SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA DURING THE 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS: THE LAPSES AND THE LESSONS

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ABSTRACT*: The use of social media in politics has continued to grow in recent times. Since Barack Obama broke the world record in the history of social media use for political purpose during the 2008 US presidential elections, many nations and politicians across the globe have continued to embrace the platform to mobilise their citizens and candidates towards active participation in the political process. Nigeria had the first real test of social media use for political participation during the 2011general elections. This study examines the experiment of social media use for political participation in the country during the 2011 general elections. The study was anchored on the uses and gratifications theory. The survey research method was used. Findings show that whereas many used the technology to make vital input in the political discourse, others used them to attack opponents, spread false rumours, hate and inciting messages which were believed to have contributed in the violence and tensions witnessed before, during and after the elections in many parts of the country. The work recommends urgent review of the various media laws to address the peculiar technicalities involved in monitoring and moderating the use of different social media platforms.*

KEYWORDS: Social Media. Political Participation. Nigeria. 2011 General Elections. Lapses. Lessons.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is widely acknowledged as the best form of government in most parts of the world today. Elections, which represent the most modern and universally accepted process through which individuals are chosen to represent a body or community in a larger entity or government is one of the cardinal features of democracy (Nnadozie, 2007).This is so because in a democracy, the authority of the government derives from the consent of the governed. This is perhaps why democracy is commonly referred to as "the government of the people by the people and for the people". Usually, a democratic election would characteristically be competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive and free and fair (Chukwu, 2007).

Nigeria's democracy may be considered nascent when compared to the older democracies of the western world. Be that as it may, the 2011 general election has gone down in the history of the country as one of the best elections in the last few years of uninterrupted civilian rule in the land.

Udejinta (2011) observes that "one remarkable thing about the 2011 general elections was the adoption of social media especially the facebook by the politicians, the political parties and the electorates as a platform for political participation". The importance attached to social media in the 2011 general elections was better explained by President Goodluck Jonathan decision to declare his intention to run for the highest political office in the land on facebook.

Jonathan had on Wednesday, September 15, 2010 informed his 217,000 fans on the world's most popular networking platform (facebook) of his intent; 24 hours later, 4,000 more fans joined his page, and by the day of the election, on 16 April 2011, he had over half a million followers. His closest rivals – Alhaji Mohammed Buhari of the CPC, Nuhu Ribadu of the ACN and Alhaji Shakarau of the ANPP were also among those that made heavy presence on facebook and other social media platforms. In addition to the approximately 3 million registered Nigerians on Facebook and 60,000 on Twitter, almost every institution involved in Nigeria's elections conducted an aggressive social networking outreach, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, candidates, media houses, civil society groups and even the police (Adibe, Odoemelam and Chibuwe 2011).

Apart from the presidential candidates, many governorship aspirants, senatorial and house of assembly seat contenders from the various states of the federation also embarked on aggressive use of social media platforms especially the Facebook to disseminate their political messages, woo electorates and support groups towards the actualization of their goals.

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. Conventional media critics such as (Graber, 1976; Fallows 1996; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) cited in Abubakar 2011) thus believe that voters were left with paid political propaganda containing only meaningless slogans, making them disinterested and cynical about politics. They argue that there is absence of serious debate in the conventional media that could make people to learn the substance of issues and policies proposals as well as related arguments, and that this disallows citizens from participating actively in political discourse.

Meanwhile, social media are interactive, web-based media. They belong to the new genre of media that focus on social networking, allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends, share personal information, as well as publish their own views on the internet. The ubiquitous access of these online devices no doubt, has democratising effects as they offer citizens opportunities for more fully engagement in the political process. This means that voters

have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages; they are now creators of the messages.

Writing on this development, Kuhus (2011) in his paper "Life in the Age of Self-Assembling message" cited in Adibe, Odoemelam and Chibuwe (2012) observes that:

> *The value of the communication experience has undergone a sea-change; from the need to share it, to the need to share in it. Technology and social media in particular have brought power back to the people; with such technologies, established authorities are now undermined and users are now the experts.*

This implies that people can now consume media as wanted and needed rather than allowing media producers to schedule consumption time and content. A person can now communicate to anywhere from any place at any time. Again, using social media is less expensive than the outrageous political advertisements on the older media. The new media is flexible, accessible and affordable. They promote democratisation of media, alter the meaning of geographic distance, and allow for increase in the volume and speed of communication. They are portable due to the mobile nature; they are interactive and open to all.

Nigeria experimented the use of this technology for political discourse during the 2011 general elections. The platform gave voice to many Nigerian politicians and electorates alike to make their voice heard in the electoral process. Regardless of the successes, many lapses were observed and many lessons abound for future elections in the country. That forms the focus of this paper.

The Problem.
The use of social media as a formidable force for social engineering and political electioneering has continued to grow. The technology is participatory, interactive and cost-effective. This has made it the medium of the moment as far as political communication and participation are concerned. Nigeria had her first true test of social media use for political participation during the 2011 general elections. Many positive results were recorded. For instance, both the local and foreign observers rated the election as the best in the fourteen year history of unbroken democracy in the country.

However, a Human Rights Watch report of April 18, 2011 says that although the April elections were heralded as among the fairest in Nigeria's history, they also were among the bloodiest". The reports further show that a total of not less than 800 persons were killed, more than 65,000 others displaced and over 350 churches either burnt or destroyed in the violence that precipitated the announcement of the 2011 general elections results in the northern states of Adamawa,

Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara by Muslim rioters.

Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) believe that social media played a huge role in instigating and fuelling the violence. They argue that during the period, many Facebook pages were awash with false rumours and gossips that added to hitting up the polity and creating unnecessary tensions. The GSM short message service (SMS) was used to spread false election results that differ from what INEC eventually announced. This made electorates believe that their votes did not count and that they were massively rigged. There was what Okoro and Adibe (2013) refer to as "social media war" on the various social media platforms, making use of all kinds of abusive languages, all manner of attacks and counter attacks among members and supporters of various opposition parties and groups. Several insulting and inciting messages flourished on facebook and GSM-SMS. These culminated in the violence and tensions witnessed before, during and after the elections in many parts of the country, with some states ordering non-indigenes to leave.

The researchers believe that if a study of this nature is ignored, the lapses of the first experiment would reoccur in future elections, resulting in another set of election related violence, bloodbaths, unwonted destruction of property and creation of unnecessary tensions and panics not only in the country, but in the West African sub-region and the African continent at large.

Objectives
The general objective of this study is to assess the use of social media for political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections. Specifically, the study was meant to:
1. Determine the role social media played in the political participation of Nigerians during the 2011 general elections.
2. Discover the lapses in the use of social media for political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections.
3. Identify the lessons from social media use for political participation during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria.

Research Questions
The study was guided by the following research questions.
1. What role did social media play in the political participation of Nigerians during the 2011 general elections?
2. What lapses were observed in the use of social media for political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections?
3. What lessons could be learnt from social media use for political participation during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Clarifications
For better understanding of our discussion, we begin this section with conceptual clarifications.

Social Media

When we talk of social media, we mean those Internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute, and search for information online. In other words, the social media are interactive web-based media platforms that offer citizens opportunity and place to connect, share opinions, experiences, views, contacts, knowledge, expertise, as well as other things like job and career tips. They belong to a new genre of media that focuses on social networking allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends and share information with greater freedom as well as publish their views on issues on the World Wide Web. Chatora, A (2012) observes that it is this interactive or collaborative nature of these tools that makes them social.

Mayfield (2008) describes these media as "online platforms that promote participation, openness, conversation and connectedness". Nation (2010)sees them as "social instruments of communication which are different from the conventional instruments like newspapers or magazines. They are online content, created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies to disseminate information across geographical boundaries, providing interaction among people (Adibe, Odoemelam and Orji 2012). They support democratisation of knowledge and information, thereby making the people both information producers and consumers.

Social media emerged with the advent of the internet and the World Wide Web. They are usually associated with the term "web 2.0" which is used to describe websites that provide opportunity for a user to interact with the sender of a message. Nwabueze (2012) observes that "Web 2.0" refers to the state of the web from 2004 till date; a period when interactive websites emerged as opposed to "web1.0" which describes the state of the web prior to 2004. Web-based communities, social networking sites video-sharing sites, Wikis, and blogs, are among examples of web 2.0 sites (Allen, Ekwugha & Chukwulete 2011).

Political Participation

In a simple approach, political participation is citizens' involvement in the acts, events or activities that influence the selection of and/or the actions taken by political representatives. It refers to the various mechanisms through which the public express their political views and, and/or exercise their influence on the political process (Chatora 2012). Abubakar (2011) sees it as the involvement of people, (not necessarily active) in any political process before a collective decision is arrived. In other words, political participation entails citizens' engagement in the discourse of socio-political and economic issues which serve as yardsticks for choosing would-be leaders. It may also include assessing the capabilities of the incumbencies and advocating ways of ameliorating societal ills for a more prosperous country.

Political participation include such activities like political discourse, political campaigns, voter registration, the actual voting, writing and signing of petitions, attending of civil protests, joining interest groups that engage in lobbying, political advocacy, monitoring and reporting of cases of violation of the electoral process such as frauds, rigging, intimidation, violence, monetary inducements, underage voting, etc.

Before the advent of the new media, political campaigns and other electioneering activities blossomed in the traditional media. Olajide (2002) cited in Onwukwe (2011) notes that prior to this period, political rallies, personal contacts and speeches were popularly used for mobilising electorates' support on political issues, and that this was greatly propelled by the mass media force. At that time, political participation was more risky, expensive and required a great deal of investments from individuals willing to engage in political activities. The process was quite demanding as far as time, money, knowledge and information are concerned. The endemic poverty in Africa prevented citizens from attending political meetings, and sometimes, from travelling to exercise their voting rights. According to Chatora (2011), a World Bank report of 2005 has it that 50.9% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa lives on less than $1.25 a day. Chatora argues that such financial constraint is capable of preventing citizens from engaging in political activities especially those that require financial investment. Within this context where poverty is extensive, time also becomes an important factor that determines whether citizens would devote time to personal activities that guarantee their immediate survival or to political participation that does not promise an immediate and tangible material outcome for them. With this problem, coupled with that of insecurity and fear of possible outbreak of violence, citizens' active participation in the political process was/is heavily compromised.

Good enough, the coming of social media in the last few years is fast changing the situation as we now have online platforms that serve as a new "political capital" where people now resort to and participate in political discourse (Abubakar:2011). The authour citing Kweon and Kim (2011) maintains that social media have become a main source of personal orientation, anonymous interactivities and social community on variety of issues that involve politics and political discourse. Mayfield (2010) attribute the social media capacity of boosting participation to its connectedness and textual/audio-visual characteristics appeal. For one, the Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, the 2go, GSM-SMS/calls, blackberries services, etc, have made political participation much easier, faster and even more cost effective than ever before.

Social media and politics
The arrival of social media has greatly enhanced all aspects of human communication. The new technology due to the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature has barely made everyone who can use it a mass communicator. This brings to fruition the prediction of Marshal McLuhan in 1964 that the world would someday become a "global village" where what happens in one part of the world would be known instantly and simultaneously worldwide.

Today, one can stay right in his bedroom and access information, entertainment, events and enjoy full interaction with the world just by processing a button. Writing on this development, Adibe and Odoemelam (2010) observe that the new media of communication have in no small measure helped human society to be aware of each other. This agrees with the submissions of Baran (1998) that:

> *… as the media shrink the world, people will become*
> *increasingly involved in one another's lives, and as*

> *people come to know more about others who were hitherto separated from them by distance, they will form new beneficial relationships.*

Baran's argument is relevant to this discourse as it draws attention to what social media is doing in the area of human communication today, especially as it concerns the fostering of relations and interaction among people.

In many parts of the world today, individuals, groups, organisations and even nations are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by social media and other e-media platforms to mobilise millions of people to support and advance their course. In the political sphere it has become a veritable tool for interacting and mobilising citizens towards active participation in the political process and democratic projects. This agrees with the submissions of Okoro and Dirim (2009) that it is through the media that people are able to participate freely in discussions relevant to public good.

Adelabu (2011) notes that the success of President Obama's Presidential campaigns in 2008 and his eventual emergence as first black president of the United States was largely credited to his active use of facebook to mobilise millions of volunteers, and voters.

Politics has indeed greatly evolved in recent decade with the advent of the new technology. With it, information sharing has greatly improved, allowing citizens to discuss ideas, post news, ask questions and share links. With social media, politicians reach the masses with the aim of assessing the political atmosphere even before venturing into the campaign. Social media is perhaps the best tool to assess the popularity of a candidate especially by the young people and craft the best language to use as a campaign slogan. Social media also provides a politician with the opportunity to be informally free with the public. This free connection through social media helps politicians to communicate their humour, indicating their approachability and accessibility to the public.

With social media, politicians appeal to citizens; this makes them seem more personable and gives them advantage of keeping in constant contact with their supporters. Social media grants many people the chance to participate actively and get involved fully in the political discourse by adding their voices on issues posted on the social media sites. Thus, advancing the tenets of participatory democracy that sees media as a debate avenue and aids tremendously in actualising public-sphere journalism. It affords electorates a friendlier avenue of assessing candidates for political offices and promoting transparency in governance.

The 2011 General Elections: Selected Cases of Social Media Use
Since 2008 when Barack Obama broke new ground by using social media in his political campaigns in ways never seen before, many nations and politicians have continued to toe along this line. Nigeria had her first real test of social media use for political purpose during the 2011 general elections. The new technology played an unprecedented role in the April 2011 Nigerian

General Elections. INEC officials had in early March 2011 welcomed the assistance of civil society volunteers with its Facebook and Twitter accounts as well as a new media situation room which received feedback from the public and later began to provide real time information and answered constituent questions.

Nigerian politicians actively utilized social media in their campaigns. They sent bulk text and voice messages in unprecedented numbers. They made massive use of facebook pages and other social media platforms to win supports and canvass for votes. President Jonathan as we mentioned earlier declared his intention to run for the presidency on Facebook and subsequently became the second most "liked" head of state in the world after US President Barack Obama (fanpagelist.com).

Organisations like Enough is Enough Nigeria, ReclaimNaija, WangoNet and IamLagos established platforms enabling citizens to report election-related incidences with pictures, videos, text messages and voicemail. At the same time, traditional media houses such as Channels Television, *234Next* and *Punch* newspaper used new media to disseminate information and gather feedback from viewers.

Adibe, Odoemelam and Orji (2012) further observe that during the elections in Nigeria, many Nigerians were armed with their blackberries and Twitter feeds. One of such Nigerians was Gbenga, a 33 year old IT consultant and an activist. His team had designed a smart phone application called Revoda which allowed voters to instantly upload reports of delayed voting materials and intimidating gangs at their local polling stations to their database; a daily summary was then sent to Nigerian election officials and Western observers as well as posted on their Revoda website; this allowed many people within and outside Nigeria to follow the process. Photos, pictures, details and videos from polling stations were quickly uploaded to Facebook and YouTube. Gbenga puts it succinctly:

> *We've got one Blackberry Video of a policeman*
> *who was evidently drunk and intimidating people*
> *…… for those who want to go to court, they have*
> *got a lot of evidence (The Punch*, April 17, 2010).

There was another group, "Reclaim Naija" who used text messages and e-mail reports to compile a live online map of trouble spots. There were also "Twitter activists" whose job was to look out for rigging and spread warning about bombings at polling stations. Omenugha (2011) observed that this massive use of social media culminated in the success of the election acclaimed the freest and fairest in the history of the country.

Meanwhile, this disagrees with the observations of Adeyaju and Harana (2011) who believe that the technology did the nation greater harm than good as it provided avenue to disseminate provocative and inciting messages that eventually precipitated the post-election violence and tensions witnessed in many parts of the country, particularly in the north.

THEORETICAL BASE

The study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory. This theory is associated with the works of Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch (1974). It belongs to the limited or indirect effect theories of mass communication. The theory according to Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008) is concerned with what people do with media instead of what media do to people. The assumption is that people influence the effects media have on them. That is to say that uses and gratification theory takes a more humanistic approach to media use and effect. It assumes members of the audience are not passive but play active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. The theory suggests that people use media to fulfill specific gratifications. Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) note that the main thrust of the theory is that audience members have certain needs which make them to be selectively exposed to, attend to, and retain media messages because of the perceived gratifications derivable from such messages. Thus, this theory emphasizes the fact that people are important in the process of communication because they choose content, make meaning and act on that meaning (Akinwumi, 2011).

Applying the uses and gratification theory to this study, users of social media are intentional seekers of such messages. They are able to select and use the technology in ways that suit their purpose. Thus, they as the audience are active and not passive. Similarly, political candidates are also able to select and use media of choice and message content of their choice during electoral campaigns and other electioneering activities.

THE RESEARCH METHOD

The study used survey research design. Surveys allow for the study of people's opinion on a given issue of public interest. According to Onwukwe (2011), "survey research is concerned with the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting a certain condition, practice, beliefs, attitudes, etc." The purpose is usually to describe systematically the facts, qualities or characteristics of a given population, events, or areas of interest concerning the problem under investigation.

The Research Population
This study focused on Nigerian youths. Our choice of the youths as the focus population is because they constitute the active users of the various social media platforms. The Nigeria National Youth Policy (2001) defines youths as "all young persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria". (This study adopted this as our working definition).

According to them, the total number of such persons in Nigeria as at the 2006 National Housing and population census was 46,667,847. Nigeria has six geo-political zones of between five and seven states each. In this study, we selected one state from each of the zones and focused on the youth population of the state capitals. This is because to use social media, one requires some

certain degree of literacy, and majority of the youths in the capital cities can boast of this. Again, social media is heavily dependent on electricity, and the capital cities have electricity, though epileptic.

S/N	Geo-political zone	State	State Capital	Youth Population of the State	Youth Population of the state capital
1.	North East	Borno	Maiduguri	1,383,731	461,244
2.	North West	Kano	Kano	3,127,894	1,042,631
3.	North Central	FCT	FCT	468,400	156,133
4.	South West	Lagos	Ikeja	3,004,511	1,001,503
5.	South South	Rivers	Port Harcourt	1,728,467	576,156
6.	South East	Enugu	Enugu	1,085,766	361922
	Total			10,799,169	3,599,589

Sample size
The sample size for each of the cities studied was 384. This was determined using the sample size determination table by Cozby (2004) which states that at + or – 5% error margin, a population of over 100,000 would have a sample size of 384.

The Sampling Technique
Sampling works on the premise that a given population is too large for any researcher to realistically observe all the elements therein (Nwodu, 2006). This was the case in this study as studying all the users of social media in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections was practically impossible.Hence, selection of samples became necessary. In doing so, we chose the stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Our choice of the two techniques was to reflect the six geo-political zones and at the same time, give elements of each population equal chance of being selected.

Instrument for Data Collection
The instrument of questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was in two parts comprising of 13 questions. The first part (questions 1-5) was on the demographic variables of the respondents, while the second part (questions 6-13) was directly on respondents' exposition to the issue of study and tends to answer the research questions earlier posed.

Data presentation and analysis
Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents.

S/N	Variables	Maiduguri	Kano	Abuja	Ikeja	PHC	Enugu
1.	Male	212(55%)	206(54%)	198(52%)	201(52%)	195(51%)	198(52%)
2.	Female	172(45%)	178(46%)	186(48%)	183(48%)	189(49%)	186(48%)
	Total	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

Table one above shows that in all the state capitals studied, our male respondents outnumber their female counterpart. The average percentage of the male in the six states was 52.6%, the female were 47.4% while 0.9% did not respond to that question.

Table 2: Age Categories of Respondents.

S/N	Variables	Maiduguri	Kano	Abuja	Ikeja	PHC	Enugu
1.	18-23	109(29%)	111(30%)	117(31%)	100(26%)	133(35%)	107(28%)
2.	24-29	173(45%)	175(45%)	126(33%)	197(51%)	155(40%)	179(47%)
3.	30-35	102(26%)	98(25%)	101(26%)	87(23%)	96(25%)	98(25%)
Total		**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

Table 2 shows that respondents between the age bracket of 24-29 dominated the study in the various cities. Their average percentage was 44%. Those between ages 18-23 amounted an average of 30%, while those between 30-35 constituted an average 25%.

Table 3: Educational Qualifications of Respondents

S/N	Variables	Maiduguri	Kano	Abuja	Ikeja	PHC	Enugu
1.	FSLC	103(27%)	95(25%)	63(16%)	75(20%)	81(23%)	67(17%)
2.	WASCE/it's equivalent	219(57%)	209(54%)	222(58%)	217(56%)	212(55%)	231(60%)
3.	HND/BSc./it's equivalent	42(11%)	61(16%)	75(20%)	77(20%)	74(19%)	67(17%)
4.	MSc./it's equivalent	8(2%)	11(3%)	17(4%)	10(3%)	9(2%)	12(3%)
5.	Ph.D	0(0%)	1(0.3%)	3(0.8%)	2(0.4%)	3(0.8%)	4(1.2%)
6.	No Response	12(3%)	7(1.7%)	4(1.2%)	3(0.8%)	5(1.2%)	3(0.8%)
	Total	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

The average percentages of our respondents' educational qualifications in the six cities are shown in table 3 above. They are as follows: FSLC 21%, WASCE or its equivalent 57%, HND/BSc. or their equivalent 17%, MSc. or its equivalent 3%, Ph.D 0.7% and 1.3% declined comments.

Table 4: Occupation of Respondents

S/N	Variables	Maiduguri	Kano	Abuja	Ikeja	PHC	Enugu
1.	Student	264(69%)	281(73%)	258(67%)	260(68%)	279(73%)	256(67%)
2.	Civil servant	46(12%)	45(12%)	32(8%)	48(13%)	55(17%)	48(13%)
3.	Business person	35(9%)	38(10%)	49(13%)	34(9%)	20(5%)	38(9%)
4.	Others	39(10%)	19(5%)	45(12%)	42(11%)	20(5%)	42(11%)
	Total	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

Table 4 shows that an average of 69% of our respondents in the various cities of the were students, 13% were civil servants, 10% were business persons while 8% said they engage in other activities different from those mentioned.

Table 5:   Marital Status of Respondents

S/N	Variables	Maiduguri	Kano	Abuja	Ikeja	PHC	Enugu
1.	**Single**	159(31%)	190(49%)	199(61%)	228(78%)	210(65%)	204(63%)
2.	**Married**	225(69%)	194(51%)	179(39%)	157(32%)	170(35%)	178(37%)
	Total	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

Table 5 shows that while the number of unmarried youths outnumbers their married counterpart in the southern states, the northern states of Kano and Borno have more number of married youths than the single. However, the average figures were 52% married and 58% unmarried.

Table 6: Ascertaining whether respondents know what social media are

S/N	Variables	Maiduguri	Kano	Abuja	Ikeja	PHC	Enugu
1.	I do	221(58%)	240(62%)	355(93%	377(98%)	351(92%)	350(92%)
2.	I don't	152(39%)	135(36%)	25(6.2%)	5(1.3%)	28(7.7%)	30 (8.3%)
3.	No comment	11(3%)	9(2%)	3(0.8%)	2(0.7%)	1(0.3%)	2(0.7)
Total		384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

Table 6 shows that an average of 83% of our respondents in the various states studied know what social media are while 16% do not know and 1% did not respond to the question. It also shows that there is less awareness of social media in the northern states than in the south.

Table 7: Ascertaining whether respondents had account with any of the social media platform during the 2011 general elections.

S/N	Variables	Maiduguri	Kano	Abuja	Ikeja	PHC	Enugu
1.	I did	201(52%)	220(58%)	335(87%	357(93%)	331(87%)	330(86%)
2.	I didn't	170(44%)	155(40%)	45(12.2%)	25(6.3%)	48(12.7%)	50 (13%)
3.	No comment	13(3%)	9(2%)	3(0.8%)	2(0.%)	1(0.3%)	2(0.7)
Total		384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

Table 7 above shows that during the 2011 general elections, an average of 77% of our respondents in the towns and states studied had accounts with one social media platform or the other while an average of 21.5% did not have and 1.5% did not respond to the question.

Table 8: Ascertaining whether respondents used social media for political participation during the 2011 general election.

S/N	Variables	Maiduguri	Kano	Abuja	Ikeja	PHC	Enugu
1.	I did	198(52%)	211(58%)	330(87%	355(93%)	329(85%)	320(86%)
2.	I didn't	174(44%)	165(40%)	50(12.2%)	23(6.3%)	51(15%)	70 (13%)
3.	No comment	12(3%)	8(2%)	4(1%)	1(0.5%)	0(0%)	2(0.7)
Total		**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

Our statistics as presented in table 8 above shows that an average of 76% of all respondents from the towns studied used social media for political participation during the 2011 general elections while 22% did not. Also, 1.4 % of the respondents declined response to this question.

Table 9: List of social media platforms respondents used

S/N	Variables	Maiduguri	Kano	Abuja	Ikeja	PHC	Enugu
1.	SMS/calls	219(57%)	209(54%)	222(58%)	217(56%)	212(55%)	231(60%)
2.	Facebook	103(27%)	120(31%)	126(32%)	124(31.5%)	129(33%)	128(17%)
3.	Twitter	22(6%)	41(8%)	75(20%)	77(20%)	74(19%)	17(6%)
4.	YouTube	8(2%)	11(3%)	17(4%)	10(3%)	9(2%)	12(3%)
5.	BBM	20(5%)	21(5.3%)	3(0.8%)	2(0.4%)	3(0.8%)	4(1.2%)
6.	Others	12(3%)	7(1.7%)	4(1.2%)	3(0.8%)	5(1.2%)	3(0.8%)
Total		**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

Table 9 indicates that GSM-SMS/calls were the most used during the period under review. It was followed by Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blackberry Messenger (BBM) and others.

Table 10: Some lapses observed in the use of social media during the 2011 general elections

S/N	Variables	Maiduguri	Kano	Abuja	Ikeja	PHC	Enugu
1.	Used to attack Opponents	68(17.6%)	67(17.7)	59(15.5%)	61(16.1%)	73(19%)	102(26.6%)
2.	Used to spread false numerous	124(32.4%)	123(32%)	111(29%)	119(31%)	132(34%)	113(29.5)
3.	Used to spread hate & inciting messages	135(35.4%)	134(36%)	129(34%)	116(31%)	133(35%)	121(31.6%)
4.	Used to manipulate images, messages and videos	53(13.8%)	52(14%)	74(19%)	81(21%)	42(10%)	44(11.5%)
5.	No Response	3(0.8%)	5(1.3%)	8(2.1%)	3(0.8%)	7 (1.8%)	3(0.8%)
	Total	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**	**384(100%)**

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

Table 10 shows some lapses our respondents observed in the use of social media during the 2011 general elections in the various towns and states studied. The data indicates that an average of 20.1% believe social media were used to attack opponents during the 2011 electioneering, 30.1% said the technology was used to spread false numerous and 34.4 % believe they were used to spread hate & inciting messages. Also, 13.8% said the platforms were used to manipulate images, messages and videos while 1.6% did not answer the question.

Table 11: Lessons from social media use during the 2011 general elections.

S/N	Variables	Maiduguri	Kano	Abuja	Ikeja	PHC	Enugu
1.	offer participatory democracy	219(57%)	209(54%)	222(58%)	217(56%)	212(55%)	231(60%)
2.	Promote transparency in the process	103(27%)	120(31%)	126(32%)	124(31%)	129(33%)	128(17%)
3.	Facilitates speedy release of election results	22(6%)	41(8%)	75(20%)	77(20%)	74(19%)	17(6%)
4.	There is need for regulation of the platforms	8(2%)	11(3%)	17(4%)	10(3%)	9(2%)	12(3%)
5.	There is need for public enlightenment on the use of the platforms	20(5%)	21(5%)	3(0.8%)	2(0.4%)	3(0.8%)	4(1.2%)
6.	Others	12(3%)	7(1.7%)	4(1.2%)	3(0.8%)	5(1.2%)	3(0.8%)
Total		384(100%	384(100%)	384(100%)	384(100%	384(100%)	384(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

Table 11 shows that an average of 15.1% of our respondents from the towns studied believe that social media offer participatory democracy at its best. 16% said the technology promotes transparency and greater accuracy in the political process, 17.4% said facilitate speedy release of election results while 24.4% believe there is need for some sort of regulation of social media platforms and 27% said There is need for public enlightenment on how to make the best use of social media platforms especially in electioneering process in the zone.

DISCUSSION

The data generated in this study provide insight to the lapses and lessons of social media use during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. In conducting the study, the researchers deemed it necessary to begin with the demographic variables of the respondents; this decision was aimed at determining how the differences and diversities among the various geopolitical zones of the country influenced their social media use for political participation during the period under review.

The gender distribution shows that the male respondents outnumber their female counterpart in all the states studied; however, the gap was wider in the northern states than in the south. The data also show that students, especially those between the age brackets of 24-29 constitute the highest users of social media in the country.

Table 5 presents the marital status of respondents. Here, our goal was to find out whether marriage is an important factor in social media use among members of our population. The generated data indicate that there are more single youth users of social in the Southern states and Abuja, the FCT, whereas reverse is the case in the northern cities of Maiduguri (Borno state) and Kano city in Kano state.

Tables 6 and show that a good percentage of our respondents across the towns and states studied know what social media are, they have accounts with them and used them for political participation during the 2011 general elections.

In demonstration of their knowledge of the subject-matter, respondents were able to enumerate some of the social media platforms they know and those they had accounts with during the 2011 general elections. GSM-SMS/calls and Facebook top the list. Twitter, YouTube, 2go, what's up, and blackberry messenger (BBM) follow in that order.

Table 10 clearly answered research question two which sought to find out the lapses observed in the use of social media for political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections. Many of the respondents believe that social media were used to attack opponents during the period, spread false numerous, hate and inciting messages, digitally manipulate images, messages and videos, among others.

Table 11 answered our research question 3 which sought to identify the possible lessons that could be learnt from social media use during the period. The findings show that respondents learnt that social media offer participatory democracy at its best, promotes transparency and greater accuracy in the political process and facilitate speedy release of election results, etc.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that social media was used for political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections. It however shows that, whereas many used the technology wisely to campaign for their various candidates, interact with candidates and electorates one-on-one, report happenings in their areas/polling centres during the elections and electioneering period, share personal views and gauge public opinions on the various candidates; others used them to attack opponents, spread false rumours, hate and inciting messages, digitally manipulate images, messages and videos, hack into people's accounts to commit all manner of fraud and launch spam and virus attacks on opponents' information, and make users fall prey to online scams that seemed genuine, resulting in several data and identity thefts.

The study however shows that vital lessons could be learnt from the social media use experiment during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. Among them: Social media offer participatory democracy at its best, the technology promotes transparency and greater accuracy in the political process, they facilitate speedy release of election results, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings, we recommend:

1. Periodic public enlightenment on the use of social media platforms for political purpose especially among the youths. The government should be at the vanguard of this campaign, using such instruments like the ministries of information at both state and federal levels, the National Orientation Agency, the mass media, among others.

2. Politicians and political parties, as well as their supporters should be cautioned on using social media to post/twit dysfunctional messages. Government or INEC may consider enacting laws that make such acts punishable offence.

3. Efforts should be made towards monitoring, moderating or regulating the various social media platforms in order to minimize the observed weaknesses and maximize the intrinsic values of the technology in the electoral process.

4. To achieve the above, it is imperative that the various media laws are urgently reviewed to address the technicalities involved in the new media technologies; this we believe would go a long way in making the technology more useful in the electoral process and more beneficial to the society at large.

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