PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF FACEBOOK USAGE IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	This study investigates the public perception towards Facebook usage in the 2015 political campaigns in Nigeria.
Background	The utilization of online networking in political issues has kept on developing in late time, even though it was not at first recognized as a political apparatus, political aspirants and politicians at large have now understood its capability. Hence, it has turned into one of the fundamental platforms for political aspirants to propagate diverse campaign messages to their constituents who have an interest in their political career and aspirations.
Methodology	The study made use of descriptive survey design with a questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. Data were analyzed using the 2016 Microsoft Excel statistical package with frequency counts and simple percentages presented in tables and graphs. The hypotheses generated in this study were tested via inferential statistical chi-square analysis at 0.05 level of significant.
Contribution	Studies that investigate the public perception of the usage of Facebook in electioneering campaign in Northern Nigeria, notably Taraba State is in its embryonic stage. Therefore, this paper is an extension to such body of knowledge.
Findings	The study demonstrated that Facebook was used in the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaigns in southern Taraba, and this influenced electorate to vote a particular candidate. However, it is the perception of the respondents that there were dysfunctions such as deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, abusive speech, distortion of the facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing on the Facebook pages of the electorates and candidates.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Reliability (e.g. message must be clear, focused, well conveyed, believable, credible, free from abusive speech and attacking of opponents) should be an essential concept in the posted political messages or promises of politicians so as to draw

more fans to themselves.

Recommendation for Researchers	It should be noted that this study centres on southern Taraba alone, therefore, in order to get a more generalized results, it is pertinent for further research to include other parts of Nigeria. Additionally, a combination of content analysis and interview will be helpful in examining the nature of the abusive words/speeches used on Facebook in the 2015 southern Taraba senatorial electioneering campaign.
Future Research	Some of the limitations have to do with the nature of the questionnaires themselves and the kind of variables and measurement models required. The measurements are perceptions rather than quantitative interval or ratio scale measures taken on the variable. Therefore, future research should adopt quantitative interval or ratio scale measures on the variable in order to obtain scientific results.
Keywords	Campaign; Facebook; politics; senatorial elections; Taraba; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Social networking sites are web-based instruments that permit users to make a profile and create a network attached to that profile, as well as interact with others utilizing this application (Xenos et al., 2014). These social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as less popular sites, such as Google+ and MySpace (Boulianne, 2015). Therefore, the utilization of online networking in political issues has kept on developing in late time (Okoro and Nwafor 2013), even though it was not at first recognized as a political apparatus, but rather, in any case, political aspirants and politicians at large have understood the capability of a social media site (Borah, 2016). Hence, it has turned into one of the fundamental platforms for political aspirants to propagate diverse campaign messages to their constituents who have an interest in their political career and aspirations (Grow and Ward, 2013). Moreover, a growing body of literature affirmed that there is a relationship between social media and politics (Abbott, MacDonald, and Givens 2013; Fuchs, 2013; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) and through social media political mobilization and supports is attainable (Chinedu-Okeken and Obi, 2016). Studies confirmed that Facebook celebrated its tenth birthday with over one billion active users worldwide; as a result, Facebook and YouTube were ranked among the top three websites worldwide with Twitter and LinkedIn creeping up in eighth and thirteenth positions (Alexa, 2014; Sedghi, 2014). Thus, Pew research discovered that 35% of internet consumers utilized Facebook in 2008, and in 2013 that gauge expanded to 72% (Zickuhr, 2010; Brenner and Smith, 2013; Boulianne, 2015). Indeed, Facebook is more used as a political campaign tool because it does give room for individuals to engage vintage of their page in publicizing their involvement/intention. Consequently, political leaders have discovered the outstanding potency of social network sites and utilize them for their political campaigns (Baek, 2015; Williams and Gulati, 2013; Kim, 2011). Furthermore, Okoro and Nwafor (2013) reported that with social networking sites political aspirants appeal to citizens, it allows them to keep abreast and in contact with their supporters and as such supporters contribute actively by commenting on various political aspirant agenda and promises. Having a more delineate view, David et al. (2016) and Kreiss (2014) remarked that most political party and leader maintain an account on Facebook and Twitter in order to put out their agenda.

Thus, the role of web-based social networking systems, for example, cell phones' SMS, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in electioneering campaign in Nigeria as of late can't be overemphasized (Ajayi and Adesote, 2015). Similarly, the utilization of social media sites such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, and Blogs were massively deployed in the 2015 Nigerian General elections. Due to its participatory and creative nature, it turned into an utter and exceptional platform for political campaign organizers doing electioneering crusades and other ideological trumpeting exercises, as well as political contribution and mobilization among others (Chinedu-Okeken and Obi, 2016). Indeed, a strong relationship exists between political activities, particularly the electioneering and the mass media (conventional, new and social). Politics is barely achievable without media (McQuail, 2005). Although, Facebook as a social media site has indeed received the attention of many studies, especially as it relates to its usage during electioneering campaigns and political advertising in Nigeria and other parts of the world (Chinedu-Okeken and Obi, 2016; Boulianne, 2015; Abbott, MacDonald, and Givens 2013; Fuch 2013; Okoro and Nwafor, 2013).

Yet, studies on the public perception of the use of Facebook in electioneering campaign in Northern Nigeria, notably Taraba State is in its embryonic stage. Therefore, this paper fills that gap.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The media are essential social forces that lubricate the engine room of democracy (Borah, 2016; Gutman and Dalton, 2009; Nagourney, 2008). Nevertheless, Facebook as one of the social media is sometimes used inappropriately by users, thus, diminishing the positive part it would have played in enhancing unbiased and fair political campaigns. These actions affect the credibility of the media (Facebook), as well as politicians who utilize it for misinformation within the society. Buttressing on this, Oyenuga (2015) reported that in the 2015 general elections, web-based social networking turned out to be all the more intense device and even a deadlier weapon in which various video releases, voice lines, feature reports, headlines, and broadcasts were made to mar many political parties and individuals.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary thrust of this paper is to appraise the use of Facebook in political campaigns in the southern part of Taraba State of Nigeria. The study is guided by the following objectives:

- To examine the role of Facebook in the 2015 senatorial political campaigns of southern Taraba.
- To examine if Facebook posts influenced the electorates to vote a particular candidate in the 2015 senatorial elections in southern Taraba.
- To identify some of the dysfunctional roles such as abusive speech, deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, distortion of the facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing played by the candidates and electorates while using Facebook for campaigning in the 2015 senatorial political campaigns in southern Taraba.

HYPOTHESES

- H_o: Facebook posts did not influence electorate to vote a particular candidate in the 2015 senatorial campaigns in southern Taraba.
- H_o: There were no dysfunctional (e.g. deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, distortion of the facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing) roles played by the candidate and electorates while using Facebook for campaigning in the 2015 senetorial elections of southern Taraba.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social network sites such as Facebook allow users to share their political beliefs, support a specific candidate, and interact with others on political issues. Over the years, quite a number of studies have focused on assessing the relationship between social media and politics (Nulty et al., 2016; Anggraini et al., 2014; Olabamiji, 2014; Abubakar, 2012; Liu and Jeffres, 2012; Yousif and Alsamydai, 2012). For example, Anggraini et al. (2014) examined political campaigns through Facebook on Indonesian 2014 presidential elections. The study reveals that the existence of mechanism such as the mass media that facilitates and supports and promotes a strong tendency/propensity for interaction between individuals and society is essential and an effective way to communicate and exchange vital information. The study shows how large the influence of the mass media is in political life which makes them inseparable. The media have the ability to influence public opinion and a powerful tool in the formatting of one's cognition. Facebook was discovered to be one of the most effective media for interacting with other people during the electioneering campaigns. However, the medium has some negative impact on political issues such as high level of misinformation through propaganda comments and posts. Thus, they recommended the need for caution in the usage of Facebook during activities or campaign.

Furthermore, Nulty et al. (2016) studied social media and political communication in the 2014 elections of the European Parliament. In the study, the authors surveyed the European landscape of social media using tweets originating from and referring to political actors during the 2014 European Parliament elections campaign. They described the language and national distribution of the messages, the relative volume of different types of communications, and the factors that determine the adoption and use of

social media by the candidates. They also analyzed the dynamics of the volume and content of the communications over the duration of the campaign with reference to both the EU integration dimension of the debate and the prominence of the most visible list-leading candidates. Findings indicate that the lead candidates and their published debate on television and social media had a prominent influence on the volume and content of communications and that the content and emotional tone of communications more reflects preferences along the EU dimension of the political contest rather than classic national issues relating to left-right differences. Similarly, Olabamiji (2014) investigated the use and misuse of the new media for political communication in Nigeria's 4th Republic. Based on qualitative content analysis of some newsprint and electronic media messages and interviews with the users, the paper presents a situation analysis of the nexus between new media messages and political harmony or conflict in Nigeria. The paper reveals that although the new media like Facebook have enhanced political awareness and interaction, however, they are also being used in Nigeria to malign, intimidate and discredit political opponents thus triggering conflicts. Liu and Jeffres (2012) investigated how one's attitude towards the content of political advertisements influence how one is likely to vote. It focused on 2006 Mid-term elections in Ohio, U.S that featured governorship and senatorial candidates. The study discovered that, the media played an important role in encouraging citizens to participate in the political process, seeing that its function (mass media) in campaigns is to provide citizens with relevant information about candidates and policy issues and to mobilize them to engage in the political process as much as possible while they exercise their franchise. In a similar notion, Abubakar (2012) examined the place of social media in enhancing citizens, political participation in Nigeria, during the 2011 presidential electioneering. The study found that the political sphere, with the help of social media, has broadened and allows more people to participate in the political discourse that seems to be dominated by conventional media. Social media such as Facebook gives politicians and citizens a platform to share their views that may influence the voters' decision, policy initiation, and implementation. Thus, the richness and power of social media in enhancing democracy is inevitable. On the other hand, Yousif and Alsamydai (2012) studied the impact of political promotion via Facebook on individual's political orientation among citizens of Jordan. The study found that Facebook is one of the modern means that was adopted by politicians to disseminate their ideas, influence the individual's opinion, induce them to adopt their ideas, and vote for them in elections. Their study further showed that Facebook provides access to the target audience in political advertising as well as provides users with means of interaction. From the foregoing, it is apparent that there are a plethora of works on social media, political communication, and democracy, and they all suggest that Facebook utilization has an impact on electioneering campaigns. However, if utilized negatively it tarnishes the image of political aspirants and opponents leading to high level of propaganda.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory adopted for this study is the Public Sphere Theory (PST), as one of the critical theories which emerged between the periods of 18th to 19th centuries from the social inquiries of Frankfurt scholars led by German Sociologist, Jurgen Habermas. This theory, as captured in the book of Habermas "the Structural Transformation of Public Sphere" holds that the old and new media are components of various avenues where citizens can participate freely and also communicate while sharing political ideas and information in democratic forums. Herbamas (1989) argues that the theory serves as "realm of our social life in something approaching public opinion can be informed and accessed is guaranteed to all citizens.

Public Sphere and Political Campaign

Habermas' focus on democratization was linked with emphasis on political participation as the core of a democratic society and as an essential element in individual self-development. His study "the structural transformation of Public Sphere" published in 1962 contrasted various forms of an active, participatory bourgeois publish sphere in the heroic era of liberal democracy with the more privatized forms of spectator politics in a bureaucratic industrial society where the media and elites controlled the public sphere. The Facebook political campaign allows for liberal democracy where everybody says what he or she feels. The principles of public sphere involve open discussion of all issues of general concern in which discursive argumentation was employed to ascertain general interests and the public good. The public sphere thus presupposes freedom of speech, press and the right to freely participate in political activities and decision-making. For Habermas, the function of the media has thus been transformed from facilitating rational discourse and debate within the public sphere into shaping, constructing, and limiting public dis-

course to those themes validated and approved by media corporations. Hence, the interconnection between public debate and individual participation has been fractured and transmuted into that of a realm of political information and spectacle, in which citizen-consumers ingest and observe passively entertainment and information. But for Facebook campaigns, up-to-date messages are posted at the spot where individuals obtain almost if not a first-class information. Political public spheres include social movements, media that monitor and criticize the state, and groups that take political action. Therefore, discussion on the political impact of social media has focused on the power of mass protests. Facebook potential lies in supporting civil society and the public sphere. Facebook has become contested terrain, a new form of a class struggle, national liberation, and pro-democracy movements. The concept of the public sphere and the model of deliberative democracy are unrepeatable, what underlies them is the national critical debate. The possibility of a modern public sphere has been realized where both electronic and print media, as well as the internet (Facebook), have been heralded a new public sphere which opened new channels for political communication and public discourse. Facebook, therefore, has been a basis for more democratic and participatory public sphere.

Agenda setting theory

Since this study examines the role of Facebook in political campaigns as well as the influence of Facebook post on electorate voting choice of a particular candidate, it is pertinent to back up this paper with the agenda-setting theory of the media. Agenda setting depicts an intense impact of the media; the capacities to disclose to us what issues are noteworthy. It is "the process whereby the news media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues" (Zhu and Blood, 1997:111). This implies that the media is geared towards influencing people's perception of what is necessary, acceptable and desirable. The media influence people to turn towards certain issues in the society neglecting other aspect; thus, striking issues are raised keeping in mind the end goal to impact the general population to think towards it. Folarin (1998:68) observes that "agenda setting implies that the mass media predetermines what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society. During elections, different media are used by politicians and electorate to propagate their views and opinions.. Nonetheless, agenda setting does not attribute to the media the potency to determine what the people think, but it does outline what to think about. As such, it sets the agenda for political campaigns.

The reason for adopting this theory is that agenda setting explicates the role or functions of the media in ascertaining public agenda before, during and after elections. It further traces the influence of the media in molding and shaping the notion of the public towards some topical issues, of which election is paramount. In fact, the primary thrust of the agenda-setting theory is that the mass media set the docket on the burning topic in the society for public discussion. Consequently, social media can be used to influence electorates to vote for a particular candidate and as such, could also be deployed by the candidate to promote manifesto. There are instances where candidates and electorates use the media to bring down their opponents through abusive speech, deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, distortion of the facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing. However, through Facebook, political advertising is attainable. Candidates post different messages on social media, such messages over time creates agenda and makes the public to start thinking towards such messages. For example, Dare (2011:44) found that former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan launched his Facebook fan page to reach out to Nigerians with a view to getting feedback on electoral reform and other national issues. His study also revealed that in the 2011 elections, many politicians in Nigeria used the social media platform (Facebook, Twitter) to trumpet their political agenda in order to get electorate's support and votes. Similarly, studies on social media and politics remarked that Obama's usage of social media in the 2008 elections frequently refers to the most excellent way an applicant can efficiently contact the group of the electorate, notably the young (Gutman and Dalton, 2009; Nagourney, 2008; Borah, 2016). Thus, social media utilization shaped, influenced and set agenda for people in southern Taraba in the 2015 Nigeria senatorial elections.

Uses and gratification theory

The uses and gratification theory was propounded by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in 1974 (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011: 294; Blumler and Katz, 1974). The theory suggests that people use media for different purposes base on the gratification derived from it (Idakwo, 2011:24). The uses and gratification theory directly places power in the hands of the audience (Apuke and Iyendo, 2017). As such, Apuke (2016)

describes it as the gratifications or benefits that attracts and hold audiences to diverse types of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological demands. Linking this theory to the present study, politicians and their supporters use social media most especially Facebook to influence the electorate to vote for them. Social media platforms are without doubt a notable tool today that promotes the participation of citizens of a country, nation or states in politics and other civic activities (Boulianne, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

This study made use of descriptive survey research design with a structured questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The study's targeted population is Southern Taraba which consists of five local governments: Donga, Ibi Takum, Ussa and Wukari respectively as indicated in the light blue shaded part of the map (See Figure 1).
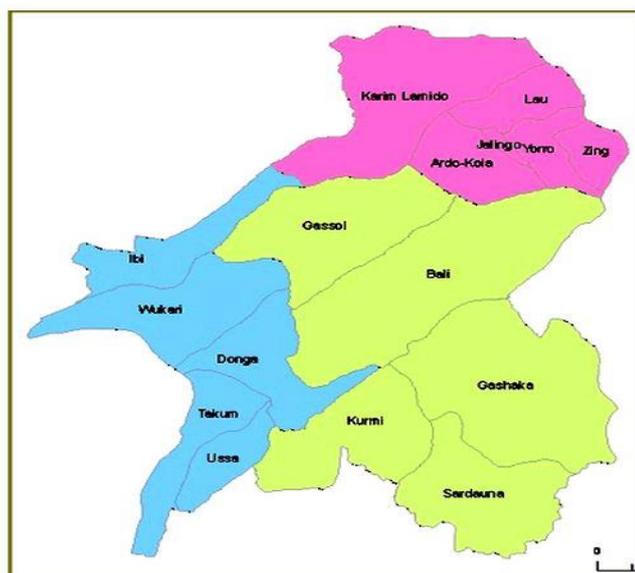

Figure 1: Location of study

Taraba is a Northern State situated in Nigeria, which was named after the Taraba River, with its capital as Jalingo (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taraba_State). The total population of southern Taraba according to the 2006 population census was 687077. Therefore, to determine the sample size the Taro Yame's formula (Yamane, 1967) was employed. The rationale for using this formula is because the population is already known and it is not possible to administer questionnaires to all the respondents in the population (Ugwuanyi and Ibe, 2012). The formula is as follows:

$$n = \frac{n}{1 + n(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size sought
e = Level of error $(0.05)^2$
N = Populatio size (687077)

$$n = \frac{687077}{1 + 687077(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{687077}{687078(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{687077}{191717.7}$$

$$n = 400$$

Thus, the sample size of this study is 400 respondents. The researchers used a convenient sampling technique to select 80 respondents each from the 5 local governments that make up the southern Taraba senatorial zone. Since this study examines the perception of respondents' towards the utilization of Facebook in the 2015 senatorial political campaigns in southern Taraba of Nigeria, the researchers conveniently selected those who were willing to partake in the study as well as those who have the knowledge of Face-

book utilization. The data derived were analyzed using the 2016 Microsoft Excel statistical packaged with frequency counts and simple percentages presented in tables and graphs. The generated hypotheses in this study were tested via inferential statistical chi-square analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The data collected using questionnaires distributed to the five local governments in Southern Taraba are demonstrated and analyzed with the aid of Microsoft Excel 2016 using frequency counts and simple percentages depicted by tables and graphs. Four hundred questionnaires were administered; the whole questionnaires administered were duly filled and retrieved, giving a response rate of 100%. The researchers achieved this high rate of response because they employed 2 other research assistants in the distribution of questionnaire. The researchers conveniently selected those who were willing to partake in the study as well as those who have the knowledge of Facebook utilization. After distributing the questionnaires to the respondents the researchers waited for them to fill and return. Therefore, the distribution of the questionnaires covered a period of 8 weeks adopting a convenient sampling.

RESPONDENTS' CHARACTERISTICS

From the data gathered and analyzed, (n=160) 40% of the respondents were between the ages of 18-25 while (n=120) 30% were between the ages of 26-33. Also, (n=100) 25% were between the ages of 34-41, (n=40) 10% were between the ages of 42-49. Furthermore, a total of (n=240) 60% respondents were male and (n=160) 40% respondents were female. Thus, the qualification of respondents shows that (n=200) 50% have Secondary School Certificate (SSCE), (n=120) 30% NCE/OND holders, (n=60) 15% had HND/Degree, while only (n=20) 5% have Masters and above.

ROLES OF FACEBOOK IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Table 1 describes the responses on the role of Facebook in the 2015 senatorial political campaign in southern Taraba.

Table 1: The role of Facebook in political campaigns

Item (questions)	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Are you into social media?	Yes	400	100%
	No	0	0%
If yes, which of these social media platforms do you utilize the most?	Facebook	360	90%
	Twitter	20	5%
	YouTube	20	5%
	Flicker	-	-
Are you an active user of Facebook?	Yes	360	90%
	No	40	10%
Facebook was used in 2015 senatorial electioneering campaigns in southern Taraba State.	Yes	340	85%
	No	60	15%
Are you satisfied with the role Facebook played in 2015 senatorial electioneering campaign in southern Taraba?	Yes	320	80%
	No	80	20%

Furthermore, the responses indicate that all of the respondents (n= 400) 100% are into social media. Facebook is found to be the most utilized social media as shown in Table 1. This proves that most of the respondents are active users of Facebook as indicated by (n= 360) 90%. The results likewise demonstrate that Facebook was used in the 2015 electioneering campaigns in southern Taraba, and (n= 320) 80% of the respondents agreed that they were satisfied with the role Facebook played in the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaign in southern Taraba, while (n = 80) 20% believed that Facebook never played a role in the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaign in southern Taraba. Consequently, it can be deduced

from this survey that Facebook played an immense role in the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaign in southern Taraba.

FACEBOOK POST -INFLUENCE ON ELECTORATES

Table 2 Examined respondents' perception as to whether Facebook post influenced electorate to vote for a particular candidate in the 2015 senatorial elections of southern Taraba.

Table 2: Facebook post influence on electorate towards voting a particular candidate

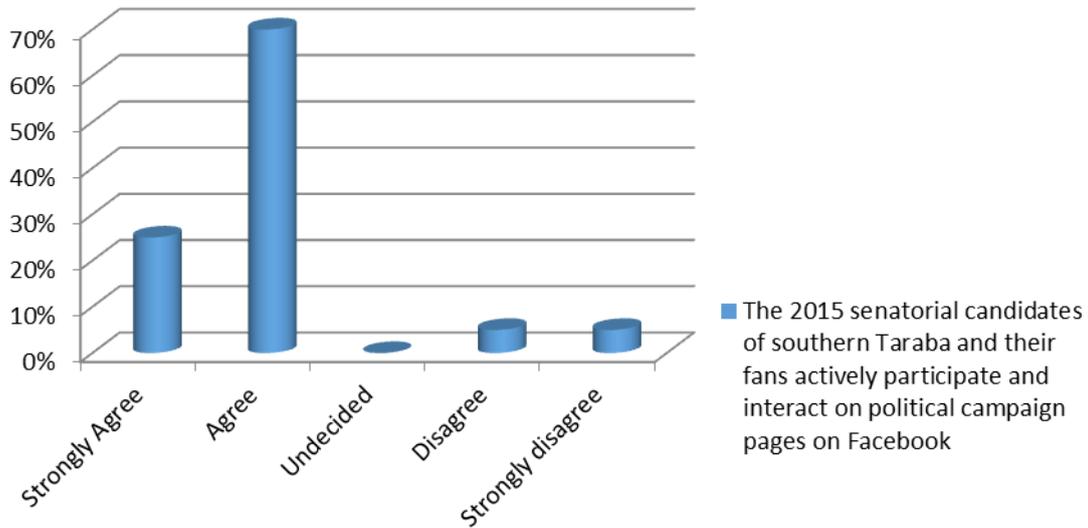| Item (questions)	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
The 2015 senatorial candidates of southern Taraba and their fans actively participated and interacted through political campaign pages on Facebook.	Strongly Agree	100	25%
	Agree	280	70%
	Undecided	-	-
	Disagree	20	5%
	Strongly disagree	20	5%
Southern Tarabans are up-to-date on Facebook political-ly.	Strongly Agree	100	25%
	Agree	260	65%
	Undecided	-	-
	Disagree	28	7%
	Strongly disagree	12	3%
Facebook successfully influenced electorate to vote a particular candidate during the 2015 senatorial elections in southern Taraba	Strongly Agree	280	70%
	Agree	80	20%
	Undecided	12	3%
	Disagree	16	4%
	Strongly disagree	12	3%
Facebook is one of the strongest media that had an impact in the 2015 senatorial elections in southern Taraba, compared to the Traditional media (Television, Radio, and Newspaper).	Yes	360	90%
	No	40	10%
The 2015 senatorial candidates of southern Taraba posted campaign messages on Facebook to influence electorate to vote for them.	Always	320	80%
	Sometimes	40	10%
	Rarely	24	6%
	Never	16	4%
Senatorial candidates posted messages on Facebook on every political update in the 2015 elections in southern Taraba.	Always	360	90%
	Sometimes	24	6%
	Rarely	8	2%
	Never	8	2%
Candidates and supporters post credible and accountable information in the 2015 senatorial campaigns in southern Taraba.	Yes	80	20%
	No	320	80%
Candidates post their campaign promises on Facebook	Always	360	90%
	Sometimes	20	5%
	Rarely	12	3%
	Never	8	2%

Figure 2: The 2015 senatorial candidates of southern Taraba and their fans actively participate and interact on political campaign pages on Facebook

A s revealed in Table 2 and Figure 2 (n = 100) 25% of the respondents strongly agreed that the senatorial candidates of southern Taraba and their fans actively participated and interacted in the 2015 senatorial campaign, (n= 280) 70% agreed that the senatorial candidates of southern Taraba and their fans actively participated and interacted in the 2015 senatorial campaign, while (n=20) 5% disagreed. On the other hand, (n=20) 5% strongly disagreed that the 2015 senatorial candidates of southern Taraba and their fans actively participated and interacted on political campaign pages on Facebook. Furthermore, (n= 100) 25% of the respondents agreed that southern Tarabans are up to date on Facebook politically. While (n= 12) 3% respondents strongly disagreed, and (n=28) 7% disagreed that southern Tarabans are up to date on Facebook politically, and (n=260) 65 agreed that southern Tarabans are up to date on Facebook politically. This implies that southern Tarabans are up to date on Facebook politically. Thus, (n=280) 70% of the respondents as depicted in Table 2 and Figure 3 strongly agreed that Facebook successfully influenced electorate to vote a particular candidate, whereas (n=80) 20% agreed that Facebook successfully influenced electorate to vote a particular candidate, while (n=12)3% of the respondents remain undecided, nonetheless (n=16)4% disagreed while (n=12)3% strongly disagreed that Facebook actually influenced electorate to vote a particular candidate in the 2015 senatorial elections in southern Taraba.
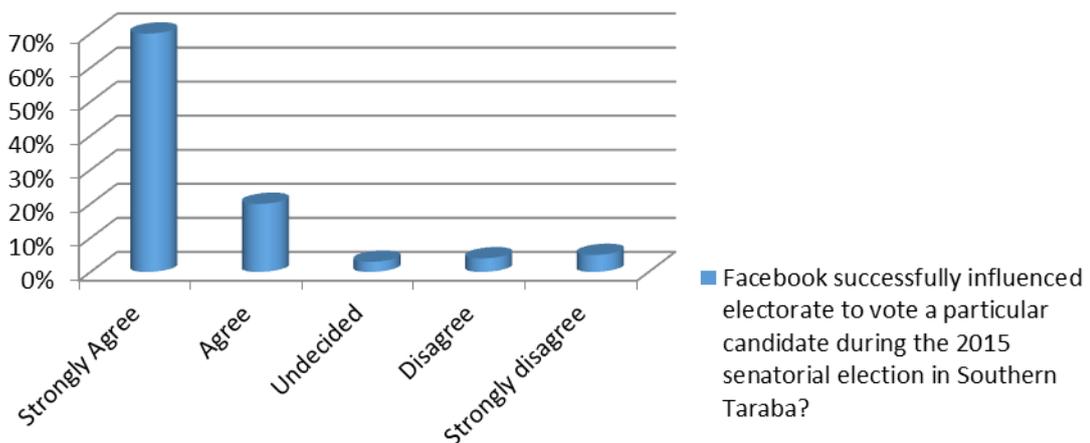

Figure 3: Facebook successfully influenced electorate to vote a particular candidate during the 2015 senatorial elections in Southern Taraba?

Furthermore, Table 2 also established that Facebook is one of the strongest media that made an impact in the 2015 senatorial elections in southern Taraba as concurred by (n=360) 90% of the respondents, while (n=40) 10% disagreed. Therefore, (n=320) 80% of the respondents said that the 2015 senatorial candidates of southern Taraba always post campaign messages on Facebook to influence electorate to vote for them, (n=40) 10% agreed that the 2015 senatorial candidates of southern Taraba post campaign messages sometimes on Facebook to influence electorate to vote for them, on the contrary, (n=12) 3% said that the senatorial candidates rarely post campaign messages, whereas, (n=8) 2% affirmed that the senatorial candidates have never posted any campaign message to influence electorate to vote for them. It could be deduced that the senatorial candidates in the 2015 elections of southern Taraba posted campaign messages at all times to influence the electorate to vote for them. Hence, (n=360) 90% of the respondents submits that the senatorial candidates always post political update messages on Facebook, (n=24) 6% said the senatorial candidates sometimes post political update messages on Facebook, however, (n=12) 3% said senatorial aspirants of southern Taraba rarely post political messages in the 2015 elections, while (n=8) 2% which is the least averred that political senatorial aspirants had never posted political updates on Facebook.

In ascertaining the credibility and accountability information posted by senatorial candidates and supporters in southern Taraba, Table 2 and Figure 4 indicates that (n=320) 80% of the respondents disagreed as to senatorial candidates and supporters posting credible and accountable information on Facebook in the 2015 southern Taraba senatorial elections, while (n=80) 20% agreed that senatorial candidates and supporters posted credible and accountable information on Facebook in the 2015 southern Taraba senatorial elections.
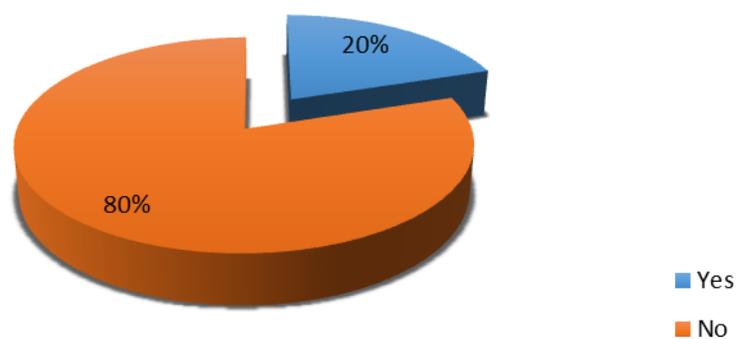

Figure 4: Candidates and supporters post credible and accounTable information in the 2015 senatorial elections in Southern Taraba

Conclusively, Table 2 demonstrates that (n=360) 90% of the respondents agreed that senatorial candidates in the 2015 elections of southern Taraba always post campaign promises on Facebook. More so, (n=20) 5% agreed that the senatorial candidates in the 2015 elections of southern Taraba sometimes post campaign promises on Facebook, however, (n=12) 3% agreed that the senatorial candidates of southern Taraba rarely posted campaign promises on Facebook, and (n=8) 2% said that the senatorial candidates of southern Taraba had never posted campaign promises on Facebook.

THE DYSFUNCTIONS IN CAMPAIGNING THROUGH FACEBOOK.

Table 3 highlights some of the dysfunctional roles played in the utilization of Facebook for political campaigns.

Table 3: Dysfunctions in campaigning through Facebook

Item (questions)	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook contributed strongly to the socio-political situation of southern Taraba during the 2015 senatorial elections.	Yes	320	80%
	No	80	20%
Facebook posts of the 2015 senatorial candidates and their fans in southern Taraba challenge their opponents.	Always	320	80%
	Sometimes	40	10%
	Rarely	24	6%
	Never	16	4%
There were dysfunctions such as deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, distortion of the facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing on the Facebook pages of the 2015 senatorial elections in southern Taraba.	Strongly Agree	340	85%
	Agree	40	10%
	Undecided	8	2%
	Disagree	8	2%
	Strongly disagree	4	1%
Most Facebook pages of the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaigns in southern Taraba contained abusive words directed to their opponents	Strongly Agree	280	70%
	Agree	80	20%
	Undecided	12	3%
	Disagree	16	4%
	Strongly disagree	12	3%

Furthermore, it was revealed that (n=320) 80% of the respondents are of the opinion that Facebook contributed to the socio-political situation in the 2015 senatorial elections in southern Taraba, while (n=80) 20% said no. Hence, (n=320) 80% of the public averred that the Facebook posts of senatorial candidates and their fans in the 2015 electioneering campaigns always challenge their opponents, (n=40) 10% said Facebook posts by the senatorial candidates and their fans in the 2015 general elections sometimes challenge their opponents, (n=24) 6% agreed that the posts on Facebook by the 2015 senatorial candidates and their fans rarely challenge their opponents. On the other hand, (n=16) 4% of the respondents affirmed that the posts on Facebook by the senatorial candidates in the 2015 elections in southern Taraba and their fans had never challenged their opponents. Consequently, (n=340) 85% strongly agreed that there were dysfunctions such as deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, distortion of the facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing on the Facebook pages of senatorial aspirants in the 2015 elections in southern Taraba. (n=40) 10% agreed that there were dysfunctions in forms of deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, distortion of the facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing on the Facebook pages of senatorial candidates in the 2015 electioneering campaigns, while (n=8) 2% remained undecided as to if there were dysfunctions such as deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, distortion of the facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing on the Facebook pages of senatorial candidates in the 2015 electioneering campaigns in southern Taraba. Nonetheless, (n=8) 2% disagreed that there were dysfunctions in terms of deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, distortion of the facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing on the Facebook pages of senatorial candidates in the 2015 electioneering campaigns in southern Taraba.
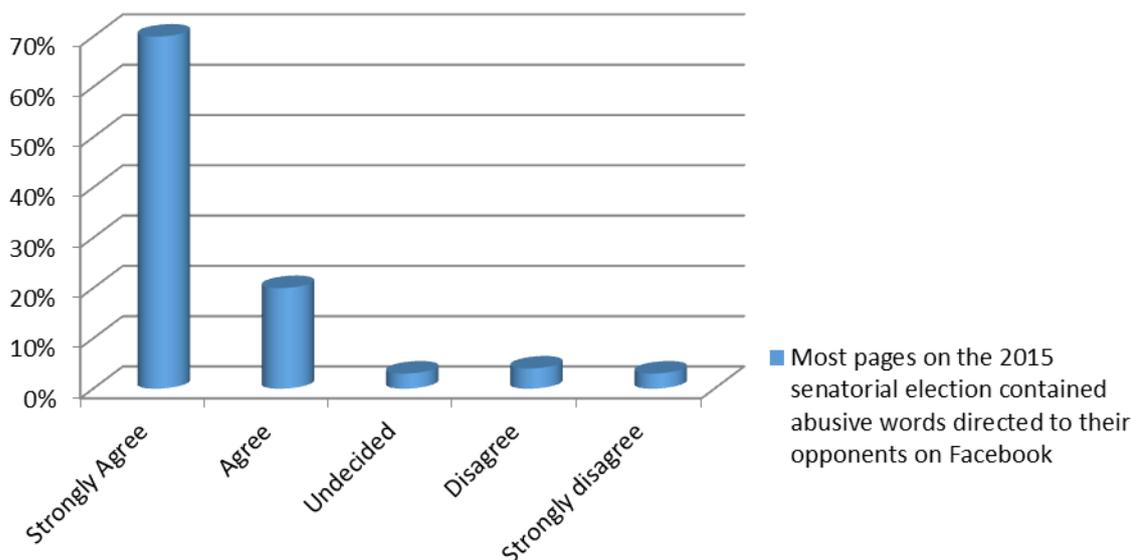
Figure 5: Most pages on the 2015 senatorial elections contained abusive words directed to their opponents on Facebook

Conclusively, as demonstrated in Figure 5 and Table 3, (n=280) 70% of the respondents strongly agreed that most of the Facebook pages of the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaigns contained abusive words directed to their opponents, (n=80) 20% agreed that most of the Facebook pages of the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaigns contained abusive words directed to their opponents. (n=12) 3% of the respondents remained undecided as to whether most of the Facebook pages of the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaigns contained abusive words directed to their opponents. (n=16) 4 of the respondents disagreed as to whether most of the political aspirant pages on Facebook in the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaigns contained abusive words directed to their opponents. (n=12) 3% strongly disagreed that most Facebook pages of the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaigns contained abusive words directed to their opponents. From these responses, it is inferred that most of the Facebook pages in the 2015 senatorial electioneering campaigns of southern Taraba contained abusive words directed to their opponents.

TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis One

H_o: Facebook posts did not influence electorate to vote a particular candidate in the 2015 senatorial elections of southern Taraba. This hypothesis will be tested with chi-square (x^2) contingency table analysis at 5% = 0.05 level of significance and 4 degrees of freedom.

Table 4: Facebook posts influenced electorate to vote a particular candidate in the 2015 senatorial elections of southern Taraba

Response	O	E	O-E	$(O-E)^2$	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
Strongly Agree	280	80	200	4000	50
Agree	80	80	0	0	0
Undecided	12	80	-68	4624	57.8
Disagree	16	80	-64	4096	51.2
Strongly disagree	12	80	-68	4624	57.8
Total	400	400	0	17344	216.5

Note: O = Observed frequencies, E = Expected frequencies and $\sum$ = Summation.

Given a level of significance of 5% = 0.05 and 4 degrees of freedom the Chi-square distribution Table consulted showed a critical value of 9.488, whereas, the calculated value as depicted in Table 4 is 216.5. Therefore, the null hypothesis that states "Facebook posts did not influence electorate to vote a particular candidate in the 2015 senatorial elections of southern Taraba" is rejected since the calculated value 216.5 is greater than the critical value of 9.488. As such, it is inferred that Facebook posts influenced electorate to vote a particular candidate in the 2015 senatorial elections of southern Taraba.

Hypothesis Two

H_0: There were no dysfunctional roles (e.g. deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, distortion of the facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing) played by candidates and electorates while using Facebook for campaigning in the 2015 senatorial elections of southern Taraba.

Table 5: There were dysfunctional roles played by the candidates and electorates while using Facebook for campaigning in the 2015 senatorial general elections of southern Taraba

Response	O	E	O-E	$(O-E)^2$	$\dfrac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
Strongly Agree	340	80	260	67600	845
Agree	40	80	-40	1600	20
Undecided	10	80	-70	4900	61.25
Disagree	8	80	-74	5476	0.64
Strongly disagree	4	80	-76	5776	72.2
Total	400	400	0	17344	999.1

Note: O = Observed frequencies, E = Expected frequencies and $\sum$ = Summation.

Given a level of significance of 5% = 0.05 and 4 degrees of freedom the Chi-square distribution Table checked showed a critical value of 9.488. However, the calculated value as depicted in Table 5 is 999.1. As such, the null hypothesis that states "there were no dysfunctional roles played by the candidates and electorates while using Facebook for campaigning in the 2015 senatorial elections of southern Taraba" is rejected since the calculated value 999.1 is greater than the critical value of 9.488. Therefore, it is inferred that there were dysfunctional roles (e.g. deliberate distortions in the information about opponents, distortion of the facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing the electorates) played by candidates and electorates while using Facebook for campaigning in the 2015 senatorial elections of southern Taraba such

DISCUSSION

Grow and Ward (2013) argued that Facebook allows the candidate and position holders to interact with voters, allowing for transparent communication, as well as contending against an adversary. This means that Facebook has played a vital role in political campaigns as highlighted in the above data analyzed, the majority of respondents (n= 360) 90% agreed that they are active users of Facebook and they are satisfied with the role of Facebook in 2015 senatorial elections of southern Taraba. Thus, this study further revealed that the senatorial candidates of southern Taraba and their fans actively participated and interacted in the 2015 senatorial campaign as concurred by (n= 280) 70% of the respondents. Consequently, it is the perception of the respondents that southern Tarabans are up to date on Facebook politically.

This study also established that Facebook was used in 2015 senatorial campaigns to influence electorate to vote a particular candidate. This is demonstrated in hypothesis one in Table 4. These findings are consistent with Liu and Jeffres (2012) study that discovered that social media such as Facebook provides politicians and citizens a platform to share their views, and such views influence the voters' decision, policy initiation, and implementation. This paper further establishes that Facebook is one of the strongest media that had an impact in the 2015 senatorial elections in southern Taraba, compared to the Traditional media (Television, Radio, and Newspaper). This coincides with Abubakar (2012) who reveals that the political sphere, with the help of social media, has broadened and enhances the capacity of citizens to participate in the political discourse that seems to be dominated by conventional media. Social media such as Facebook offers politicians and citizens a platform to share their views which in turn influence the voters' decision, policy initiation, and implementation. Accordingly, this study also reveals that the 2015 senatorial candidate in southern Taraba always posts campaign messages to influence the electorate to vote for

them. Supporting this, Yousif and ALsamydai (2012) remarked that Facebook is one of the modern means that is adopted by politicians to disseminate their ideas, influence the individual's opinion, induce them to adopt their ideas, and vote for them in elections. By implication campaign messages posted in the media (Facebook) will increase participation, provide more access to information and hence enhance the capacity of citizens to make choices about voting for one candidate as opposed to the others. On the other hand, this paper reveals that despite the positive roles being played by Facebook in the 2015 senatorial political campaigns in southern Taraba, the messages posted by candidates and supporters lacked credibility and accountability as highlighted by (n=320) 80% of the respondents. Nevertheless, this study revealed that the 2015 senatorial candidates of southern Taraba always post campaign promises on Facebook as highlighted by (n=360) 90% of the respondents.

This study further revealed as highlighted by (n=320) 80% of the respondents that Facebook contributed to the socio-political situation of the 2015 senatorial elections in southern Taraba, hence, (n=320) 80% of the respondents believed that Facebook posts by the 2015 senatorial candidates and their fans always challenge their opponents. Consequently, this paper highlights that there were dysfunctional roles that were played either by the candidates or electorates as demonstrated in the tested hypothesis two in Table 5. As such, (n=280) 70% of the respondents strongly agreed that most senatorial aspirant's Facebook pages in the 2015 elections contained abusive words directed to their opponents. This corresponds with Olabamiji (2014) who reported that although the new media like Facebook have enhanced political awareness and interaction, however, they are also being used in Nigeria to malign, intimidate and discredit political opponents, resulting in conflicts. As such, in a world where everybody is connected, everybody is at risk (Udende, 2011) due to the ubiquitous nature of the new media and its inherent dangers (Olabamiji, 2014). For example, because of the lack of editorial filtering, and the anonymity of online users permitted on the internet, some individuals do not use their real identities but nicknames. Such strategies are often adopted by political aspirants to bring down their opponents. Simply put, Anggraini et al. (2014) noted that social media has some negative impact on political issues such as high level of misinformation through propaganda comments and posts. However, Okigbo (1992) suggests that political advertisement should be a crucial issue of the day. In recap, Ajayi and Adesute (2015) remarked that web-based social networking problem such as openness to abuse and profanation can be adequately limited through legal checking and regulatory restrictions without necessarily abridging possibility of communication. If done properly, it will promote and maintain participatory democracy in Nigeria and the world at large, as well as develop and strengthen democracy in spite of the increasing difficulties.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In today's world of digitization and networks of electronic communication, Facebook is one of the most widely used social networks. It has also become one of the mechanisms of communications most frequently used political campaigns around the world. Facebook as one of the most widely used social networking site has become a tool intensely used in political campaigns around the world and has played a vital role even at the grassroots level. Facebook is accessible and affordable because one can use devices like computers, laptops, iPhones, Ipads and even the cheapest cell phone that has internet access to log in. However, as demonstrated in this paper, Facebook can be used negatively or positively in electioneering campaigns depending on the priorities of the candidates. Due to the freedom of political discussion on social media as postulated in Habermas public space, political campaign through Facebook allows for liberal democracy in which everybody says what he or she feels. Thus, the interconnection between public debate and individual participation has been fractured and transmuted into that of a realm of political information and spectacle, in which citizen-consumers ingest and observe passively entertainment and information. This has resulted to open discussion of all issues of general concern in which discursive argumentation are employed to ascertain general interests and the public good. The public sphere thus presupposes freedom of speech, press and the right to freely participate in political activities and decision-making. However, this freedom has led many to deliberately distort information about opponents, facts about personal performance, and misinformation as a strategy for influencing the electorates, resulting to a negative effect on the democratic electoral process.

Conclusively, it could generally be deduced from this study that there is a strong perception that Facebook has played a role in influencing citizen's participation in the electioneering campaign, especially in the 2015

senatorial election in Southern Taraba. Based on the issues discovered in thus study, the following recommendations are proffered:

➢ The public should be willing to understand the abusive and hate speech in political campaigns so as to be mindful of not marring a political aspirant. Although Facebook is an open platform for every electorate to voice out, however, it should not be an arena for creating tension and chaos in the society.

➢ In order to keep the peace in a given country, the government should sanction any political aspirant and electorate that engage in abusive speech and falsehood while campaigning. Although this negates the Herbermas principles of public spare, however, peace and unity is the only factor that can move democracy to a greater height.

➢ Reliability (e.g. message must be clear, focused, well conveyed, believable, credible, free from abusive speech and attacking of opponent) should be an essential concept in the posted political messages or promises of politicians so as to draw more fans to themselves.

LIMITATION AND PROPOSITIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Some of the limitations have to do with the nature of the questionnaires themselves and the kind of variables and measurement models required. The measurements are perceptions rather than quantitative interval or ratio scale measures taken on the variable. So one can only state results as perceptions rather than measurement taken on observed outcomes (facticity). The study also fails to ask the respondent to indicate the influence that Facebook had on his or her decision to vote for a particular candidate as opposed to the other. There is no question on whether the respondents voted in the election and the influence of Facebook versus other media on their (those who voted) decision. Since the paper is about the public perception it perhaps is not that critical.

 This study did not provide information that test for the reliability of the scale in the questionnaire constructed. Or equally as important the validity of the questions/scales used. Typically, Cronbach measures could be used to test validity. However, the authors used a modified version of the Meta study approach to compare and determine the reasonableness of the results of their tests with other similar studies. This is done extensively in the article and in particular in the discussion section and lends support to the credibility of the study. It also gives a sense of internal and external validity. Conclusively, it should be noted that this study centres on southern Taraba alone, therefore, in order to get a more generalizable results, it is pertinent for further research to include other parts of Nigeria. Additionally, a combination of content analysis and interview will be helpful in examining the nature of the abusive words/speeches used on Facebook in the 2015 southern Taraba senatorial electioneering campaign.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest is declared in this work.

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