INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN NIGERIA: A CASE OF THE 2015/2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria marked a turning point in the use of social media for awareness, campaigns, discourse and even outright posting of election results. In lieu of this, this study investigated the influence of social media on youth participation in Nigerian politics and its impact on the outcome of the last two general elections in Nigeria. The survey research design was used for this study with questionnaire as data gathering instrument. The research population comprised of youth drawn from the major cities in Western Nigeria. The data collected was analyzed using simple percentage and differential statistics. It was revealed from the study's findings that 88.8% of the respondents were aware of social networking sites (SNS). While 79.8% were using social networking sites. The study also found that majority of the respondents were actively spending most of their time in online political discussions and in real life political issues with 59.3% of them voting the 2015 and 2019 general elections. The finding therefore showed a positive relationship between social media use and real life political participation by youths.

INTRODUCTION

The 2015 electoral year in Nigeria showed social media playing a very vital role. What hitherto could only be watched on television screens or read in the dailies began being transmitted live and direct through various social media handles such as Facebook, twitter and Instagram. The phenomenon has only increased with the 2019 general elections. Politics seemed to have left a murky dark world and entered into the limelight. Various candidates also exploited these social media to showcase themselves and their ideologies to Nigerians and the world as a whole. The candidates became like the proverbial goldfish without a hiding place. Secrets became open and everything came under the scrutiny of the public. More importantly however, youths, who hitherto had exhibited a lukewarm attitude to politics, became very

active participants, maybe not through direct involvement, but in following the political trends and freely commenting about it online. Before, during and after the 2015 elections and the just concluded 2019 elections, youths through social media showed a lot of interest in the election process. It is worthy to note that the previous administration in Nigeria witnessed a lot of criticism on social media because social media was an avenue to say one's mind without the fear of consequences.

All the activities of the previous and present governments unlike any other in Nigeria have been put under the microscope of various social media such as Facebook, twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. With the affordability of smart phones and easy access to the apps of these social media at their fingertips, getting current news became easier and posting comments about such news also became easier and the anonymity and spontaneity of these media provided easy platform for all and sundry to air their views without fear or favour. This was a novel development as news was not as spontaneous in the past as it is now and contributing meant writing to the editor and waiting long for at least weeks before ones opinion could be aired. Social media has made it possible to read a news item and comment upon it immediately. Politics wasn't a field usually veered into by youths as the African culture did not give much leeway to youths airing opinions where elders are. This had prevented a lot of youths in the past from participating in politics. But with the advent of the immediacy of social media, the trend changed, social media became a forum to air ones opinion, criticize government and make suggestions. The 2011 general elections in Nigeria marked a turning point in the use of social media for awareness, campaigns, discourse and even outright posting of election results. Candidates ranging from presidential to senatorial used the various social media platforms to vigorously campaign and sell their ideologies to the teeming number of Nigerians on these platforms. Hitherto political lethargic Nigerian electorates also used these media to campaign for their candidates, air their political views and engage others in political discussions (Okoro and Nwafor, 2013).

The period was a very eventful one in the history of Nigerian politics and political participation as youths were vigorously involved in passing comments about their candidates and making contributions online.

However, the study of Dagona, Karrick and Abubakar (2013) in investigating youth participation in politics through their activities on Facebook discovered that being active politically on social media did not translate to being active in real life politics. This paper therefore aims to investigate how the advent of social media had given rise to more youths participating in politics and to see how social media impacted on the outcome of the last two general elections in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The broad objective of the study is to investigate how social media has influenced youth participation in politics in Nigeria. The sub objectives are;
- To find out youth perception of politics before they got on social media
- To find out whether or not youth participated actively in the previous general elections in Nigeria
- To find out if being on social media influenced their participation in politics or otherwise
- To find out whether or not youth online participation in politics translated to real life participation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
- What is the perception of youths about politics before social media?
- How actively did youths participate in the general elections of 2015 and 2019 in Nigeria?
- Has social media influenced youth participation in politics?
- Does youth online participation in politics translate to participation in real life?

METHODOLOGY

The survey research design has been used for this study. Questionnaire was constructed in line with the research questions posed. The research population comprises of respondents drawn from the major cities in Western Nigeria. Two hundred questionnaire was used for each of the selected cities to make a total of one thousand two hundred. The sample was collected using the stratified and purposive sampling technique. The respondents are youths from the ages of 18 to 35 as postulated by the Nigerian National Youth Policy of 2001 that anybody within the ages of 18 and 35 years and citizens is referred to as a youth. However, the study focused on youths who were eligible to vote in both the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Therefore, questionnaires was administered to youths between the ages of 18 to 35. The data collected was analyzed using simple percentage and differential statistics.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Youth and Social media

Haddon (2015) explains that the term 'youth'' is context based as it could mean different age ranges in different countries. In the United States, the draft youth policy framework (2013) defines a youth as anyone below the age of twenty-five. Although the United nation views youth as a person between fifteen and twenty-four years, it recognizes the various definition adopted by member nations. (UNESCO, 2017). In Nigeria according to the Nigerian National Youth Policy (2009), a youth is someone between the ages of 18-35. Anyone who falls within this age bracket can rightly be called a youth in Nigeria. Social media is the second generation of the World Wide Web which is also known as web 2.0. Web 2.0 is a movement of the first generation static web pages that allow for dynamic content that can be shared with others (Wigand et al, 2010). With web 2.0, it became possible to have applications that facilitated interactive information sharing, interoperability that is user designed and ability to collaborate. The beauty of web 2.0 and the attendant social media networking sites makes it possible to share news that is both

professional and social with others, collaborate on issues and generally share content (Yang and Dehart, 2016). With web 2.0 users were gifted with the ability to generate content such as conversations and communications.

Social media according to Kaplan (2014) is 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". With social media, physical boundaries are overcome and there is possibility of people who have never met before to create, share and collaborate on ideas that will be of benefit to all. Social media sites also known as social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Wechat, blogger, Myspace and several others have transformed the face of communication and totally redefined visibility and participation. Wigand et al (2010) posited that social media have become a natural part of people's everyday lives all over the world, especially youths. Research has also shown that youths are the most users of social media (Auskalniene, 2012). This is not surprising since they have been brought up in the era of online internet technology. Young people of today are growing up in a world more connected by knowledge and information through technology. Youths are mostly impacted by social media as social media tools are embedded into majority of young people's lives (Kaur, 2015). To youths, social media transcends the television broadcast age and the interactivity of it is what has given rise to wide acceptability of it. Salman and Saad (2015) describe the youths as citizens in their formative years and that they are the ones who are mostly enamored with social media. Furthermore, the ability to multi-task and use multimedia has spread social media use beyond individuals to organization who want to have an edge above others. It has also become necessary too for adults who want to remain relevant in this generation. To the youth however, growing up in this new age has made it imperative for them to become dexterous in the use of social media. Social media has influenced youths to the point of enhanced exposure to what hitherto would have been impossible and is creating

more awareness amongst young peoples all over the world. In a study carried out in Bahawalpur City, Shabir et. al. (2014) found out that youths used social media to meet a variety of needs ranging from education to information and even for political participation. With social media, youth are able to contribute to issues that were hitherto off limits to them in the past.

In studies carried out about youths and social media usage, several findings reveal that youths are actively involved in social media use. In a study carried out in Dhaka City, Bangladesh, Al-Jubayer (2013) found that 79% of the respondents admitted to being very prolific in the use of social media and spend a lot of time online. The study was specifically aimed at the use of Facebook and majority of the respondents say they used it quite often. It was further discovered that they participated in all kinds of discussion ranging from fashion to politics whenever they were online. Similarly in a study carried out by Uji (2015) on youth's use of social media for political engagement, she found that youths felt that social media helped them to participate in governance because through it they can voice their opinions and effect changes.

Political Participation

Broadly speaking, political participation is the involvement of citizens in the country's political system. According to Griffin and Morey (2015), political participation is seen as a set of rights and duties that involves formerly organised civic and political activities. It is a civic responsibility that is voluntarily carried out by the populace of a particular country. Through political participation, citizens are able to choose who would lead them and are therefore indirectly involved in the decision making process of their country. They can vote for people and also put themselves out to be voted for. Invariably, political participation, allows people to influence issues in their communities and country. Political participation is realised through the process of elections and voting. Therefore, the component of a liberal democratic political system is elections since it is a formal mechanism through

which citizens maintain or discard the existing political leadership (Flanigan and Zingale, 1998). Through elections, ordinary citizens have the power to proffer continuous support to the existing leadership of their community or out rightly reject them and elect new ones. Therefore, through elections, the electorates are able to consciously evaluate the performance of the existing leaders and pass either a vote of no confidence on them or endorse them for continuity.

The process of casting votes during an election is known as voting (Zahida and Yinnus, 2014). They further clarified that citizens use voting as a means of expressing their approval or disapproval of current leadership, government decisions, policy and programmes and the qualities of the candidates.

Youths and Political Participation

In Nigeria, the trend in politics over the past thirty years (30), have shown the same set of politicians being recycled in government. Active participation in politics especially at the decision and policy making level are filled with people fifty years and above. Even the Nigerian constitution seems to have disenfranchised the youth. Although the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) gave the minimum age requirement to contest for the House of Representative as 30years that of the Senate as 35years, for governors 35years while for the president is 40years. The monetary requirements for eligibility into any of the post is way above what any normal youth could afford. The 20million naira requirement to enable one contest for the House of Representative as stipulated Section 90 of the Electoral Act (2010) as amended, effectively disenfranchises the normal youth from participating in the countries decision making body. Youth exclusion in political participation in Africa especially in Nigeria can be traced to the culture of the people. There are two unspoken rules in any typical Nigerian household. First, that a youth should only be seen and not heard and secondly that wisdom resides in the old. This then translates to decision making even in the household. The youth is not consulted when decisions are to be taken,

only told what to do. Also in the larger society, there is the belief that the youth should not be involved in decision or policy making. Therefore, it is no surprise to find that the youth is always at the bottom rung in any political party. Thiers is not to make decision but to carry out the decision of the elders. The role of the youth in any structured political party was the foot soldier, used by the 'elders' to intimidate other political parties, rig elections, cart away ballot boxes or generally create mayhem if the outcome of an election was not favourable to them (Umar, 2016).

This seems to be the trend all over the world as a study by the UNDP (2012) discovered that in almost a third of countries of the world, older people are the ones in government. The study expounds further that youths were not favourably represented in the decision and policy making process in majority of countries. In a survey of several countries on youth participation in politics including Nigeria, the UNDP found that there was strong evidence of youth exclusion in politics.

Youths, Politics and Social media
The advent of digital technology has opened the floor of discussion on political issues. This has made social media use for politics possible and more widespread (Abdulrauf, Hamid and Ishak, 2015). In times past, political discussions were done in person and it was almost like a cult following, secretive and hidden. However with social media and social networking sites, more and more people are getting more actively involved in political discussions and analysis. With digital technology, response to political issues is now spontaneous and instantaneous. With the popularity of social media in African countries however, a lot have changed. Youths became more interested in active political participation vis a vis the decision making process. The Arab Spring of 2010-2011 was made more popular and widespread because of Social media. Several studies have posited that Social Media played a vital role during the Arab Spring as it allowed for more participation and activism in the revolution. (Robbins, 2017 and Albany Associates, 2012).

Youths in the affected Arab countries of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya used social media to one, organize the various protests that were springing up sporadically in the affected countries, two, to disseminate information to the general public but especially to the international community about the various protests and lastly to publicize the demands of the protesters to the international community (Stepanova, 2011).

Although the uprisings started from a protest by a street vendor who set himself on fire as a result of injustice, sustained popularity for the uprisings was made possible by social media. Chuang (2011) posited that majority of the participants were young well educated avid users of the internet. She stated "Arab Social Media Report by the Dubai School of Government give empirical heft to the conventional wisdom that Facebook and Twitter abetted if not enabled the historic region-wide uprisings of early 2011". Although the uprisings didn't start with social media, social media made it more popular and its impact more felt. Dogona, Karick and Abubakar (2013) found in a research carried out in the Jos metropolis on youth participation in social media and political attitudes that Facebook was a major social media used during the Nigerian 2011 general elections. Their findings showed that there was a significant relationship between social media use and political participation. However, their findings also revealed that frequent social media use did not translate to actual political participation. The fact that majority of the respondents had Facebook accounts and vigorously engaged in political discussions on it did not translate to physical political participation.

The study of Taufiq, Alvi and Ittefaq (2019) while investigating the use of social media on political participation of students in rural Pakistan found that the students used social media for political participation. Their findings also showed that use of social media for online and offline political participation was high. Online political participation translated to offline political participation as the students also participated. The findings of Omotayo and Folurunso (2020) on the

use of social media for political participation of youths in Oyo state supports that of Taufiq et al. their findings show that youths used social media to participate in politics in the area of advocacy, campaign, discussions, monitoring of campaigns and elections and also to engage politicians.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Demographics

Sex		Frequency	Percentage
	Male	612	59.8
	Female	411	40.2
Age			
	18-21	126	12.3
	22-25	246	24.0
	26-29	261	25.5
	30-35	390	38.1
Marital Status			
	Single	–	–
	Married	519	50.8
	Divorced	336	32.8
	Widowed	168	16.4
Education			
	SSCE	72	7.0
	NCE	180	17.6
	ND	138	13.5
	HND	144	14.1
	BA/BSc	336	32.8
	MA/MSc	96	9.4
	P.hd	21	2.1
	No formal Education	36	3.5
Occupation			
	Employed	531	51.9
	Unemployed	183	17.9
	Student	141	13.8
	Employed/student	168	16.4

Table 1 provides a representation of the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Out of the one thousand, twenty-three respondents, 612 (59.8%) are males and 411(40.2%) are females. 126 (12.3%), 246 (24%) are between the ages of 18-21 and 22-25 years respectively while

261 (25.5) and 390 (38.1) are between the ages of 26-29 and 30-35 years. However, 519(50.8%) of the respondents are married, 336 (32.8%) are divorced while 168 (16.4%) widowed. In term of education qualifications of the respondents, 72(7.0%) are SSCE holders, 180(17.6%) have NCE, 138 (13.5%) National Diplomas, 144 (14.1%) have Higher National Diplomas, 336 (32.8%) holds BA/B.Sc. degrees, 96 (9.4%) have MA/M.Sc., 21 (2.1%) have P.hd while 36(3.5%) of the respondents do not have formal education. Meanwhile, an analysis of the respondent's occupation reveals that 531 (51.9%) are employed, 183 (17.9%) unemployed and 141 (13.8%) are student while 168 (16.4%) are employed/student.

Table 2: Awareness and Use of Social Networking Site (SNS)

Awareness of SNS		Frequency	Percentage
	Disagree	87	8.5
	Undecided	27	2.6
	Agree	429	41.9
	Strongly agree	480	46.9
Use of SNS			
	Strongly disagree	36	3.5
	Disagree	144	14.1
	Undecided	27	2.6
	Agree	405	39.6
	Strongly agree	411	40.2

Table two indicates that, a cumulative percentage 88.8% totaling 909 of the respondents were aware of social networking sites. While 87(8.5%) disagreed to been aware of social networking sites, 27(2.6%) of the respondents could not decide may be they were aware or not aware. However, a total of 816 respondents representing 79.8% agreed to using social networking sites, 144(14.1%) disagreed to using social networking sites while 36(3.5%) strongly disagreed.

Table 3: Purpose of Using Social Network Sites

entertainment		Frequency	Percentage
	Agree	846	82.7
	Disagree	177	17.3
educative purposes			
	Agree	813	79.5
	Disagree	177	17.3
	Undecided	33	3.2
informative purposes			
	Agree	891	87.1
	Disagree	132	12.9
read political posts			
	Agree	717	70.1
	Disagree	270	26.4
	Undecided	36	3.5
post political topics			
	Agree	633	61.8
	Disagree	366	35.8
	Undecided	24	2.3
contribute to political posts			
	Agree	696	68.1
	Disagree	291	28.4
	undecided	36	3.5

Table 3 examines the purpose for which respondents use social networking sites. Majority of the respondents 846(82.7%), 813(79.5%) and 891(87.1%) uses SNS for entertainment, educative and informative purposes respective. In the aspect of political activities, it is indicated, that a larger percentage of the respondents 70.1%, 61.8% and 68.1% use SNS to read political posts, post political topics and contribute to political posts.

Table 4: Political Activeness

I have been very active politically even before being on social network sites	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	141	13.8
Disagree	336	32.8
Undecided	24	2.3
Agree	318	31.1
Strongly agree	204	19.9
I only became politically active because of being on SNS		
Strongly disagree	165	16.1
Disagree	429	41.9
Agree	243	23.8
Strongly agree	186	18.2

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were politically active before using SNS or when they started using SNS. Table 4 indicates that 51% of the respondents were politically active before using social networking sites. While 42% were politically active as result of being on social networking sites.

Table 5: Political Activities

I am very active in online political discussions	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	135	13.2
Disagree	225	22.0
Undecided	21	2.1
Agree	444	43.4
Strongly agree	198	19.4
I am very active in real life political issues		
Strongly disagree	162	15.8
Disagree	294	28.7
Undecided	12	1.2
Agree	360	35.2
Strongly agree	195	19.1
I am a card carrying member of a political party		
Strongly disagree	234	22.9
Disagree	516	50.4
Undecided	12	1.2
Agree	153	15.0
Strongly agree	108	10.6
I voted in the 2015 general elections		
Strongly disagree	102	10.0
Disagree	315	30.8
Agree	147	14.4
Strongly agree	459	44.9
I did not vote in the 2015 general elections		
Strongly disagree	285	27.9
Disagree	294	28.7
Undecided	12	1.2
Agree	216	21.1
Strongly agree	216	21.1

Table 5 shows that 642(62.8%) of the respondents were active in online political discussions, while 555(54.3%) were actively involved in real life political issues. 501(48.9%) participate in political online polls. Besides, 894(87.4%) have valid permanent voter's card, but 606(59.3%) voted in the 2015 and 2019 general elections while 432(42.2%) did not vote.

Nevertheless, only 261(25.6%) of the respondents were card carrying members of various political parties.

Table 6: Time Spent on Social Networking Sites (SNS)

How long have you been using social networking site	Frequency	Percentage
less than a month	24	2.3
1-6 months	99	9.7
7month - 1 year	78	7.6
more than a year	822	80.4
How much time do you averagely spend on SNS daily		
less than one hour	165	16.1
1-6 hours	429	41.9
7 - 12 hours	306	29.9
13 - 24 hours	123	12.0
Majority of my time on SNS is spent on political posts		
Strongly disagree	204	19.9
Disagree	345	33.7
Undecided	21	2.1
Agree	369	36.1
Strongly agree	84	8.2

Table 6 indicated that majority of the respondents 822(80.4%) have been on social networking site for more than a year with most of them 429(41.9%) and 306(29.9%) respectively spending 1-6 and 7-12 hours daily on social networking site. However, a total of 453(44.3%) respondents spent majority of their time on political posts.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It was revealed from the study's findings, that 88.8% and 79.8% of youth are aware of and use social networking site (SNS) respectively. These findings tallies with that of Greenhow (2011), Al-Jubayer (2013) and Uji (2015). The increased awareness and usage of SNS may be unconnected to the educational qualifications of the youth, as 96.5% of them have academic qualifications ranging from Senior

School Certificate Examination (SSCE) to PhDs with only 3.5% not having formal education. However, the youth use social networking site for different purposes, which include: informative; entertainment; educative and reading political post which are rated high with 87.1%, 82.7%, 79.5% and 70.1% respectively, followed by posting and contributing to political post. The study further revealed, that 51% of youth have been very active politically even before being on social network sites while social networking sites informed 42% of youth's political activeness. Irrespective of how the respondents become politically active, 80.4% of the youth have been using social networking sites for more than one year, with 71.8% of them spending one to twelve (1-12) hours per day on social networking sites. Meanwhile, on whether or not the youth's online political activities translate to real life political issues, the study revealed that 62.8% were active in online political discussions while 54.3% were actively involved in real life political issues. This finding supports that of Taufiq, Alvi and Ittefag (2019) and Omotayo and Folorunso (2020). Besides, 25.6% of the respondents were card carrying members of various political parties and 59.3% of the 87.4% who have valid permanent voter's card, voted in the last general elections

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Technology is here to stay and the findings of the study shows that social media is and will continue to play a big role in how people especially youths view issues generally and politics in particular. With social media, participation and actual engagement in politics increased as shown by the 2015 and 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Youths are now not merely being used as thugs and disruptors of elections but also as participants in seeing that able and competent leaders are chosen to rule the affairs of the nation. The findings showed that WhatsApp and Twitter played very important roles in the just concluded general elections since youths used them to create online surveys as to the outcome of the elections and also to campaign vigorously for candidates of their choice. It can therefore be deduced that there is a

positive influence between social media use and political participation of youths.

In line with the findings, the following recommendations are made;
1. Politicians should leverage more on social media to sensitise the populace, especially youths on policies that affect them.
2. Government should also leverage on social media in creating awareness of political processes in Nigeria.
3. The youths should be sensitise not just to participate in online politics but to also physically participate in the political process in Nigeria in order to make a difference
4. Statistics shows that despite the increase in physical participation in the 2019 general elections, the number of youths who participated was still minimal, therefore, youth leaders should sensitise youth on being actively involved in the nation's political process

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