Mobilization and Participation

Mobilization could be seen as the process by which candidates, parties, activists, and groups induce other people to participate in politics to win elections, to pass bills, and to influence policies (Strandberg 2006). Political organizations may contact people and provide a specific opportunity for political action. In most instances, mobilization is a key prerequisite before any participation can occur. Political mobilization can further be defined as the way in which citizens organize people to put pressure on the political representatives. Thus it could be any sort of movement which in the end results in a change of policy, for example when a newspaper writes about malfunctioning within a government, a lot of people read it, and it gets picked up by the politicians who will start working with it, and in the end are able to change the government's composition. It could be actions such as signing a petition to bring about change in public policy on issues.

Marc, et al (2010) asserts that mobilization is an important precondition for most forms of political participation and engagement. Potential participants have to be informed and recruited before they can participate. In fact, mobilization and recruitment processes are essential preconditions before citizens can become engaged in any form of civic or electioneering action. In recent years, these mobilization processes have been transformed rapidly from direct to an indirect process. Instead of relying on face-to-face contacts or print media, mobilization agents increasingly have adopted new electronic media and the Internet to reach out to potential participants. Katerina (2010) distinguishes between the direct and indirect types of mobilization. Direct mobilization includes canvassing on the streets, TV campaigning, direct mails and phone calls. Indirect mobilization takes place through social networks individuals

are subscribed to. Citizens are indirectly mobilized by their family members, playmates from their football team or in the church or mosques they belong to. Involvement in social networks implies that a particular person is available and that he or she is reachable for the request for participation. Indirect mobilization occurs when political leaders contact citizens through social media/networks of friends, neighbors and colleagues. Social networks in this account are a facilitator of political mobilization. This is the focus of this study

b. The Social Media Explained

The term 'Social Media' has been defined in different ways by its users. For instance, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:9) define social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". It includes web-based and mobile based technologies that are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue among individuals, organizations, and communities. Typical examples of social media platforms include websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and the interactive options on these websites, such as the "re-tweeting" option on Twitter. These instruments are referred to as media because they are tools which can also be used for the storage and dissemination of information. However, unlike the traditional media like Television and Radio, most of the social media tools allow their users to interact as "re-tweeting" on Twitter and "comment" options on Facebook illustrate.

Looking at social media from a more practical point of view, Sweetser and Lariscy (2008: 179) define social media as a "read-write Web, where the online audience moves beyond passive viewing of Web content to actually contributing to the content". One thing that is common in the definitions of social media reviewed in this work is the view that it is based on user-generated participation. The opportunity to enjoy user-to-user interaction distinguishes social media from the traditional media which is characterized by top-down news dissemination arrangement (Clark and Aufderheide, 2009:28). Another attribute of the social media which distinguishes it from the traditional media is the choice it accords its users. Choice enables people to access the information they like to learn about through the social media, eliminating the gatekeeper role of traditional media. On one hand, the choice offered by social media reduces the shared experience that viewers of particular traditional media channels usually have; on the other hand, it creates a network of individuals with like interests and similar preferences.

Two primary tools that have enabled people to socialize and connect with each other online are social networking sites and electronic messaging. More than half of America's teens and young adults send electronic messages and use social networking sites, and more than one-third of all internet users engage in these activities (Jones and Fox, 2009:33). In Nigeria, internet users are estimated, as at October 2014, at 67,101,452 with 16% growth rate when compared with the 2013 figure, and is 2.30% of the country's share of the world internet users (Internet Live

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Stats, 2014). Nigeria is also the third most active African country on twitter (Mejabi and Fagbule, 2014). Most people who use social media tools access them mainly through computers and mobile devices such as phones and Tablet PCs. Analysts suggest that majority of phone purchases in the coming years will be more for using online networks rather than making phone calls (Baekdal, 2008:16). Politicians in Nigeria are joining the online community to communicate with their audiences because they believe they are a key demographic who shape and influence perception. Thus, phone communication is now tending toward one-to-many sharing rather than the usual one-to-one conversation. Nevertheless, there is no comprehensive knowledge of their activities as well as how this form of media can impact on citizen's mobilization and participation in Nigeria electoral process.

Social media technologies take on different forms including magazines, internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, podcasts, pictures, and video. Considering that social media come in diverse forms, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:5) tried to classify social media into six distinct categories:

- (a) Collaborative projects (for example Wikipedia)
- (b) Blogs and Microblogs (for example Twitter)
- (c) Content communities (for example YouTube)
- (d) Social networking sites (for example Facebook)
- (e) Virtual game worlds (for example World of Warcraft)
- (f) Virtual social worlds (for example Second Life)

Out of these six categories of social media tools, three categories (blogs and micro blogs, content communities, and social networking sites) are the ones that are most relevant to the application of social media in the electoral process. In the process of political communication, there has been strong intermediation between the traditional media and the three categories of social media mentioned above. Traditional media channels, particularly television and newspapers, try to expand their reach by using social media platforms for news broadcast. In Nigeria for example, many newspapers like Guardian, Vanguard, Daily Trust, and ThisDay as well as television stations like Channels, have Facebook and Twitter accounts.

A common trend among traditional media houses, especially the television stations, is to have i-reporters. I-reporters are individuals without professional experience of journalism, but who can utilize their dexterity in the use of social media tools to broadcast messages about events taking place around them through the traditional media. I-reporters share pictures and videos of events with the public through the television. In this way, the traditional media rely on users of social media for news, information and leads, the same way that social media utilize news and information emanating from newspapers, radio and television channels. Through the ties of camaraderie, neighborliness, and family, social leaders are able to communicate their messages and to engage people in civic and political action. The network nature of the internet combined with the opportunity for collaboration has made the internet an important tool for political mobilization. Political and interest

group mobilization has also shifted onto the internet. There has been a rise in global political activism, with internet-based mass demonstrations against corporate globalization. The social media tools made available by the internet enables users to produce, interact and share content online. Online social networks are described as websites that are ideal for encouraging interpersonal interaction, broadening social ties, and providing valuable information about how to become civically and politically involved. Current research demonstrates that blogging and online social networks have positive relationships with participation in civic organizations.

Specifically, social media have shaped political communication in four major ways. Firstly, it has deepened segmentation of the audience triggered by the rise of network television channels and specialized magazines and websites. Segmentation of audience is a product of two main elements of the social media: diversification of coverage and selective exposure that is, finding information that aligns with the predispositions of individuals (Stroud, 2008:93). Social media makes it possible for its users to read and discuss specific issues and then connect with other individuals who share their beliefs. This has the possibility of influencing individual voters that are fixated on specific issues and who may not be able to relate with the wider issues that are part of a general election. The existence of different media and brands of information platform can slit political communication into different segments - all addressing the same issues from different perspectives.

The second way social media has shaped political communication is by weakening the gate-keeping capacity of the traditional media. Before the emergence of social media, the traditional media played a key role in deciding what is sufficiently important to be aired to the public. This gatekeeper role of the traditional media enables it to set the agenda of public discourse. In the 1970s, McCombs et al (1997) asserted that the mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about and have feelings about. They argue that a small number of mass media news producers dominate the market, and therefore, audiences only get information about what the media decides is important enough to be covered. By presenting politicians with a platform to speak directly to their constituents and potential voters without the traditional media intermediary, the social media has largely curtailed the agenda setting role of the traditional media (Gillin, 2008:54).

Related to the weakening of the gatekeeper role of the traditional media is a third effect of social media on political communication. The practice of breaking news through the social media rather than press releases in the traditional media has gained currency in recent times. Press secretaries are increasingly losing their control as gatekeepers, and individuals now have more liberty to frame and prime issues they consider important. In all, the use of social media limits the control of traditional press secretaries over the outflow of information, and also decreases the dependence on traditional media for up-to-date content. Although the lack of control over the content of social media may be positive in the sense that it allows for greater freedom

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of information, there are also the dark sides of this phenomena. The social media has been misused in many ways including using social media platforms to spread false information, abusing political opponents, and inciting violence. This, therefore, highlights the need for a reflection on how to balance individual freedom and responsibility in the use of social media. Social media outlets have a responsibility to develop and implement social networking guidelines for their users.

Fourthly, social media have emerged as the new influencer in social, economic and political settings. Research has shown that the increasing use of social media for political communication has led to declining newspaper readership and television viewership in many countries (Eva, et al 2009). Under this circumstance, the social media may likely continue to dominate political communication, and to serve as a tool for gathering and disseminating political messages.

Theoretical Framework

Paradigms that could be used in analyzing the role of the social media in mobilizing citizens' to participate in elections abound but the theoretical framework of this study will be limited to the Agenda Setting Theory. The Agenda setting theory of the media according to Zhu and Blood (1997:111), "is the process whereby the news media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues". This is because the action of the media is towards influencing people's perception of what is important, acceptable, or desirable. Attention is drawn to certain aspects of reality and away from others, thus influencing people in terms of what to think.

This agenda-setting function of news casting can be achieved deliberately or accidentally by the size of headlines, order of appearance, choice of words, and length of coverage and this is possible because of the active audience which are conceived as selective in their programming choices and interpretation, motivated by different demands, and resistant to direct media influence; in contrast to the concept of mass audiences whom many perceived as passive and easily swayed. The concept represents a new way of thinking about audiences and their relationship to media communication. Folarin (1998:68) in his own view notes that "Agenda setting implies that the mass media predetermines what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society". In Folarin's submission, the media through its educative and enlightenment functions brings to light different issues of importance during elections. Elections are paramount to the success of any democratic engagement in any country. Different media are usually employed by politicians, civil society groups, electoral bodies, government and its agencies in the quest for successful free and fair elections.

Agenda setting does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what people actually think but it does ascribe to them the power to determine what people are thinking about. They set the agenda for political campaigns. Daniel (2003:121) argues that:

The mass media force attention to certain issues and they build-up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting that individuals in the mass media should think about, know about and have feelings about.

The rationale behind adopting the Agenda Setting Media Theory in this study is because it explains the role or function of the media in determining public agenda before, during and after elections. It further describes the influence of the media in molding and shaping the opinion of the public towards some topical issues, of which election is paramount. In fact, the main thrust of the agenda setting theory is that the mass media set agenda on the burning issue in the society for public discourse.

Furthermore the Agenda Setting Theory has been viewed in different ways. McCombs, et al (1997:38) make the distinction between the first and second levels of agenda setting. The first level agenda setting deals with objects on the media and public agenda. This is the traditional domain of agenda setting research in which the media are seen as influencing what issues are included on the public agenda. On the other hand, the second level of agenda setting looks at attributes of these objects. At this level, the media not only suggest what the public should think about but also influence how people should think about the issue

According to Folarin (1998:68), the elements involved in agenda setting include:

- i. The quality or frequency of reporting
- ii. Prominence given to the reports – through headline, display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, films, graphics or tuning on radio and television
- iii. The degree of conflict generated in the reports; and
- iv. Cumulative media specific effects overtime.

The media, most especially social media, through the above elements can colour events by using them in a particular way or refusing to use them at all. These significantly shaped the conduct and the outcome of the 2011 Nigeria's general elections.

The Role of Social Media in Electorates' Participation in the Electoral Process

Arthur (2012:57) asserts that social media have great potential for encouraging collaborative political participation. Accessible social media platforms offer ordinary citizens the opportunity to interact more directly and actively with their political systems. Social media tools also possess the potential to allow diaspora communities to get involved in social-political processes. People engage in social media for various reasons which include to air their views and express (in some cases) anger and dissatisfaction.

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Mobilizing citizens to become engaged in politics is more than getting people out to vote at a poll on Election Day. Various Nigerian political actors who are engaged in electoral processes are increasingly using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs in their campaigns. Political parties and independent political advocacy and interest groups have recently used Facebook, Twitter and political blogs as mediating platforms to engage citizens. Similarly, citizens have employed social media to participate in the electoral process. There are some pertinent examples of social media being widely used across Nigeria, most especially in the Fourth Republic to encourage citizens' political involvement. It is widely known that running election campaigns through social media platforms is a tactic that has been successfully employed in developed countries. For example, US President Barack Obama ran a widely popular election campaign in 2008 that employed social media to good effect. In the U.S., the 2008 election of Barack Obama as President reflected unprecedented use of social media in a political campaign. The Obama campaign served as a stunning demonstration of a skilled team's use of widely available tools. The Obama campaign participated actively in more than 15 social networks and had 5 million active supporters through these media.

President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria successfully utilized Facebook and Bulk SMS to interact with Nigerian citizens during the 2011 presidential elections. Jonathan even took the unprecedented decision of announcing his presidential candidacy on Facebook. The bid was announced on 15 September 2010 to his 217 000-plus fans through his Facebook page. By Election Day on 16 April 2011, Jonathan had over half a million fans on Facebook. In Nigeria's electoral process, social media tools were not only employed for political campaigns but also, various institutions involved in the elections also conducted their own social media initiatives. Institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties like the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), candidates, media houses and civil society groups engaged with citizens on various platforms. During the month-long election process in April 2011, INEC posted almost 4000 tweets, many in response to voters' queries.

A report on the role played by social media platforms during the electoral process revealed that Twitter ultimately proved to be the most efficient way to interact with INEC. Similarly, during the election, the Nigerian mainstream media struck a relationship with social media platforms that enhanced both citizens' participation and professional journalistic practices. Journalists from various media organizations interacted with citizens on Facebook and the citizens' contributions informed the journalists' questions during interviews with political players and institutions such as INEC.

Social media play a key role in facilitating the interactive relationship between citizens and political representatives. These communication platforms allow citizens to interact with their political leaders at local community, municipal, provincial and

national levels. The level of reciprocal communication between representatives of political parties and social media users is still a matter for debate but despite the contestations, various political entities variably utilize these platforms to interact with, and push information, to citizens. It should be noted that this interactivity is the hallmark of social media. Interactivity involves user engagement with information and with other users. These online tools allow people to communicate, collaborate and openly share information, thereby bringing to the fore the power and agency of citizens to make political contributions. Social media also possess the potential to facilitate citizens' engagement with institutions (Arthur, 2012:57). While it is difficult to quantify or confirm the direct impact of the campaign, these examples of user engagement with social media to contribute to political conversations underline the quintessential role of these communicative tools in facilitating citizens' political involvement.

Be that as it may, to address the flaws that marred previous elections in Nigeria, various organizations, institutions and individuals set up social media platforms that enable the citizens to oversee the electoral process and report electoral malpractices to authorities through their mobile phones, computers and other electronic devices. Through social media platforms, an overwhelming number of videos, photos, tweets and comments were shared. In the words of Omokri (2011:21),

The widespread use of these real-time media severely limited electoral malpractices because we found that people were aware that they were on camera and this made them operate at their best behaviour.

Jega (cited in Amuchie, 2012:90) also agrees that the use of social media during the 2011 elections enhanced transparency in the electoral process and made INEC more accountable to the public in the conduct of elections. The importance of the above medium for citizens' political mobilization and participation notwithstanding, the current political climate all over the world has witnessed a shift in attention to the social media. For instance; the 2011 general elections witnessed a remarkable use of social media as a political communication tool in Nigeria.

Three major issues underline the tremendous use of social media tools during the 2011 general elections. Firstly, it reflects a global trend towards "internet elections" or "e-electioneering" (Macnamara, 2008:35). Around the world, rapidly expanding access to the internet, increased availability of internet ready smart-phones and other communication devices, as well as the evolution of web-based new media – personal websites, social networking sites, blogs, e-newsletters, have redefined methods of political communication, leading to a significant shift towards the use of social media in the electoral process. Previously, network television and newspapers dominated coverage of electioneering and were the primary sites of election-related information. But today, the social media has become a major election information sharing platform globally. Because of its ease of use, speed, and reach, social media is revolutionizing the efficiency of election administration, coverage and reporting.

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The second issue that underlines the use of social media in Nigeria's 2011 elections is the tendency of some Nigerian politicians to tap the opportunities offered by the social media for on-line campaigning. During the 2011 general elections, many politicians, particularly the presidential aspirants, used social media tools to connect with voters and constituents. Facebook and Twitter appear to be the most widely used social media platforms by the politicians. For example, in December 2010, it was estimated that Goodluck Jonathan had nearly 300,000 fans on his Facebook page (Ekine, 2010:3). Other presidential aspirants like Dele Momodu, Ibrahim Shekarau, Nuhu Ribadu, and Atiku Abubakar, all had Twitter and other social media accounts. Political parties such as the (PDP), (ACN), and (CPC) also maintained Facebook accounts. Social media offered politicians and their parties the opportunity to broadcast messages and recruit a huge number of volunteers to support their campaign.

The third issue that underscores the use of social media in Nigeria's 2011 general elections is the tendency of the Nigerian civil society and the electorates to take up social media as a tool for improving the efficiency of election observation. Prior to the conduct of the 2011 elections, elections in Nigeria had been largely flawed by vote rigging and other electoral malpractices. The 2011 general elections offered a unique context and opportunity to examine the use of social media in elections, especially the usefulness and applicability of social media in the electoral environment. Although it seems obvious that social media contributed in no small measure to the success of the 2011 elections, it is pertinent to understand specifically how particular stakeholders in the 2011 elections, like INEC, politicians/political parties, the electorates, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) used the social media during the elections.

The use of social media in politics has continued to grow in many parts of Africa in recent times. The year 2011 alone witnessed a massive use of mobile phone (Bulk) SMS, Facebook, Twitter, etc., in the Federal, State and Local governments elections in Nigeria and some other African countries like in the independence referendum in South Sudan, as well as in the Arab uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya (Adibe & Odoemelam, 2012:1). Social media due to their participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature have no doubt become veritable instrument for carrying out electioneering campaigns and other electoral activities. Meanwhile, many political actors in Nigeria have not fully exploited the opportunities it presents, maybe due to risks and fears of possible abuse and misuse of these technologies, which might be against their will.

Methodology

The methodology for this study is Descriptive Design. The researchers used Survey Method which is aimed at collecting large samples from a population in order to examine the distribution incidence and interaction of the phenomenon in the study. The basis for selecting this research design is to determine the state of all variables in the study which is an investigation into the impact of Social Media in Citizens'

Mobilization and Participation in Nigeria's Elections. Questionnaire was used to reach out to the population of study. The population of this study is the Nigerian public, most especially those who fall within age bracket of 18 years and above that witnessed the 2011 general elections. Based on accessibility, resources and time constraints, we selected samples consisting of 500 populations, 250 from Federal Capital Territory (FCT, Abuja) and 250 from Lagos State. Abuja is located in the center of Nigeria and is the administrative headquarters of Nigeria. Lagos is the economic and financial capital of Nigeria with a population of over 14 million people. Lagos is currently the second most populous city in Africa and it is estimated to be the fastest growing city in Africa (Lagos Bureau of Statistics 2011). The selection of these two urban centres is very strategic to this study, as they both play major roles in the nation's political and economic development with democratic engagement. They do not only possess vibrant populations but high percentages of youths who use the social media for one reason or the other.

The study adopts primary and secondary methods of data collection. In the Primary methods, questionnaires were used to solicit answers that test if the social media were effectively used in citizens' mobilization and participation in the last Nigerian general elections in 2011. This is done through administration of questionnaires to about 250 electorates, party executives and members, civil society actors, media practitioners and stakeholders each from the two metropolises (Lagos and Abuja). This is complemented by secondary sources of data collection through data retrieval techniques, most notably scholarly textbooks, journals, official publications, seminar and conference papers, newspapers/magazines and the internet. The sample technique used is the non-probability sampling. Members of the population were chosen based on their relative ease of access. The non-probability sampling method was used to express the frequency and chance of each of the sampling units being included in the sample equally without being biased in selection and to avoid calculation of errors. In this study, purposive sampling technique which entails the researchers selecting samples for study based on the purpose of the study. We used a sample population of five hundred (500) respondents selected from the entire population. Out of the 500 Questionnaires distributed only four hundred and fifty two (452) were returned and form the basis of our analysis and findings. The presentation of the primary data is done with the use of statistical tables and simple percentage based on data retrieved from questionnaires.

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Results and Discussion

Table 1.1- Distributions of Respondents on how they heard about the 2011 General Elections

How they heard about the Elections.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	250	55.31
Twitter	60	13.27
Lunar Storm	6	1.33
BBM	50	11.06
WhatsApp	30	6.64
Myspace	21	4.65
Youtube	25	5.53
Others	10	2.21
Total	452	100

Source: Researchers' Survey 2014.

Table 1.2- Distributions of Respondents on if the Social Media should be used for subsequent elections in Nigeria

Social media should be used for the subsequent elections in Nigeria	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	420	92.92
No	30	6.64
Not Sure	2	0.44
Total	452	100

Source: Researchers' Survey 2014.

From Table 1.1 above, it was discovered that respondents heard about the 2011 elections from one Social Media or the other. It could be deduced from the results contained in the Table that, the Social Media played an informative role during the Elections. The Social Media like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, WhatsApp etc. and related technologies such as cell phones driven by the internet have become a tool that is gradually being used in elections all over the world today, whether consciously or unconsciously. In Table 1.2, 92.92% (420) of the respondents agreed with the proposition that the Social Media should be used for subsequent elections in Nigeria. If the Social Media did not play any key role, they would not approve of its development in future elections. The good thing about social media is that anybody can use it whether government, or political aspirants, or parties, or individuals. The

increasing rate of growth of these modern media platform makes it impossible for them to be ignored whether by a business, society or an individual. They are in fact gradually detecting the pace of information sharing and collaboration online and even in the real world, are giving the traditional media a run for their money. In most cases, these media are hardly controlled because the people own it unlike the traditional media that are owned and controlled by politicians for their selfish gains.

The interactivity and information this platform offers for anyone who cares to use it, is quite high because such would probably not be got from the traditional media. Social media which are also regarded as the new media, citizen media or consumer generated media are designed in such a way that they become very easy to generate and to use to share information, Connect with thousands of people and also mobilize them towards a particular cause through social networks. For example, Facebook has an application called Facebook Causes; this connects people with common interests. Videos from Youtube have helped different groups of people and organizations to promote social and political causes successfully in their societies. Social media makes for openness and democratization of information like never before resulting in citizen journalism. Politically, social media platforms have played a very vital role in changing the political tide in some countries, for example, Facebook has been credited as being instrumental to the successful election of President Barack Obama. Facebook and twitter were used to mobilize people and also raise funds that led to his victory. According to Arianna Huffington, the editor in Chief of Huffington Post (the leading blog on the internet) said, “*were it not for the internet Barack Obama would not be President, were it not for the internet, Barack Obama would not have been the nominee*”

Here in Nigeria, although the social media is a new trend as it was used for the first time in 2011, the social media platform has been used to register dissatisfaction with some government policies. One that easily comes to mind is the *Enough is Enough* protest as a result of massive rigging of election results, electoral violence and thuggery among other reasons. The mobilization of young people that took part in that peaceful protest was done via the social media giving credence to the fact that social media can have effect anywhere in the world even in Nigeria. In all of these accounts, one thing that is clear is that the social media played vital roles in the 2011 general elections, though not very active roles, their effect cannot be over looked.

Considering the political landscape of Nigeria, a lot needs to be done. The electorate and even INEC should be educated on the need to use certain tools before, during and after the elections to ensure that our democracy is sustained. Such tools like blogs, Google maps, SMS, MMS, mobile phones, camera, VoIP, Wikipedia, mobile and computer broadcasting platform and others need to be used effectively. The information and data from these tools can provide detailed insight when analyzed.

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Table 2.1- Distributions of Respondents on if the Social Media was a contributory factor to the success of 2011 General Elections

Social Media is a contributory factor to the success of the 2011 General Elections	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	327	72.4
No	98	21.68
Not Sure	27	5.97
Total	452	100

Source: Researchers' Survey 2014.

From Table 2.1 above, it can be deduced that majority of the respondents attested to the fact that, the Social Media was a contributory factor to the outcome of the 2011 general elections. Generally, the prime concern of media coverage of elections is the right of voters to have accurate information, and their rights to participate in debates and dialogues on policy matters with politicians. Inherent in this task is the entitlement of parties and candidates to use the media as a platform for interaction with the public.

Furthermore, INEC has to communicate information to the electorate and a variety of other groups, including the political parties and candidates. The media themselves have a right to report freely and to scrutinize the whole electoral process. This scrutiny is in itself a vital safeguard against interference or corruption in the management or conduct of the electoral process. An election cannot be deemed democratic unless the public is fully able to participate and is unhindered in exercising choice. As such, the social media played a vital role in ensuring that there was a transparent platform for debate and participation in the discussion of election issues. Moreover, candidates are to represent the public and transparency of an election helps ensures that this indeed is so. Before the advent of the new media, the older or conventional media radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc, ruled the world, and had directly or indirectly blocked popular participation in the electoral process. This is because there has always been scarcity of space and airtime given by the conventional media to the citizens to have their say in politics, governance and in the electoral process. Furthermore, the social media brought to light transparency of individual processes (such as voting, counting, registering, candidate nomination, campaigning and so forth). It also encouraged further processes and enabled public participation in the entire election processes.

Table 3.1- Distribution of Respondents by the Stakeholder that mobilized them

Levels	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Political parties	205	45.35
INEC	65	14.38
Civil Society Organization	100	22.12
Media	80	17.70
International Observer	2	0.44
Total	452	100

Source: Researchers' Survey 2014.

Table 3.2- Distributions of Respondents on the Stakeholders that reached them through the Social Media

Agents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Political parties	152	33.63
INEC	130	28.76
Civil Society Organization	50	11.06
Media	100	22.12
International Observer	20	4.43
Total	452	100

Source: Researchers' Survey 2014.

As stated earlier, there are four key stakeholders in the electoral process (the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), politicians/political parties, the electorate, and Civil Society Organizations). These made extensive use of social media during the 2011 elections. Each of these stakeholders used the social media to achieve a number of interrelated objectives. For INEC, social media was basically deployed to share information on the elections and receive feedbacks from the public on the performance of election officials. Politicians/political parties used social media primarily to reach out to the voters and canvass for support. The voters used social media to report their experiences and receive election related information. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) used social media tools to mobilize and educate the electorate as well as to cover and report the outcome of their monitoring of the electoral process. What is of utmost importance was the stakeholder that used the social media most.

As regards results contained in Tables 3.1 and 3.2, it was discovered that Political Parties used social media most compared to other election stakeholders. The 2011 elections demonstrated the extent to which the social media has penetrated the urban populace in Nigeria. It has been observed through researches and estimates that out of approximately 150 million Nigerians as at the 2011 elections, 87 million own mobile phones that can send and receive SMS messages and 44 million have internet access (Asuni and Farris, 2011:4). If all election stakeholders could take advantage of this media, it would be a good step in the right direction for the country's democratic

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engagement, specifically during elections for transparency, equity and fairness (Tejumaiye, 2003:58).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study contends that the significant use of social media during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria was a result of three key factors: the tendency of election stakeholders in Nigeria to follow the global trends in the use of social media as a political communication tool; the tendency of Nigerian politicians and political parties to tap into the opportunities offered by social media to reach and engage their constituents and voters; and lastly the tendency to use the social media tools to improve the efficiency of election observation. The paper has argued that the four key stakeholders in the Nigerian electoral process (the INEC, Politicians/political parties, the electorate, and the CSOs) made extensive use of social media during the 2011 elections. Each of these stakeholders used the social media to achieve a number of interrelated objectives. INEC used social media basically to broadcast messages on the elections and receive feedbacks from the public on their experience with the process. Politicians/political parties used the social media to reach out to the voters and canvassed for vote and support. The electorates used social media to report their experiences and receive election related information, while the CSOs used the social media to mobilize and educate the electorates as well as to cover and report their observation of the electoral process.

There are many questions about the reliability of the information collected and shared through the social media, especially in highly-disputed contests as Nigeria's presidential election. Crowd-sourcing often relies upon information provided by grassroots citizens in the local communities, who are sometimes anonymous reporters. Bearing in mind the fact that some of these citizen/journalists might be people with partisan interests, it is difficult to affirm the accuracy of the reports without subjecting them to a systematic verification process. Reliability improves if independent verification checks are built into the system; for example, if a random sample of reports are vetted by a trusted and independent agency, or if reports from multiple sources such as CSOs, local and international observers, election officials, security personnel and the media, are compared. Information shared through the social media during the 2011 general elections passed through only little or no form of vetting or verification which led to misinformation being circulated.

Going by the outcomes of the 2011 general elections, it can be argued that Nigeria may have broken the cycle of flawed and bad elections, but the challenges that lie ahead are many and daunting. Between now and the next general polls in 2015, far-reaching electoral, political and economic reforms are needed to help consolidate the modest gains made in 2011 and launch the country on the path of permanent and sustainable electoral change.

Be that as it may, INEC requires fundamental reforms ranging from organizational restructuring, including decentralization, strengthening of state and

local government offices and staff recruitment and training. Institution-building should be pursued with vigour and rigour. There is no need to re-invent the wheel, however. Both government and INEC should revisit, widely disseminate and implement the remaining recommendations contained in the 2009 Uwais Electoral Reform Committee Report. The electoral process should continue to be improved, and complaints and litigation should be resolved quickly. The entire process needs to be made as simple and people-friendly as possible. INEC's legal framework should be addressed, and it should seek domestic and international help to alleviate its weaknesses.

Government, working with other key political players and social actors, has the responsibility of constructing a system of disincentives to deter political and electoral malfeasance. This should be done through political and economic reforms that make the state relevant to most Nigerians. Besides, more attention should be paid to developing industrial and manufacturing capacity in order to create jobs for the army of restive and idle school-leavers and graduates who are readily used as agents of political violence and electoral malfeasance. The current post electoral system should be reviewed and consideration be given, as proposed by the Uwais Committee, to introducing some degree of proportional representation. More generally, the political system turns elections into a zero-sum game and this is not a recipe for national unity.

Through civic and voter education, as well as public statements and concrete actions, the government should foster greater public consciousness of what Nigeria means to its people and the values guiding the country. Nigeria has the resources and the capacity to entrench a culture of credible elections, with all that would mean for sustainable democracy. But President Jonathan and his cabinet will need to summon the political will to lead that effort.

Based on findings of this study dwelling on the challenges and benefits of the use of social media in elections, the following are therefore recommended:

1. The benefits of the use of social media outweigh its challenges, as such the civil society should adopt its use and equally encourage other election stakeholders to use social media in subsequent elections in Nigeria.
2. The Electoral Act should be enhanced to provide specific guidelines on the use of social media in Nigeria's future elections.
3. INEC should establish guidelines for the use of social media as a political communication tool in Nigeria.
4. INEC, CSOs, and security agencies should establish modalities to systematically verify information reported by citizen observers through the social media.
5. INEC should establish a social media tracking center to monitor, collate, and interpret trends and reports during elections.
6. Development partners should support domestic observer groups to utilize social media as a means of improving election observation in Nigeria.

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