

## Analysis of Social Media Abuse in Nigerian Politics: Is Regulation Necessary?

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### Abstract

*Upsurge in social media use owing to internet access perhaps through mobile phones has enhanced information sharing within and outside political terrain in Nigeria but currently breeding socio-political imbroglio. Social media usage, which was much pronounced during 2015 general election and is presumed to have enhanced transparency and democratic process, has generated mixed feelings on whether it should be regulated or not. It draws a battle line between the advocates of human rights to information freedom (publics) and the protectors of human rights from information abuse (Legislators). Aiming to establish empirical justifications for or against social media misuse in the Nigerian political fold, content analysis approach was used to explore the abuse of Facebook and Twitter contents during 2015 election. With a focus on posts and tweets on the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the two major presidential aspirants (Mohammadu Buhari (APC) and Goodluck Jonathan (PDP), the abuse of the platforms was found apparent. The public obsession in social media use is considered the consequence of the platforms boundless accessibility and interactivity that merited its need to reiterate public agenda. Considering the state of the abuse, monitoring and rewriting sordid and campaign of calumny posts and twits by governments at various levels as well as concerned Nigerians, without compromising the right to free speech, can bring sanctity to the social media platforms.*

**Keywords:** Social media, Democracy, Information regulation, Hypocrisy, Communicating development, Press freedom

### Introduction

The emergence of internet connectivity brought and is still bringing fresh faces to and reforming odd faces of mass media in term of operation, content, access, interactivity, audience usage, and performance. The argument that conventional media are likely to go into extinction as competition with the new interactive media becomes keen still looms. As the struggle to arouse, retain and sustain audience attentions and interests (without participatory and self-generated contents vantages) became intense

due to the rate at which people are pedalling towards online media use, conventional media are wanting. Individual rights to have his/her interest or opinion heard and considered in relation to the amount of attention, consumption, as well as contribution paid to social media fascinate every audience that likes to be active. These according to some studies could result to and be a justification for audience drought in the mainstream media (Bachmann, 2010; Chyi & Lee, 2013; Linders, 2012; Moores, 1993).

As for every other innovation, emergence of social media into Nigerian media structure tread the line of market differentiation. Economic imbalance, which defeated public acquisition of necessary phone gadgets, internet mechanism and subscriptions, and the level of education required to manipulate the gadget and to contribute to the media contents brought about social stratification of the audience of social media. Until the level of adoption of the media ripples through the early majority and partially late majority adopters, (Rogers, 2004) social media influence was not felt within the cycle of political ideologists and analysts among the most pronounced segment of Nigerian population online.

Prior 2011 election, subscription to and usage of social media platforms for political movement were not well pronounced in Nigeria. Despite that some of the popular social media were in existence prior 2011, they were more used for social functions and entertainment than political participation. The subscription to social media in Nigeria follows world pattern as Facebook made a giant stride in 2011. Facebook was not only subscribed to at the time for socialisation function but also for political participation and monitoring. Twitter also added some weight to number of users. Many of the twitter accounts were opened and managed on behalf of politicians, who were not used to the platform or too busy to explore its benefits. Other social media networks such as LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, Skype, and Pinterest aroused the interest of Nigerians as access to internet was becoming more lubricated though used more for social entertainment than politics (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013).

When 2015 election was approaching, the level of internet access had improved and the number of Nigerians on social media particularly Facebook and twitter swollen. It solidified the foundation upon which political wind could be blown. StatCounter GlobalStats reports estimated that about 85% of Nigerians on social media use Facebook in 2014. Those who made use of twitter account within the same year were about 12% with a slight increase towards the end of the year. The increment could be necessitated by the awareness on the suitability of the platform for political campaign partly experienced during 2011 election. Other social media platforms could only account for less than 3% of the social media users in Nigeria.

Internet access to facilitate social media use in Nigeria is considered undemocratic, imbalanced, and unevenly distributed. Some studies (Ohaja; Okoro & Nwafor, 2013) consider the concentration of the internet access in the urban gave some undue advantage to the urban social media users over the rural dwellers. The public voice in political issues, interpretations and analyses of political trends, as well political mobilisation and influence on social media did not reflect rural elements. Reflecting on

the two-step flow media theory, there could be an assumption that the social media users in the urban would serve as opinion leaders to influence the rural population on the political trends. Investigating on whether the agenda set by the active social media users on where the political wind blows truly reflect political calculation and decision of the rural dwellers could be another area of research focus. The emphasis here is that political agenda on social media are made to influence political participation and decision of the rural populace. Social media use for projecting political information and exploring political influences in Nigeria is rapidly growing such that its impact on where the political wind swing is becoming noticeable.

This study therefore aims to establish empirical justifications either for or against social media abuse in the Nigerian political fold using Facebook and Twitter messages in the 2015 general election as a relevant case. As the usage pattern of social media is expanding and the need for it to succour politics is undebatable, freedom of speech and unhindered access to information on the platforms reiterate its need. Since there is no specific regulation to curtail the excesses in the usage of the platform, there have been mixed reaction on the need to regulate social media platforms particularly for political use. Justifying the need for social media regulation or otherwise transcends the opinionated arguments but rather requires empirical clarification of the abuse. Analyses of the social media contents prior and just after the 2015 general election in Nigeria would present the nature of the media misuse for political purposes. Based on the nature of social media abuse, part of the objectives of this work is to establish justifications for its regulation or otherwise, and to suggest possible regulatory mechanisms approach that are non-conflicting with public freedoms and right.

## Literature Review

### Social Media Consumption of Political Messages

One of the many explanations for political crises and dangling democratic structure revolves round the people relationships within political milieu and social structure which are more often defined by the rates of attentions paid to the media (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2016). Through media-agenda setting function, people's actions and reactions to public issues reeks the amount of media consumptions and inferences of media structure and operation. The public power and contributions to define political agenda was caged by inability of the mainstream media (newspaper, radio and television) to allow participatory journalism in which the media-audience relationship transcends a master-servant structure (Ahlers, 2006). Participatory level in politics particularly among the young adults was as a result not commendable because their consumption behaviours of the mainstream media tilted more towards entertainment than political issues since there was no viable alternative media that recognise their voices.

The audience interest in media consumption rises at a geometric progression when internet connectivity creates opportunity for online media. Political issues benefit

immensely as the platform creates interactive opportunity, where audience voices count unlike in offline media (Couldry et al., 2016). Social media lubricates the interactivity further by allowing audience-generated news and discussion groups through which opinions are formed. Youth interest in political issues also rises alongside social media use as diminishing return to scale set on other purposes for which they use mass media (Bachmann, 2010). Robust young-adult population and their online friendly attitude arouse the interests of politicians, who care for numerical strength of the population segment for political gains.

Nigerian 2011 general election witnessed a subterfuge of social media activities despite the fact that the cost and maintenance of the media beclouded the vision to explore the avenue for political participations and advancement particularly among the middle and low-income literates in Nigeria. Yet, the taste of social media use during the period was highly appetising on campaign influence, public enlightenment, reaching people outside mainstream media reach, getting feedback on political manifesto, dissecting public agitations and needs, and uniting common and favourable interests of some target groups – all towards political calculations. It served as an eye-opener to some Nigerian politicians to recognise the media as an efficient and cost-effective campaign avenue (Adelakun, 2017). Gaining interests, which is the central calculation of the politicians always demand a medium that does not only reach the target groups but also facilitates, builds or reforms relationships that breed their political projections. Mainstream (offline) media cannot keep their audiences on a horizontal mode of interaction that enhances audience-generated information and promotes two-way communication as well as information exchange without barriers. The media cannot satisfactorily perfect the roles and as a result, most of their political-interest audience find solace in online media. Social media, which cater for interaction and feedback advantages within the radius of target young adults is thereby taking the edge (Omar, 2017).

The essence of social media, Facebook and Tweeter to be specific, during and after 2015 Nigerian general election planted chameleon effects on the adherent's expectations of the media. It left in the winning team a mirage of satisfaction in the media – it favoured them to project the kind of image that prospers their political wills and ambitions. But it paradoxically hunts them for accountability and transparency of policies and governance, demanded by the joint forces of the political-inclined youth and political oppositions, who are commonly regarded as public. Though using social media for similar purposes but variant goals – the young adults engender protests on social media by reinforcing public agenda on unsavoury policies and forcing changes in polluted governance taking cue from Tunisia and Egypt. The countries according to Rauniar, Rawski, Yang, and Johnson (2014) took social media influence on political agitations to hyper level that resulted in the topple of the reins of Zine El Ebidine in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. As the media dazzled the chances of the oppositions before the election, it placates them with opportunity to demonstrate their grievances against alien and unfavourable policies orchestrated by the ruling party.

Referencing some developed democratic countries such as US and UK where social media are used in pre- and post-election for mediating and moderating influences respectively to advance political structure and to ensure open governance, Valenzuela, Arriagada, and Scherman (2012) postulate a justification for revitalising social media to shield against erosion of good and accountable government and eruption of unpopular policies. Emulating the postulation could sieve the dregs in social media abuse to enhance even political communication in African and counter social media ‘cold-war’ among the politicians and their accolades in Nigeria.

Revitalising social media for political succulence houses both freedom and regulation. The freedom enhances the power of the social media users to orchestrate appraisal, criticism, protests, prosecution and autopsy on repugnant policies to ensure open and transparent governance. Such is the reason Juris (2012, p. 260) describe social media as a “decentralised and largely leaderless network of resistance”. As much as the freedom help the politicians to mobilise people during political needs, it does not only disintegrate the mob but also prod them to resist unpopular government and aberrated policies. Regulation is therefore meant to curb the excesses emanating from destructive criticism, intolerance and iniquities in demand and political expectations, insincerity of purpose in agitations or abnegations, as well as loosed, unverified, miscalculated, and pregnant information on social media, capable of bringing government or individuals to disrepute. The justifications for both cases are loomed to every society that allows social media for information diffusion (Khan, 2012) to flourish political consciousness among teaming young adults. But ensuring either of the cases will unmask the veiled intents of the advocates of freedom in and the proponents of regulation of social media use.

### **The Reign of Social Media as Mechanisms for Political Campaign in Nigeria**

Synthesizing social media use into Nigerian political advancement was belated partly due to economic squalor which robs many Nigerians of access to facilities that ensure social media presence, particularly internet connectivity. Not until 2011 general election, little or no record could substantiate the incidence of social media activities in the preceding political activities in Nigeria (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). Barrack Obama took the lead in 2008 as the first presidential aspirant to mobilise Americans towards active participation in political process on social media. Since then, politicians and their accolades as well as members of the public across the globe have beckon the platform for various political usages. The platform has made significant contributions to political development as it does not only aid information diffusion but also ensure participatory and self-generated information (Juris, 2012).

Social media is perceived as having mixed influence on the political advancement – as both the propeller of and hindrance to the development of the nascent democracy of many developing African countries. Access to analyses of policies and political structure on social media is currently overshadowing the mainstream media approaches thus enhancing political awareness, participation, agitation as well as

(media) prosecutions and persecution of err politicians. Nigerian social media ecosystem is progressively growing in term of usage, influence and effect since 2011 (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). Two major factors could be used to substantiate the turnaround – the first is the internet access on mobile phones at affordable rate and the power over usage control during the interval of subscription while the second hangs on the public awareness of the potency of the mechanism for political campaigns.

Interacting and seeking audience with the electorates or the public in actual sense is not much significantly bridled on the campaign grounds or on conventional mass media (radio, television, newspapers, and outdoor) in form of sponsored adverts/campaigns, paid or sponsored news, propaganda, and stage-managed public affairs programmes or money-induced editorials (Kavanaugh et al., 2012; Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). Since the two ends of political information are been transformed from producer-consumer affair to progressive partnership and complementary roles scenario, the need for social media to achieve the goal becomes uncompromising. Political participation becomes all-inclusive and voters' decisions are not only based or limited to what the media cook for people to feed on and digest but also what the people cook, exchange, feed on, and vomit for media to form substantial parts of media packages.

Social media played a crucial role in Nigeria's 2011 election in ways that the political players never bargained for. Some political events marked a revolutionary account in the media realm during 2011 general election (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013):

- a. Goodluck Jonathan was the first presidential aspirant to announce his bid to run the presidential race on Twitter
- b. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria absolutely revamped their website to become more user-friendly. *I think you only go the extra mile to really refurbish your house if you are expecting visitors. Unlike the past, visitors were definitely on the way this time, and they were prepared.*
- c. INEC also set up a Twitter account through which it educated people on how to go about voting, debunked false rumours about the commission or voting process, responded to queries and looked out for reports on rigging.
- d. INEC handed out a BlackBerry Pin via Twitter for voters to send reports from their polling booths
- e. A group of tech-savvy Nigerians developed an application that voters could download on their phones or simply participate via SMS to monitor the elections – REVODA. Google (Africa) partnered with these groups in monitoring the elections.

After 2011 election, the 2013 reports of Business Day Research and Intelligence Unit (IBRIU) and Terragon Insights records 30% internet penetration in Nigeria. It was considered a significant landmark and platform for social media to triumph. In a similar report by Terragon Insights on 'The state of Digital Media in Nigeria', in the same year, 72% of the people that have access to and use internet visit social networking sites. The statistics was also corroborated in 2016 when the Minister of Communication, Adebayo

Shittu, gave an estimation that 75% of Nigerians that use internet are on social media. It shows that one of the significant essence for subscribing for internet most often through mobile phone network providers is to access social media platforms (*The Punch*, Nov. 17, 2017). Citing Nielson Reports of 2016, which itemise the ratio of various social media visits by the users, the minister emphasised hyper growing of social media use in which about 80 million tweets per day and over one billion Facebook posts per day are recorded.

### **Freedom, Abuse and Political Struggle on Social Media**

Economic strategy to survive and remain in the media industry have questioned the integrity of many Nigerian journalists and mass media. The strategy also compromises the bedrock of journalism essence – truth and objectivity. It is not only the airtimes and spaces (in the mainstream media) that are offered for sale but also the media contents and the people behind the contents. Politicians influence mass media contents by injecting their voices into what constitute the agenda to influence the public perceptions and acceptance of the doctored agenda (Lim, 2012). The Editor-in-Chief of Premium Times, Musikilu Majeed, on Kadara Ahmed's Show, 'Herdsman/Farmers Crisis' on Channel Television, held between 8 – 10pm, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2018 enunciated that the mainstream media are emotional and ply one-way track on national issues. Truth becomes the first victim when issues on politics make it to the press or come on air. Public do not have much contributions on the news wind around them – they feed on the media contents that they have no input on how they are cooked. By the time social media was within access range and makes an avenue to discuss political issues, conventional media contents are scrutinised.

There is no argument about the influence of social media on the patronage of mainstream media. Youths are so engaged on social media that their attentions are becoming difficult to be aroused by the mainstream media (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010). Public priority has shifted from what the mainstream media say. There is drastic reduction in the power that the mainstream media enjoy as news breaking is no more their monopoly. News stories are not only broken on social media, but are also broken down to analyses, discussions and criticisms. Politicians took the advantage of the public obsession in social media to sell their political wills and to influence and unite common interests towards their targets during 2015 election. Prior the election, there was no controversy regarding social media use. Everyone, members of the public and the politicians within the ruling and opposition parties, saw and focused only on the bright side of social media platforms. The platforms became prioritised to fulfil the motive at hand (criticism and defence) (Lim, 2012).

When the election was over, the ruling party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) lost to the then opposition party, All People Congress (APC). The loser considered its low usage of social media platforms as compared to the APC domination of the platforms, as one of the key factors that shape the election output. Mr. Sentell Barnes, the Country Director of International Republican Institute, also attributes the PDP loss

of 2015 election partly to its refusal to recognize the power of social media, and its failure to synchronize communication channels (The Vanguard, July 17, 2016). Then, the need to recuperate was perceived dwells much on how to use the same platforms to effectively play criticism role as the new opposition party rather than faulting social media essence or contents. Members of public, particularly the political-informed urban youth could not but reinforce social media usage. Since social media give opportunity for: self-generated news to echo public opinion; analyses and criticism of issues and policies affecting the country; and suggestions to wrestle the challenges that constitute stumbling-blocks to development, its preference among the category of audience is second to none. APC does not for once relegate the power of social media even after it won 2015 election. It is just that its usage has changed from criticism-oriented contents to defensive and policy promotion or propaganda as the opposition would tag it. Despite the fact that contents of social media are full of unverified and spurious information, false accusations, propaganda, sensationalism, destructive criticisms, subjective analyses, and unsubstantiated assumptions, from the time of its adoption, it is alarming that hardly any record shows that any of the social media stakeholders pointed out any of these anomalies until about two years after 2015 election (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013).

Social media platforms bring plethora of vantages to political scene (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It opens eyes and minds of Nigerians to politics and create alternative avenue to put political office holders on their toes. Yet, it is not without blemishes as raised earlier. Owing to incessant allegations of social media abuse, mostly from the governments and its agents, the need for regulation seems plausible. How can social media regulation be ensured without curtailing press freedom and the fundamental human rights to information and expression of thoughts? Even in the advanced countries, measures towards social media regulations are yet to be finetuned. Regulating social media in Nigeria does not only raise a grave concern among the public and within the opposition party but also assumed wears a suspicious look. A bill was raised and debated at the upper chamber of Nigerian legislative Arm on the need to regulate social media in Nigeria. While the bill is at its embryonic stage in the legislative, it has become an agenda on social media.

### **Social Media Abuse and The Media Agenda**

The change in issue agenda most often does not follow a natural cause. Attributing media agenda-setting of issues to what media consider important for public to think about, is most often what studies (Kioussis & McCombs, 2004; Moon, 2013; Nwanne, 2014; Shaw, McCombs, Weaver, & Hamm, 1999) consider as the normal trend of the theory. This consideration substantiates the explanation on ‘where agenda-setting of an issue originates from – media or public’. Sometimes, market demand (public interests in an issue) compels the media to set agenda on such issue by making the issue the central focus of their reportages, while most times media emphasizes on an issue entice public interests and as a result making them the most important to the public. While trying to discuss the reciprocal nature of agenda setting using politics as a case study, Thesen



(2014) emphasises that though agenda-setting is still referred to as a media function, media agenda-setting of issues are sometimes triggered by politicians or public. It is upon this agenda corroborative influence that Thesen substantiated the relationship between media agenda and public agenda while discussing agenda-setting as mediated politics. Discussing the “degree to and ways in which media agenda influences the agendas of political actors”, Thesen’s attention was drawn to the question of “who influences who”.

There are substantive arguments from scholars that agenda-setting of issues is more of media function than audience-triggered influence on media decision on which issue deserves more attentions. Such is a reason why Shaw et al. (1999) emphasise that the implication of agenda setting is that the mass media are powerful and are dealing with passive audiences. And most of the earliest agenda setting studies emphasised mass media influence on audience than audience influence in the mass media. Considering the nature of social and online media and the ample opportunity that the platforms create for audience to pocket media monopoly of information, agenda-setting is becoming more audience-oriented than media-oriented.

Having established that the power to set agenda is not a monopoly of the media but rather a reflection of media-public reciprocal influence, it is necessary to discuss and establish how prioritization of political issues on social media drives agenda. The case is now between the public and the government or government and the opposition. Since contributors on social media are anonymous, it is quite difficult to determine who originate agenda. Fake names, unknown identities, and unidentifiable personalities are behind most of the conflicting contents on social media. Individuals do this to protect themselves from being responsible for the effects which the information they post on social media may generate. People in the opposition government also do so to make their submissions on the platforms look like public agenda. Government agents and their political allies engage in the unknow identities on social media to avoid being accused of partisanship. Many twitter accounts could not be sustained after the election because they were run by pay agents from the onset. Then agenda-setting on social media becomes elusive as there is no measure yet to ascertain who abuse the platforms (members of the publics, governments and oppositions or their agents), and for whose agenda.

## Method

Social media contents, (Facebook and Twitter) in the two months (January and February) that preceded 2015 election, and another two months (March and April) after the election were purposively selected and content analysed. The periods were focused because of the aggressiveness of the social media users to contribute to the issues on politics at the time. The pre-election period was chosen to establish the patterns of the abuse of the platforms during campaign exercise. The period after the election was necessitated by the intent to verify whether there is change in the nature of the abuse. Non-participant observation and monitoring of issues on social media platforms (Facebook posts and Twits from the accounts of the two major presidential aspirants

(Mohammadu Buhari (APC) and Goodluck Jonathan (PDP) were recorded throughout the period of data collection to ensure credibility of the data sourced.

A Facebook post or a tweet is considered an abuse of social media platforms if such content in part or whole conveys messages that are found to be offensive, journalistically unacceptable, and ethically debasing. Such abused contents are categorised as:

- Spurious information
- Name-calling
- False accusation
- Propaganda/sensationalism
- Destructive criticism
- Subjective analyses/assumptions
- Immorality/Obscenity
- War/Violence incitement

A total of 600 social media contents were sampled which constitutes about 20 per cent of the sum of the posts and tweets on the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the aspirants. The first 300 samples were obtained prior the election period while the second set of 300 samples were obtained after the election. The social media contents were thematically codified by three independent coders including the researcher based on the patterns of the platform abuse and in line with the agreed coding template. In the preliminary analysis using 5% of the sampled social media contents, Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), was used to test for the inter-coder reliability coefficient as well as percentage of inter-coder agreement for the variables involved. Deen Freelon's inter-coder reliability calculator (ReCal3) test on the variables (Freelon, 2013) gives satisfactory inter-coder reliability coefficients with ( $\alpha > 0.7$ ), as suggested by Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2002) and the percentage of inter-coder agreement of 97% achieved (Freelon, 2013).

### **Operationalization of and a sample on Specific Categories of the Social Media abuses**

**1. Spurious Information** covers all social media posts that are characterised with untrue information or lies, intentionally or otherwise aimed to confuse or influence the information recipients in decision making or contributions to issues in the platforms. A sample of such posts is:

**Stephen Smart**

*January 30, 2015 ·*

*lets compare de both candidates:*

*GEJ: has a certificate*

*Buhari: has a political zaga certificate*

*GEJ: campaigns with his wife by his side*

*Buhari: has no respect for women*

*GEJ: can lecture for more than 2 hours*

*Buhari: cant stand for 6 mins*

*GEJ: can give u all his mobile contacts off script*

*Buhari: cant reside just one*

*GEJ : Is properly schooled (Ph.D level)*

*Buhari: has a military training (he should collect an appointment to fight boko haram, if he is capable)*

*pls add ur own comparism*

**2. Name-calling** is used to denote the use of abusive words to qualify or describe some personalities without substantive justifications. Words such as clueless, senility, brain-dead, and many others were used to describe either of the two major contestants as contained in a sample post below:

***Hassan Olawale Nurudeen***

*11 Dec 2014 at 1:35pm*

*Watching the APC presidential primary elections live ...the manner of its conduct gives me a strong hope that Nigeria would get it right insha Allah come 2015. The delegates have lived up to the expectations by voting en-mass for General Muhammadu Buhari ....this is the man that can only dislodge the clueless president, Jonathan.*

**3. False Accusation** is herein referred to as false allegation. They are statements that are unproven and untrue in the spirit of deliberateness or deceit to bring down political opponents. One of the false accusation post before the election is:

**Louis Edafe Toweh**

*February 22, 2015 ·*

*1. Obasanjo's government spent \$16bn on power, and only achieved to change the name of NEPA to PHCN, yet some people and Obasanjo say Jonathan's Government is corrupt.*

*2. Olusegun Obasanjo and Atiku Abubakar were involved in a \$180m Hallibuton bribery scam that made world news, Yet Obasanjo says Jonathan's Government is corrupt.*

*3. Obasanjo's government, Obasanjo and Atiku spent about N1tn with Siemens for the production of National ID Card, with a N34bn bribery scam. I am yet to get mine, and Jonathan administration has embarked on a fresh one which is yielding tru NIMC. Yet, Obasanjo says Jonathan is corrupt and some gullible ones listen to him.*

4. Bola Ahmed Tinubu used Babatunde Fashola to build 1 kilometer of road for N1.2bn, while Akpabio builds same for N120m. Yet Tinubu and Fashola say Jonathan is corrupt.

**4. Propaganda/sensationalism** is an act of blowing issues beyond proportion for political gain. It is achieved sometime by overemphasise or deemphasise issues of public interest towards political calculation. A sample of the posts that portray this is:

**Goodluck Jonathan's Achievements**

January 14, 2015 ·

*The power sector is at the heart of our industrialisation strategy. We are exploring the potentials of renewable energy with the construction of two private sector-led, federal government-backed solar plants of 1000MW in Yobe and Kano states.*

**5. Destructive criticism** encompasses are critics of either of the presidential aspirants or their parties in a way as to bring them to disrepute. It is achieved by always look for the ugly side of their virtuous deeds in order to condemn such deeds or policies. A sample of such posts is:

**Mobecca Ij**

January 9, 2015 ·

*Fellow Nigerians, we have Just few days to our elections and below are some vital things we must consider before casting our vote.*

- 1. Buhari killed Ben ogedengbe by a death penalty for a crime that didn't carry death penalty when he committed it.*
- 2. Buhari doesn't attend the Federal Council meetings yet collects his allowances. Mr. Integrity indeed.*
- 3. Buhari cancelled former Governor Jakande's metroline and forfeited the \$50 million paid for it by the then Lagos State Government*
- 4 Buhari used Violence to stop the September 1985 National Conference of the National Association of Nigeria Students.*
- 5. Buhari jailed Tai Solarin and denied him his asthma drugs simply because he campaigned against military rule and for democracy .....*

**6. Subjective analyses/assumptions** contain posts that are biased in analysing the candidates or their political affiliation so as to win public sympathy for one at the expense of the other. A sample of such posts is:

***Adeyemi Olufemi***

*January 5, 2015. 10:00am*

*In comparison however, whereas the threat to the security of Nigerians came from forces external to government in the Jonathan regime, with the Buhari regime, government itself was the source of the greatest threat to the security of Nigerians. Under Buhari's regime anyone could be detained at his whim using draconian decrees, the list of those incarcerated under Buhari is lengthy, Sam Mbakwe, Fela Kuti, Femi Aribisala, Bisi Onabanjo, Bola Ige, Audu Ogbeh, and so many others. Individual security was so bad under Buhari that when Pa Adekunle Ajasin was acquitted twice by courts that found him not guilty of Buhari's accusation of corruption, the Buhari regime re-arrested and detained him under Decree no. 2. While Buhari detained Tai Solarin and denied him medication even while Tai Solarin was having persistent asthmatic attacks. Even worse, Buhari ordered the judicial murder of Bernard Ogedengbe , who was sentenced to death under Decree 20 for a crime he committed before Decree 20 was enacted whereas it carried a lighter sentence when he committed the crime.*

**7. Immorality/Obscenity** are posts that are indecent and offensive to public taste. Some are not even relevant to issues on politics. A sample is:

***Okafor Clara***

*November 29, 2014*

*Buhari is a political prostitute. From ANPP to NPP to CPC to APC. He has been sexually abused and divorced by various parties. After a brief romance, Tinubu will soon jilt him of the union.*

**8. War/Violent incitement** are social media posts that threaten unity and national security of the country. Some of such posts emphasise or support secession, ethnic intolerance, religious bigotry, and vandalization of public properties. They are more frequent on social media in the post-election than pre-election period A sample is:

***Chris Diri***

*July 5, 2015 ·*

*Shared as received!!!*

*From Bishop Matthew Kukah*

*Anyone who thinks the Biafra agitation is a nuisance and irritating should know that it is not the collective aspiration of all Igbos but especially that no one has the monopoly of nuisance. Nuisance begets nuisance. When you stay with potash loaders you too will*

*share in their dusty hair. It is in this country that the same standards are not held against all. Some can get away with anything, but others cannot get away with something. I shudder at those who blame the agitators for agitating. Everyone knows what is good for them. If you don't know what is good for you then shut up and don't obstruct those who know what is good for them. If I have my way I will cease to be a Nigerian because there is no sense of nationhood. Those who have leverage over others use it to oppress them. Otherwise how can you explain the audacious impunity of a certain section of this country. They can intimidate everybody even a sitting president and get away with it. When GEJ was president he was literally harassed by this same people until they sent him packing and we thought they will be appeased.*

### Findings and Discussions

The social media abuse thematically deduced from the sampled social media contents ranges from unverified and spurious information, name-calling, false accusations, propaganda/sensationalism, destructive criticisms, subjective analyses/assumption, immorality and obscenity, to War/violence incitement. Out of 600 social media posts sampled for pre and post-election periods, excluding accompanied sub-comments and comments on sub-comments, only 11% are from Twitter accounts while the rest 529, which account for 88.2 per cent of the samples are Facebook as presented on Table 1. Over 95% of the sampled social media contents are guilty of some of the abuse traits identified. None of the guilty contents is free of less than three of the abuse categories. More than half of the guilty contents have at least five of the unethical traits combined in a single report.

**Table1: Distribution of Social Media Contents Across the Sampled Months**

Period Sampled	Months	Social Media					
		Facebook		Twitter		Total	
		Jonathan	Buhari	Jonathan	Buhari	Total within Month	Total within period
Pre-Election	January	43	88	08	07	146	300
	February	40	95	10	09	154	
Post-Election	March	63	63	09	08	143	300
	April	66	71	11	09	157	
Total for Aspirant		212 (35%)	317 (53%)	38 (6.3%)	33 (5.5%)	600	600
<b>Total within Social Media</b>		<b>529 (88.2%)</b>		<b>71 (11.8%)</b>			

Based on the 20 per cent sample size of all the social media accounts considered, the Facebook account of the APC aspirant contain more posts than that of Jonathan more especially in the pre-election period. The wide gap in the usage of Facebook between the two aspirants reduced after the election, leaving the Facebook usage by the duo almost at a par. Jonathan used Facebook more after election than before as the number

of posts was significantly increasing after the election. Interestingly, Jonathan took a minor lead in the usage of Twitter for political contents before and after 2015 election. This confirms his interest in Twitter account, which is dated back to 2011 election; he set pace as the first Nigerian presidential aspirant to declare his bid to run the presidential race on Twitter.

**Table2: Abuse in the Social Media Contents**

Categories of Social Media Abuse	Selected Period of sampled posts and twits		
	Before Election	After Election	Total
Spurious Information	243	104	347
Name-calling	119	108	227
False accusation	191	124	315
Propaganda/Sensationalism	282	208	490
Destructive Criticism	121	132	253
Subjective analyses/assumptions	218	196	414
Immorality/Obscenity	109	72	181
War/Violence Incitement	13	134	147
<b>Total</b>	<b>1296</b>	<b>1078</b>	<b>2374</b>
<b>Percentage of the sample within Total</b>	<b>432%</b>	<b>359%</b>	<b>396%</b>

\*A total of 600 posts (Facebook and Twitter) were sampled; 300 for each of the periods

When comparative analyses are made between the two set of data, the pre-2015 election posts and twits are guiltier of the accusations than those that came after the election as reflected on Table 2. Except the contents that celebrate destructive criticism and those that incite to violence, secession or war, which are mostly orchestrated and fuelled by the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) saga after the election, other accusations are overwhelming in the pre-election social media contents than the post-election period. Perhaps, the emphasis on the incitement to violence, secession or war, which are considered detrimental to unity and national security of the country generated the uproar on the need to regulate social media.

Considering the social media abuse in politics, does regulation requires to sanctify the platforms? The social media contents after 2015 election were characterised with more of destructive criticism and war/violent incitements than any other form of abuse. Although other forms of accusations against social media were not permeated in the posts, debate on the need to regulate social media or otherwise does not form a central team in any of the social media contents. None of the posts denied or vindicated social media of the allegations against it, rather they were addressing the fear of deprivatation of freedom of speech. Some others take on government double standard; seeing the call for regulation as political whip to control the criticisms of government obnoxious policies as reflected in some posts cited below:

***Garba Al-farouq:***

*Vote the incompetent out! We are tired of Mulkin Ganin-drama. Social Media Regulation Law will not stand in Nigeria. We voice our problems out! Get your PVC's and fight for your right come 2019 election.*

**Matthew Sho'boi Onyemaenu:**

*You cannot use social media, the greatest invention for the propagation Free Speech to call for the regulation of free speech in the guise of asking government to clamp down on Hate Speech. If people thought like that, there wouldn't be Facebook, Twitter etc. how can anyone not be terrified by the prospect of government regulating free speech in a fledgling democracy like ours? That is like suggesting we subsume our modest progress in a pseudo-dictatorship of notoriously power-drunk, incompetent and vile men. Or do these guys fancy that their loud cheering of the current man in power will secure for them some form of immunity after they install their craved dictatorship? What happens when he leaves Aso Rock and they too find themselves in the same position as those they wish locked away today for demanding responsible leadership and the next government advances the same undue censorship against them? Is that how to grow democracy? .....*

Comments that follow some of the social media posts, condemning the unethical parts or whole buttress that the overwhelming number of social media users are conscious of the platforms abuse. For examples:

**Olumide Iluyomade:**

*Michael Chukwuka (below) is a prime example of the kind of dangerous, reckless and irresponsible citizenry that has been fostered in Nigeria whereby for political, ethnic or religious reasons, citizen mindlessly fabricate spurious tales, mendacious rumours and engage in fear-mongering, with the deliberate intent of causing chaos and maintaining or inducing an emotive, contentious and inflammatory responses from the public to the utter chagrin of the targeted authority. The image being shared below is several years old. It was occasioned when armed robbers caused the death of several passengers of a luxurious bus which they had robbed and thereafter, forced the passengers to lie flat on the highway! Tragically, an unsuspecting oncoming bus ran over them! Michael Chukwuka ought to be jailed for mendacity and falsification.*

**Sofowora Tobi:**

*When I supported the regulation of social media activities, some people started calling me names, Oya tell me, why would any sane person post this.*

**Layole Adekunle Adeola:**

*Exactly same way Rwanda genocide started, this guy should be put behind bars for many years*



## Conclusion

It is apparent that social media are abused as people are exercising the freedom of speech. The appetite for participatory journalism, which the mainstream media have denied them for ages is regained and utilised without much caution. Government and politicians also use the same media to advance their political objectives as reflected in 2011 and 2015 general election. Another fact that emerged is that social media abuse had been noticed from the time the innovation was embraced as an impetus to succour Nigeria democracy. There is also a conspicuous suspicion from members of the public that the government determination to regulate social media is a plan to control the level of criticism against its policies. Capitalising on the social media abuse as a reason for social media regulation is considered as an excuse to achieve the goal. Protection of national security, national interest, and national unity as well as curbing incitements that are likely to jeopardize peaceful coexistence of Nigerians would be undebatable excuses to any reasonable person. Relatedly, there is no modality yet that could regulate social media without any infringement on freedom of speech. Monitoring of social media activities by the military for national security purpose has been tagged a violation of constitution and international guaranteed right to freedom of expression and privacy online by Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP). The organization's demand followed reported statement by the Director of Defence Information, Major-General John Enenche, that the activities of Nigerians on the social media are now being monitored for hate speech, anti-government and anti-security information by the military. The military justified this move on the alleged grounds of troubling activities and misinformation capable of jeopardizing the unity of the country. Suggesting the way forward would require harmonization of these facts and the intents behind each.

Self-regulation of social media contents may not be the active measure yearning for but will at least prepare a foundation on whatever regulating strategy that does not subjugate freedom of expression for totalitarianism. The recommendation in the communique issued at the end of Extraordinary Meeting of NCI on Hate Speeches, Fake News and National Unity held in Jos, Plateau state, which emphasise setting up of a Council to regulate the use of social media in Nigeria, can also make a respite towards the conflicting interests. Since vetting or editing posts on social media might prove difficult as noted in the communique, information managers at the state level could open a website that would immediately counter reports characterized with any of the accusation against social media already highlighted.

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