RECONSTRUCTING POLITICAL DISCURSIVE PRACTICES THROUGH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES: A STUDY OF THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS CAMPAIGNS IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

- Rapid evolution in digital and communication technologies has impacted the mechanics and dynamics of our daily living.
- The revolutionary nature of new media technologies has provided a compelling reason for new approaches in political discourse research.
- Web-based technologies and social media platforms have improved our ability to engage actively in political activities and make critical choices in our socio-political space.
- Modern societies and communities are becoming more and more knowledge-based and digital-driven.
- Political and democratic discursive practices are being transformed every day

Harris (2007:39) observes that internet-based media platforms offer people' a place of sanctity for freedom of expression and participatory democracy.

Many scholars (e.g. Russman, 2012:115) agree that Social media such as Facebook and Twitter have the capacity to revolutionize public discourse as they encourage citizens to participate in politics and to engage with politicians.

SITUATING THE STUDY WITHIN DIGITAL HUMANITIES

Digital Humanities is defined as ‘an area of research and teaching at the intersection of computing and the disciplines of the humanities’ (wiki). … It is anchored on the conviction **that computational tools have the potential to transform the content, scope, methodologies, and audience of humanistic inquiry** (Schnapp, 2013).

DH AND CONNMDE

Background to the Study

This study applies digital humanities analytic methodologies to the compilation and study of online political text in Nigeria between 2011 and 2015

A range of digital media technologies were utilised for political and democratic activities

The study utilised Digital research tools for data harvesting and analysis. These include *SketchEngine, Topsy, AntConc, Wordsmith, Keyhole etc*

Description of the Project

The present study is a sub-component of a bigger project titled CORPUS OF NIGERIA NEW MEDIA DISCOURSE IN ENGLISH(CONNMDE).(A kind of specialised social web corpus)

- It started here in Chemnitz during my first research stay in 2014
- A specialised monitory corpus project involving the construction of 10 million word-tokens of a range of online discursive practices/online conversation on a number of key social, economic and political sectors.
- 1st Phase: Construction of the Corpus of Nigeria New Media Political Discourse in English(CONNMPDE)
- 2nd Phase: Corpus of Nigeria New Media Business Discourse in English(CONNMBDE)
- 3rd Phase: Corpus of Nigeria New Media Religious Discourse in English(CONNMRDE)
- Etc.
- - The Corpora will be uploaded on a dedicated user interface, website for global accessibility

Other Digital Humanities Activities

- 1st Lagos Humboldt Kolleg in Digital Humanities, November 2017
- 1st Lagos Summer School in Digital Humanities-(LSSDH -2017) (July 2017)
- 2nd Lagos Summer School in Digital Humanities-(LSSDH-2018) (September 2018)- supported by Volkswagen Foundation, Germany

These academic events were used as platforms to train and equip a new generation of scholars who are learning and applying digital tools for their research and studies.

Publications from the Project(2015-2018)

(1) Opeibi, T. (2018). *Reconfiguring our World through Words: A Critical Mapping of Discourse in Human Socio-Cyberspace*. An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of Lagos, May 23rd 2018. Lagos: University of Lagos Press, pp 133

(2) **Opeibi, T**., and Schmied, J. (eds) (2018d). *From Virtual Sphere to Physical Space: Exploring Language Use in Nigerian Democracy, REAL Studies Vol 13.* Gottingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 206pp(Germany)

(3) Taiwo R., and **Opeibi, T.** (eds.) **(2016).** *Discourse of Digital Civic Engagement: Perspectives from the Developing World*. New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc. 222 pp. (USA).

(4) **Opeibi, T.**, Schmied, J., Omoniyi, T. & Adedeji, K. (eds.) **(2015***). Essays on Language in Societal Transformation: A Festschrift in Honour of Segun Awonusi.* Gottingen: Cuvillier (GERMANY).

(5) Opeibi, Tunde (2019): Literature, discourse, technology: A digital exploration of the depiction of Lagos City in postcolonial writings. Web publication, Halle (Saale): Conference proceedings Postcolonial Digital Connections, www.zirs.uni-halle.de/en/proceedings-opeibi.

(6) **Opeibi, T**., Ademola-Adeoye, F and Adedeji, K.(2018e). A study of aspects of digital humanities in Nigerian democratic space. *Unilag Journal of Humanities, Vol. 5.* , pp 171-202

(7) Opeibi, Tunde (2018b). Gaining Political Capital through Social Media: A Study of Akinwunmi Ambode's Twitter Campaigns During 2015 Elections in Nigeria. Opeibi, T., and Schmied, J. (eds.) (2018). *From Virtual Sphere to Physical Space: Exploring Language Use in Nigerian Democracy, REAL Studies Vol 13.* Gottingen: Cuvillier Verlag, pp 1-30.

(8) Opeibi, T(fc) Digitizing Humanities Research in Nigeria: An Exploration of Local Initiatives. Joseph, K, & Risam, R.(eds) *Digital Black Atlantic xxxxx*

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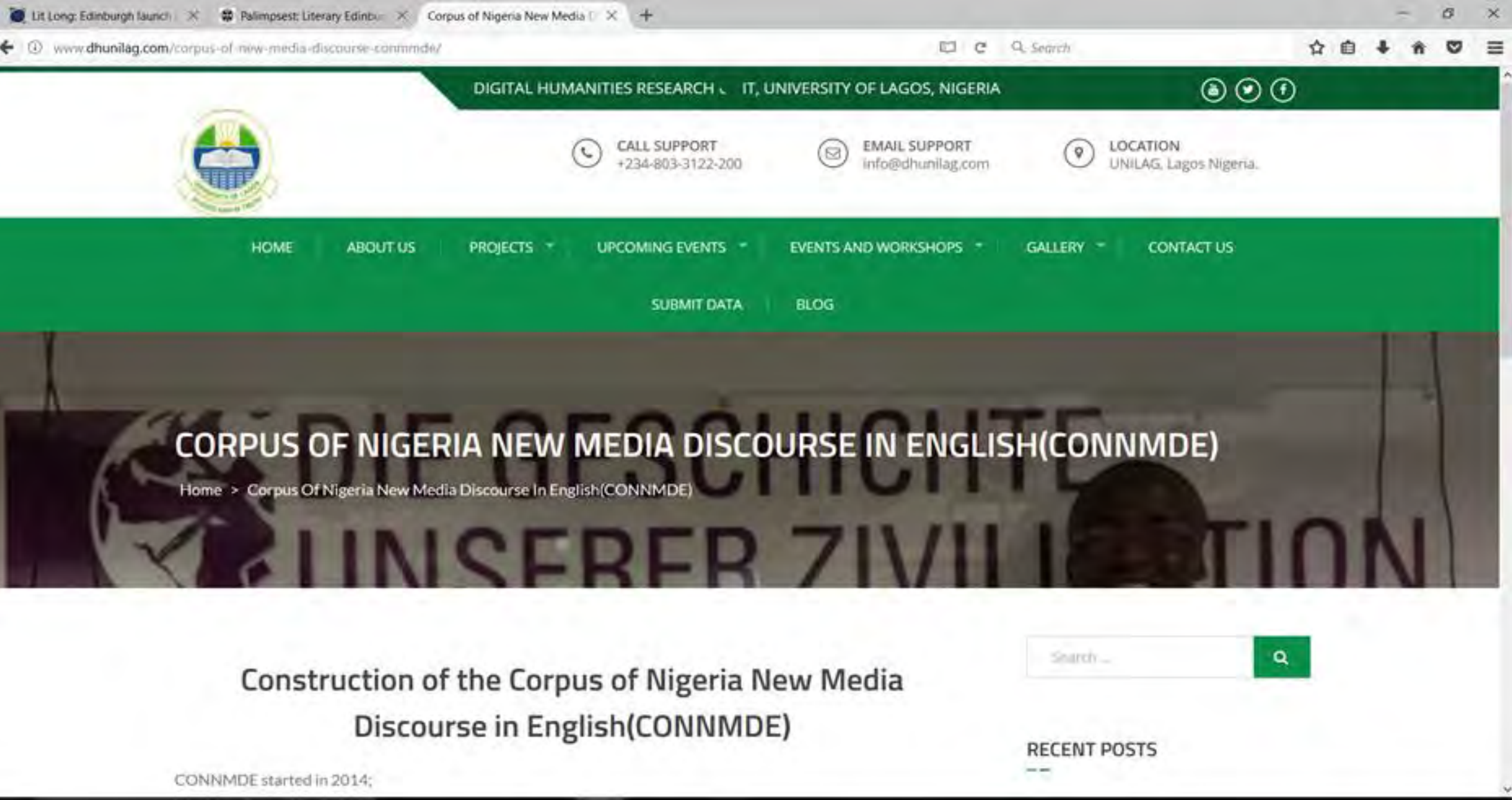
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The Present Project: Research Questions/Objectives

What specific new media tools were used during the 2015 elections?

Who were the active users of digital technologies during the elections?

How were the digital tools used?; In what context? For what purpose?

Does new media create ‘new politics’ and ‘new agencies’ while backgrounding the prevalence of digital and structural divides in Nigeria?

Can new media succeed in promoting wider social and political transformation?

In what ways have these new technologies contributed to the ongoing democratisation process in Nigeria?

Specific Focus

The study focuses on 2 major issues:

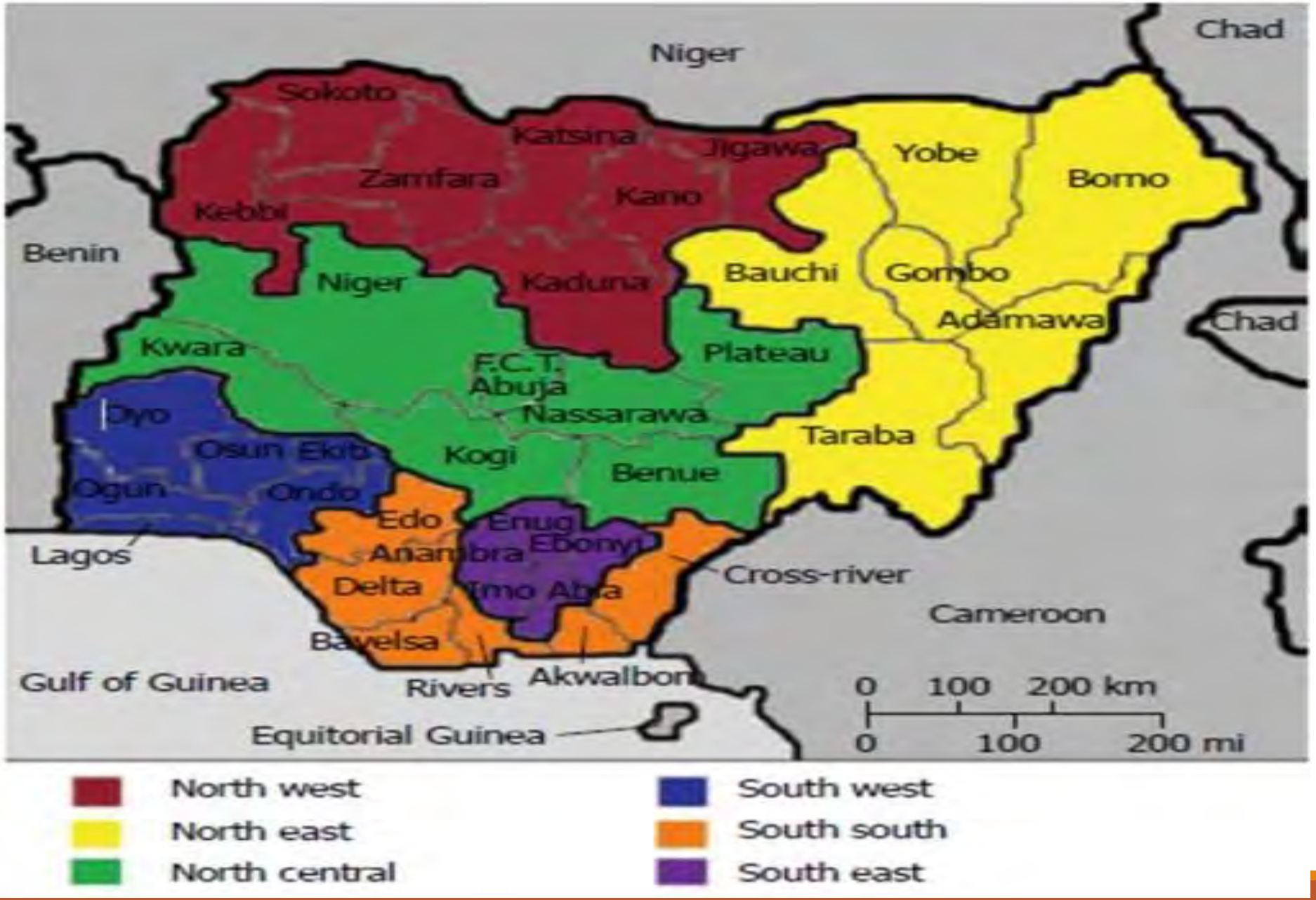
A: Digital Tools

1. The Use new media technologies for political communication & mobilisation
2. The use of new media for civic engagement
3. The use of technologies for electoral administration and political governance

B. Key Users of Digital Tools:

1. Political Stakeholders- Political Parties, Candidates
2. Citizens- Politically-active Internet users ('Netizens')
3. Third Party (Civil Society Organisations, Non-Partisan & Partisan Corporate Organisations).

The Socio-political Context of the Study:



MAP OF NIGERIA SHOWING THE 6 GEO-POLITICAL ZONES & THE 36 STATES PLUS FCT, ABUJA

The Socio-Discursive Context of the Study

Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960

- A couple of political instability from 1966 with the 1st military intervention
- Progressive but spasmodic Development of Democratic practice in Nigeria
  - 1960, 1963, 1979, 1992, 1999-date

Nigeria is now said to be in its 4th Republic from 1999(the longest uninterrupted so far)

- Progressive Development of Political Discourse:
  - 1999 & 2003: Introduction of mobile phones and SMS as campaign, mobilisation and awareness tools(from 2003)
  - 2003: Limited Usage of Partisan websites
  - 2007: SMS, Website, Internet, Youtube,
  - 2011 & 2015: A greater deployment of new media technologies

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES USAGE IN NIGERIA

1	**Mobile phone users**	**114.72m**
2	**Internet users**	**83, 362, 814m**
3	**Facebook users**	**7m**
4	**Twitter users**	**3.8m**

Table 1: Statistics showing number of users of major new media applications in Nigeria as at February 2015
Source: Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC)

STATISTICS OF POPULAR NEW MEDIA NETWORKS

S/NO	PLATFORM	NO OF ACTIVE USERS	PERCENTAGE of Penetration	Growth between 2000 and 2017
1	INTERNET	97, 210, 000	52%	45.699.4%
2.	FACEBOOK	16m		
3.	TWITTER	7 m	5.29%	
4.	INSTAGRAM	3.6m		
5.	YOUTUBE		0.11%	
6.	WHATSAPP	14-16 million		
7 8.	2GO Eskimi	10m (monthly) 8.8m (monthly)		

Stats as at 2017

http://webclick.com.ng/nigeria-internet-statistics-nigerians-online; /stats.com/stats1.htm; http://www.innovationiseverywhere.com/nigeria-forget-facebook-2go-eskimi-two-social-mobile-networks-matter/

- More than 70% use their mobile phones for social media activities.
- Active users are between 18 and 44 years.
- Coincidentally that is the age range of politically active population in Nigeria

NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES IN USE

- 2011: Facebook, Website, Twitter, Youtube
- 2015: Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Partisan Websites, Instagram
- SPECIFIC USAGES OF NEW MEDIA IN 2015
- 2015: Digital technologies for electoral management:

➢ Use of electronic card reader to promote electoral credibility, transparency, block electoral fraud, double/multiple votings, underage voting, etc

➢ Use of new media for political campaigns, voters' mobilisation, crowd sourcing(some candidates used it to raise funds), and civic engagement

- 2015: Digital technologies reduce post-election violence as all the parties accepted the results because of the level of transparency promoted through new technologies
- 2015: Drawback includes the use of new media to spread hate speech, false election results

Histo-discursive mapping of Nigerian Political Discourse

(1) **Traditional Political Discourse (1960-1992)**

-person-to-person, public rallies, limited mainstream media campaigns(interviews, news reports of political activities on radio, TV)

(2) Integrated Political Discourse (1993-2007)

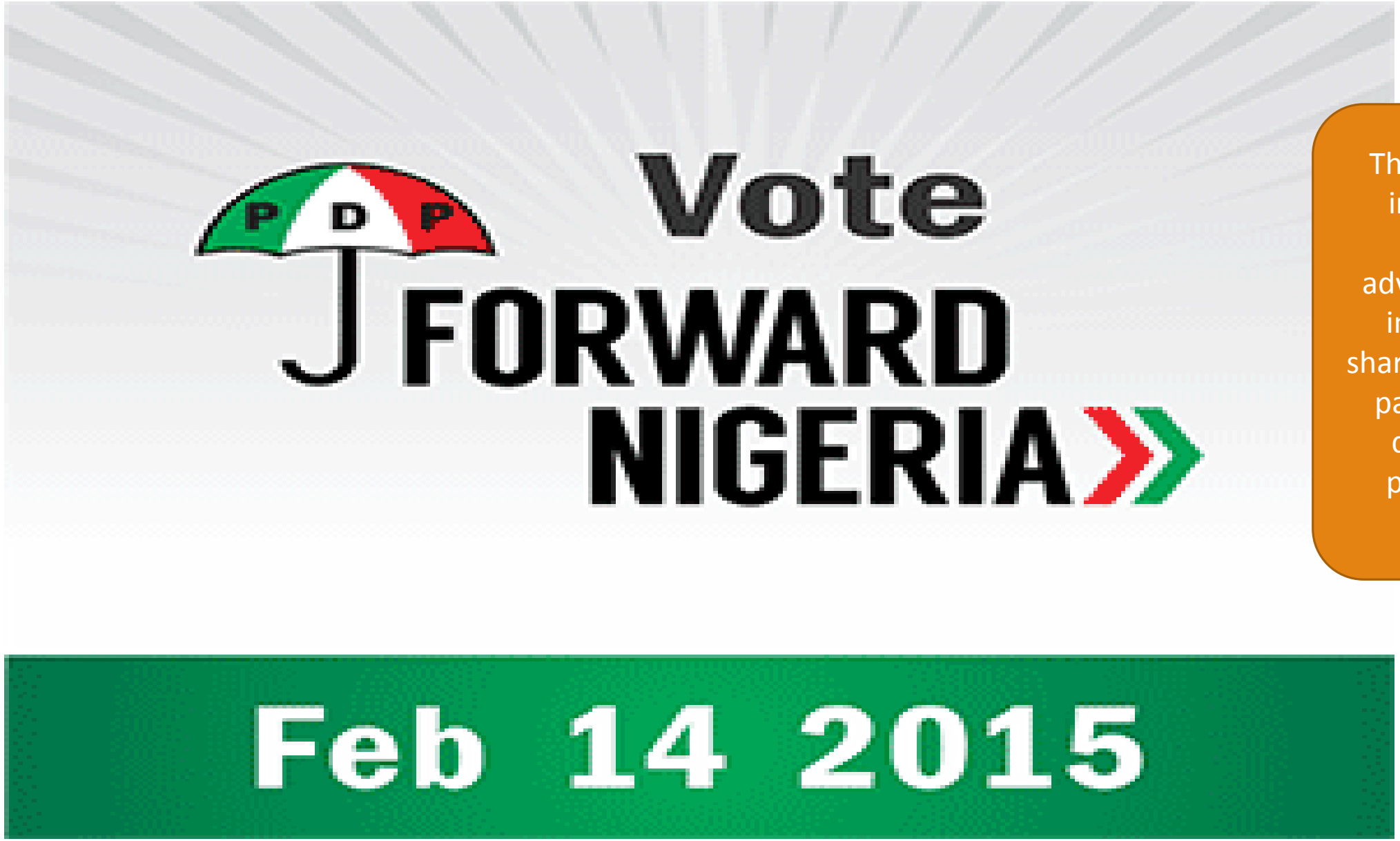
-person-to-person, posters, rallies plus ***political advertising, political debates***

(3) Multimodal-New Media Political Discourse (2011- Date)

This phase combines both aspects of traditional and integrated (1, 2, and the use of ***web-based/new media technologies*** *(Internet/Websites, Mobile Phones/SMS, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube)*

PARTISAN WEBSITES FOR MULTIFUNCTIONAL DISCURSIVE PRACTICES

THE POLITICAL WEBSITE OF THE ALL PROGRESSIVES CONGEESS(APC), THE MAIN OPPOSITION PARTY THAT WON THE 2015 ELECTIONS



The use of the internet for political advertising and information sharing about the party and the date of the presidential election

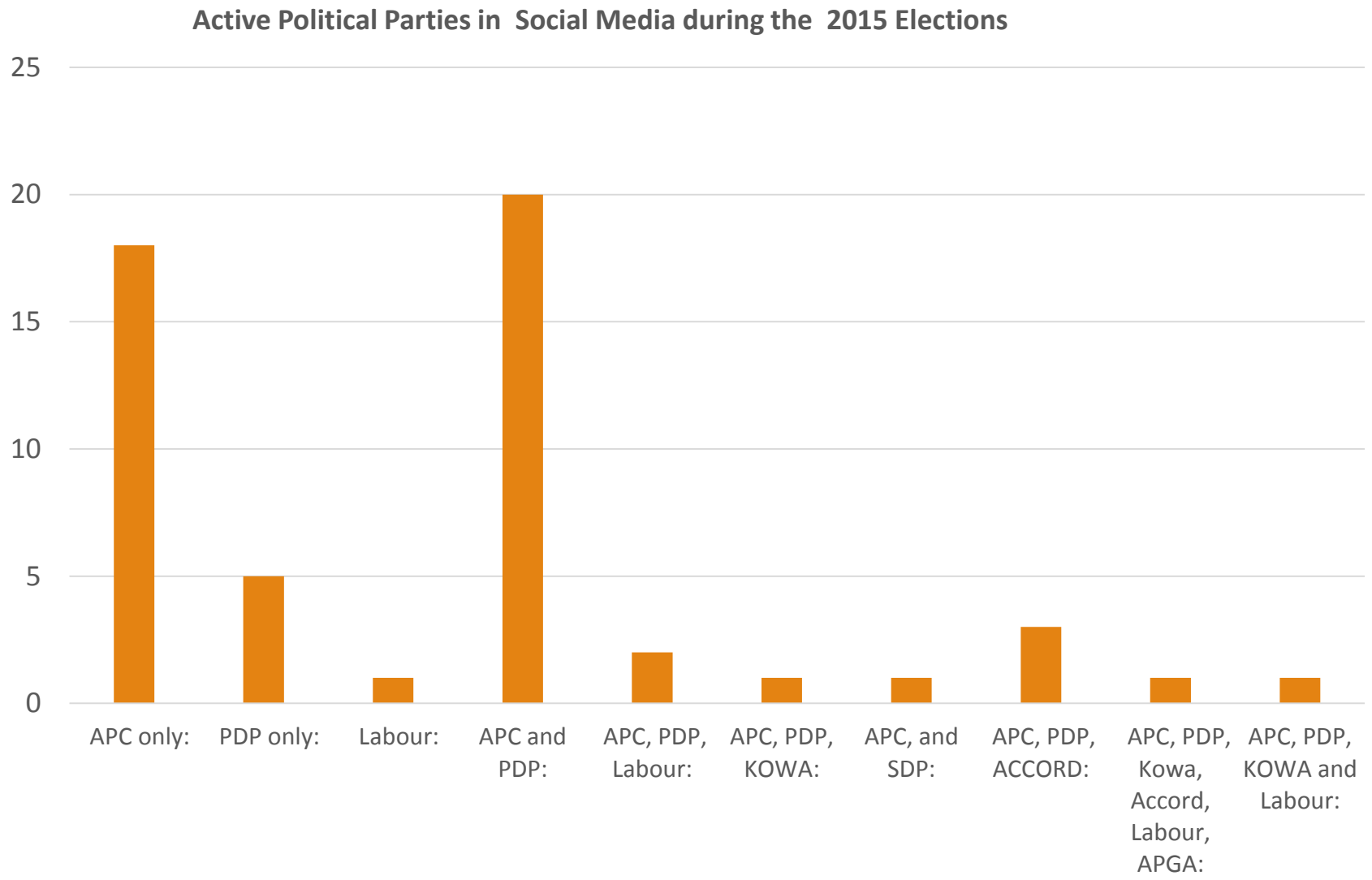
The Use of the Internet for achievement-based political advertisements - Ruling party posted achievement clips on webpage.

THE POLITICAL WEBSITE OF THE PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDP)THE DEFEATED RULING PARTY DURING THE 2015 ELECTIONS

SAMPLE OF TWITTER HANDLE USED DURING THE 2015 ELECTIONS

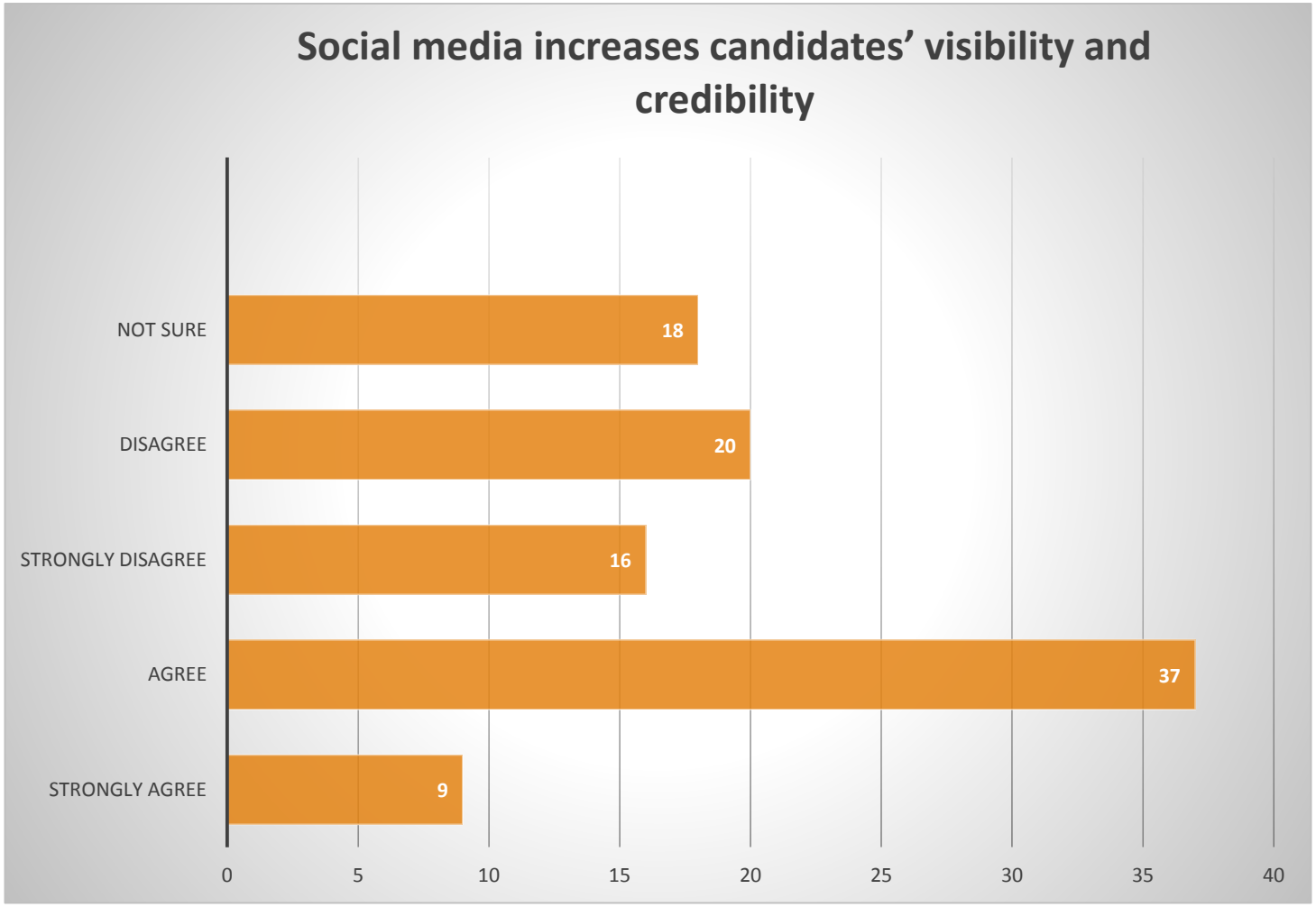
THE TWITTER HANDLE OF A PARTISAN 3RD PARTY GROUP THAT SUPPORTED THE RULING PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC PARTY DURING THE 2015 ELECTIONS

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF FIELD WORK CONDUCTED BETWEEN JULY AND AUGUST 2017



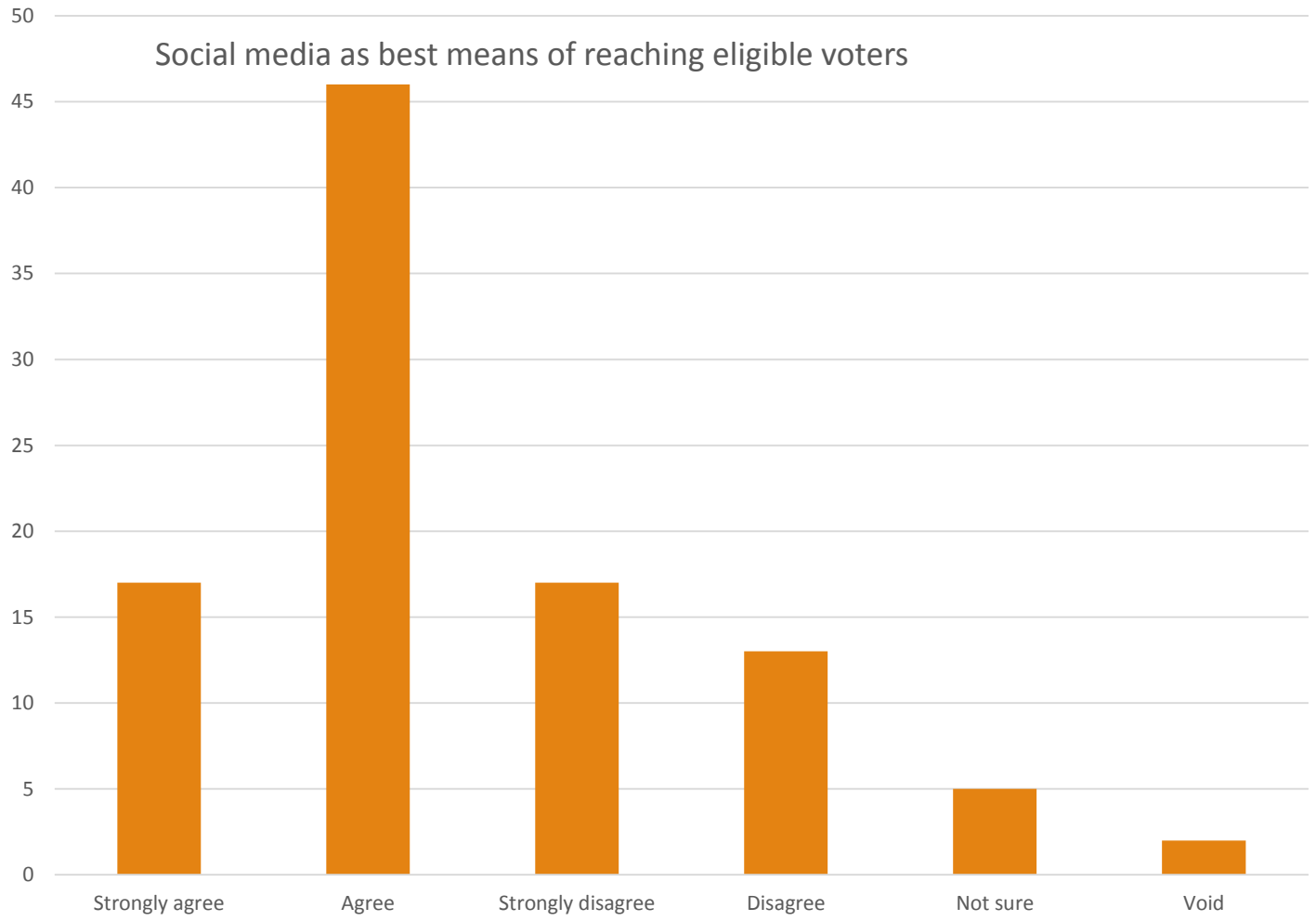
About one third of the research population (34%) believes that APC only was more active on social media platforms compare to the 10% who believes PDP only was more active in social media in the 2015 election.
However 37% of respondents believes that the 2 major parties "APC and PDP" were most active in social media in the 2015 elections.

Does Social media increase candidates' visibility and credibility?



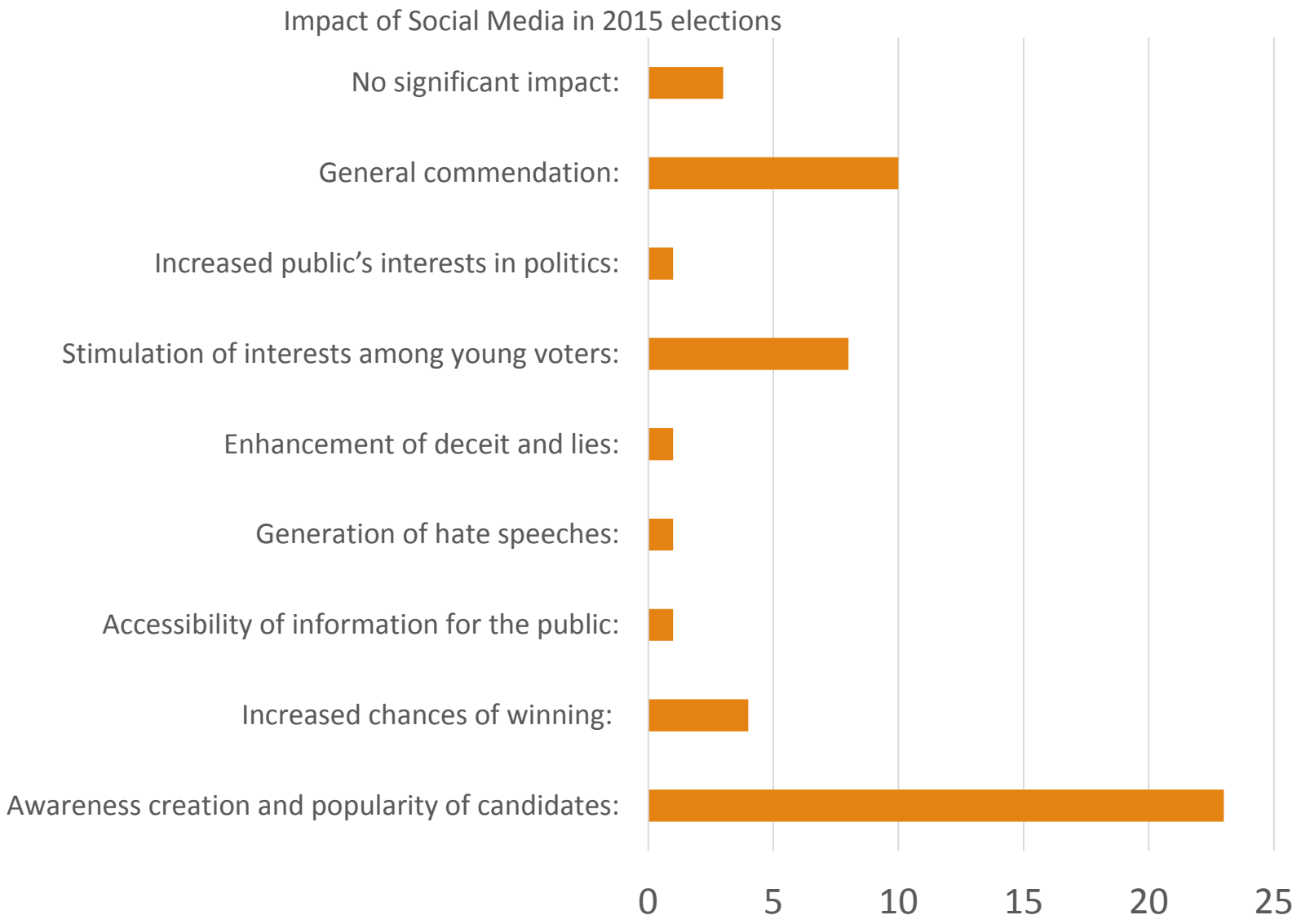
More than 50% of the respondents believe that social media has the potential of increasing candidates' visibility and credibility. This could reflect a major impact that social media now has on Nigerian Democracy.

Is social media the best means of reaching eligible voters?

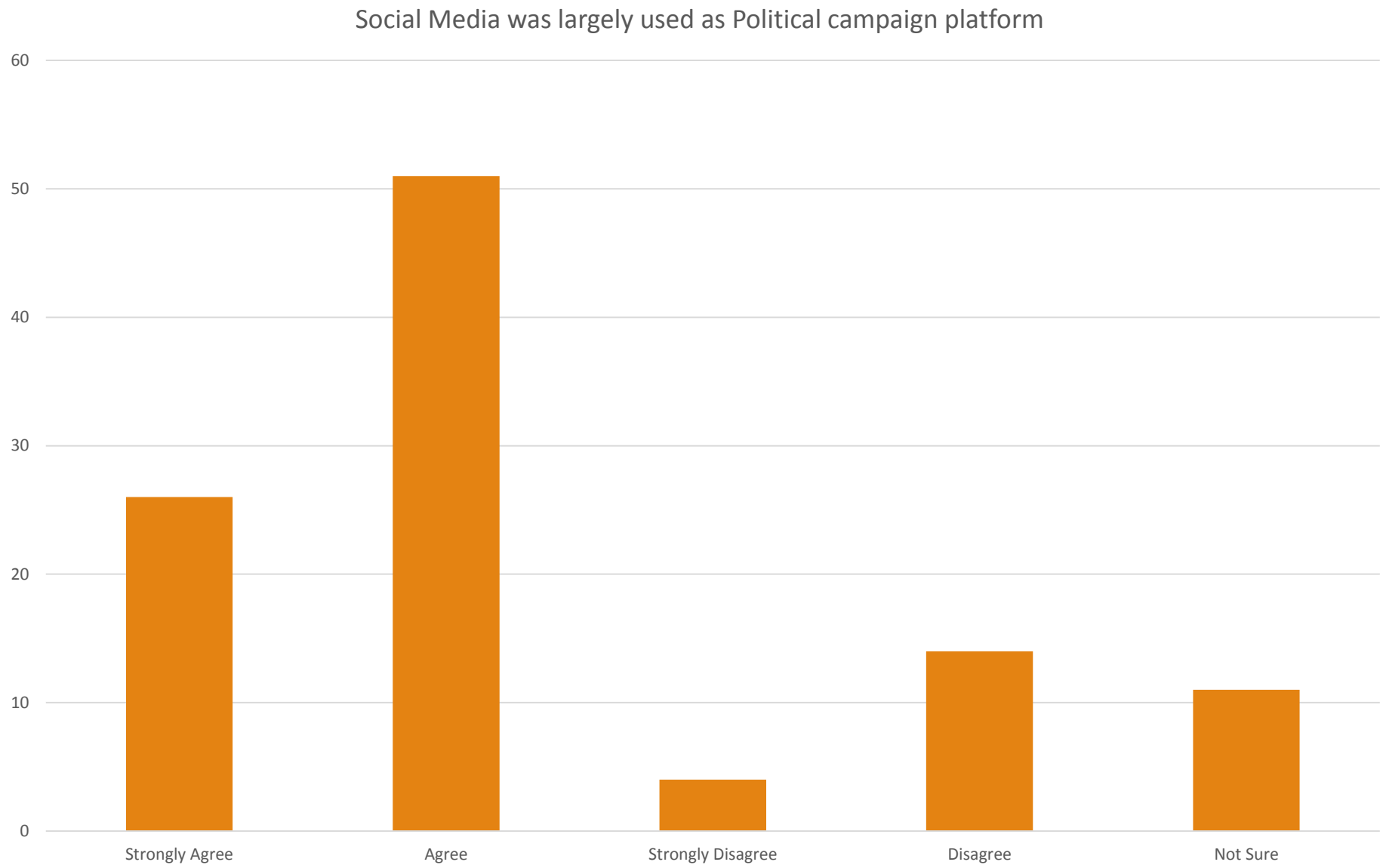


A relatively large group of people also believe that social media is the best and cheapest means of reaching all eligible voters.

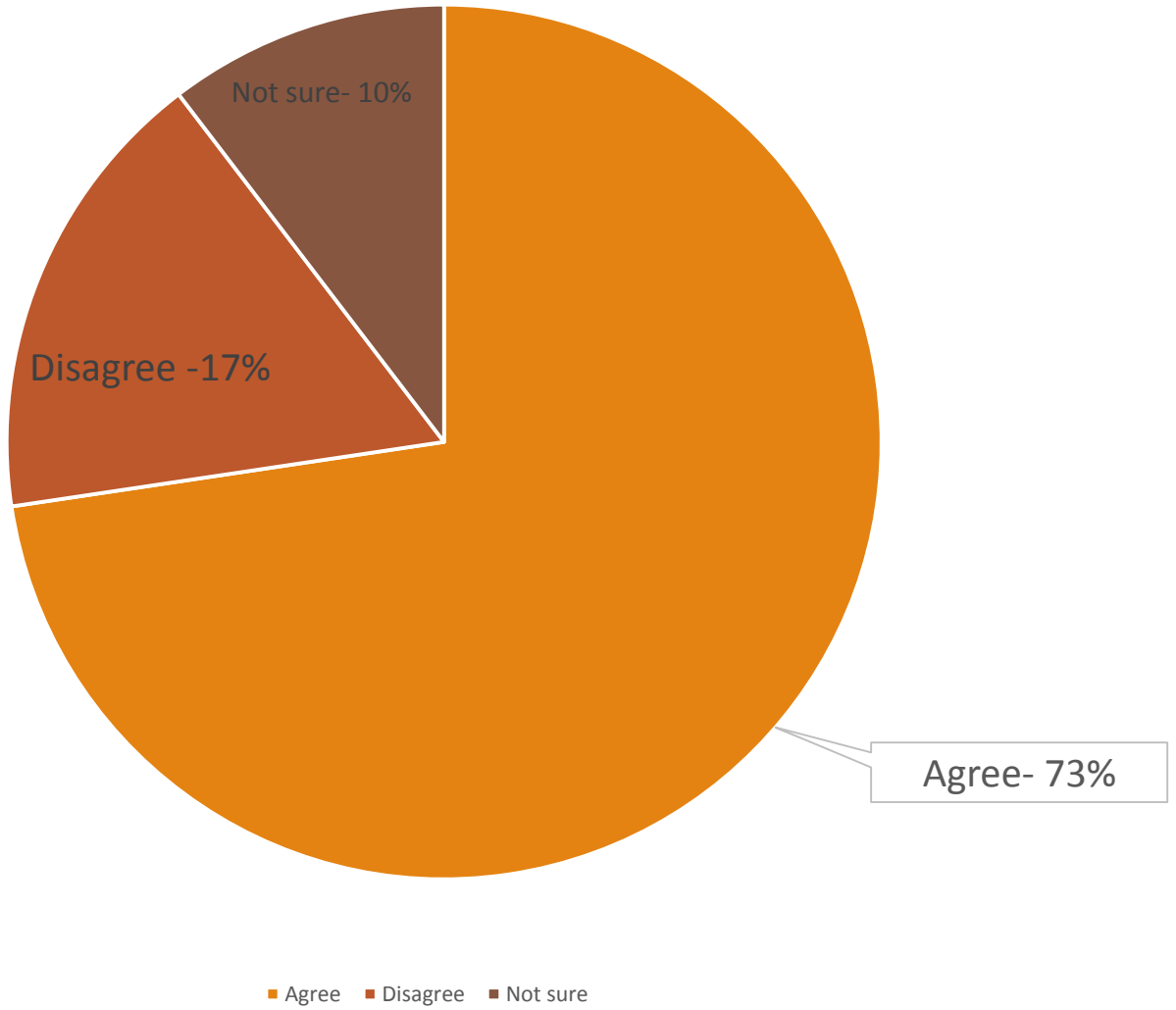
Do you believe that social media has some impact on the outcomes of the 2015 elections?



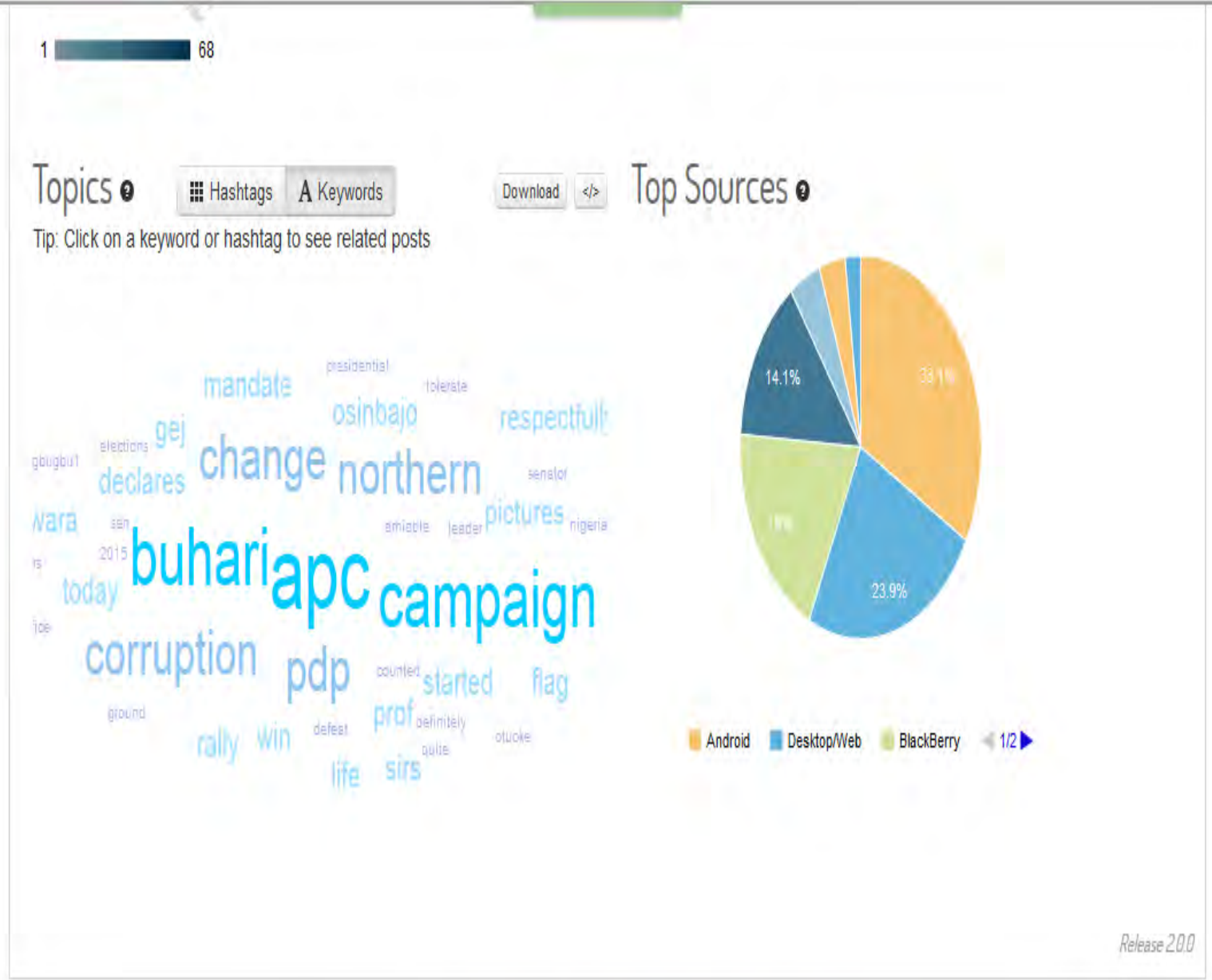
Close to half (44%) of the respondents are of the opinion that social media usage during the 2015 general elections promoted awareness and popularity of candidates.


Social Media was largely used as Political campaign platform
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Strongly Agree
Agree
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Not Sure

Social Media tools were used largely as Political campaign platforms



A combination of 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' in Slide 23 gives us 73% 'Agree'



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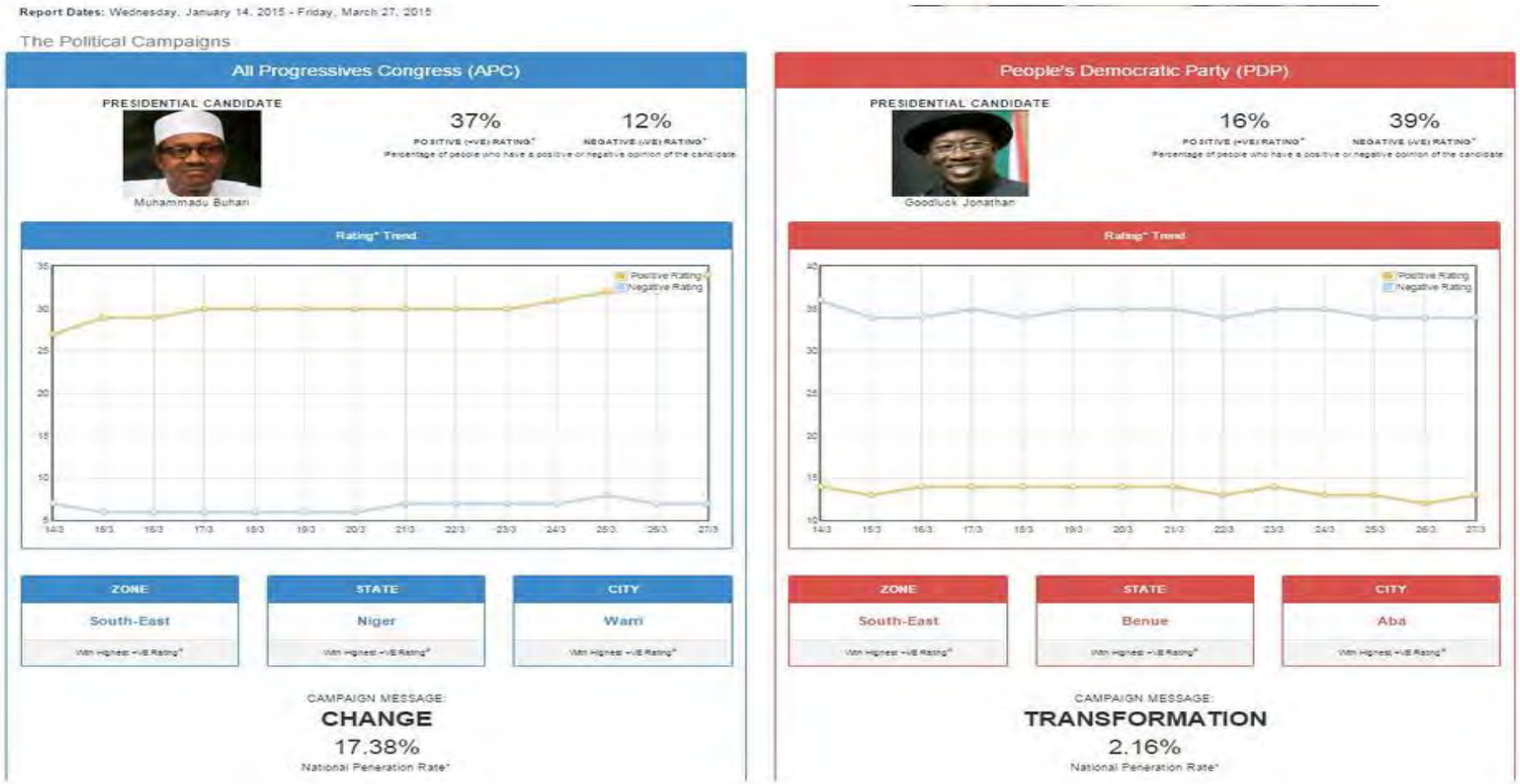
Word Cloud analysis of key topics trending during the 2015 elections in Nigeria.

February 2015

The main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress(APC) (at a polling centre) using his Twitter handle to encourage voters to also come out and vote as he has just done



APC was more aggressive in the use of the digital media scoring 37% positive rating above PDP's 16% positive rating

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KingMakers - website that tracks what the Nigerian public are thinking by analyzing Twitter data generated within the Nigerian borders in relation to the 2015 elections.

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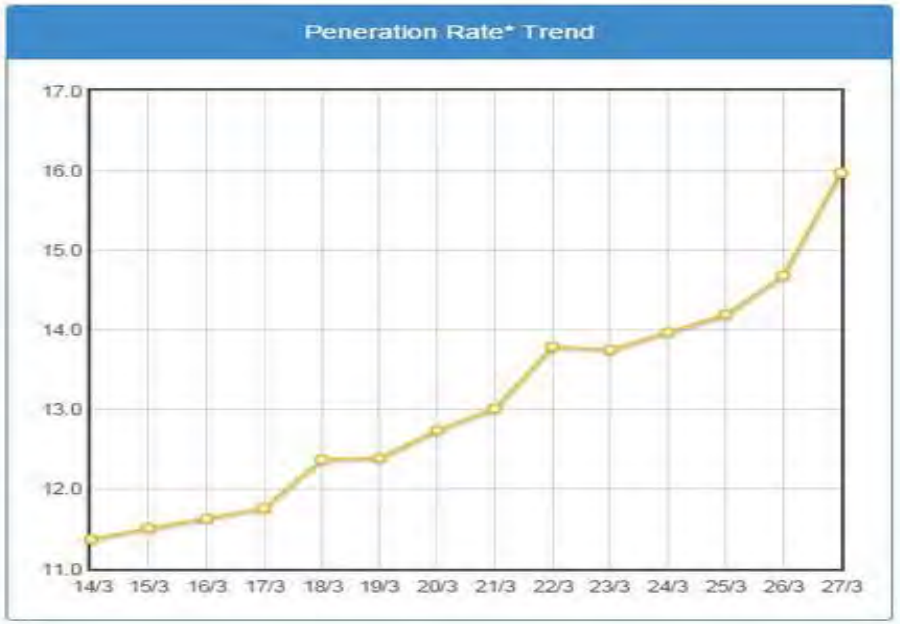
CAMPAIGN MESSAGE:

CHANGE

17.38%

National Peneration Rate*



ZONE	STATE	CITY
North-West	Kebbi	Gombe
With Highest Penetration	With Highest Penetration	With Highest Penetration

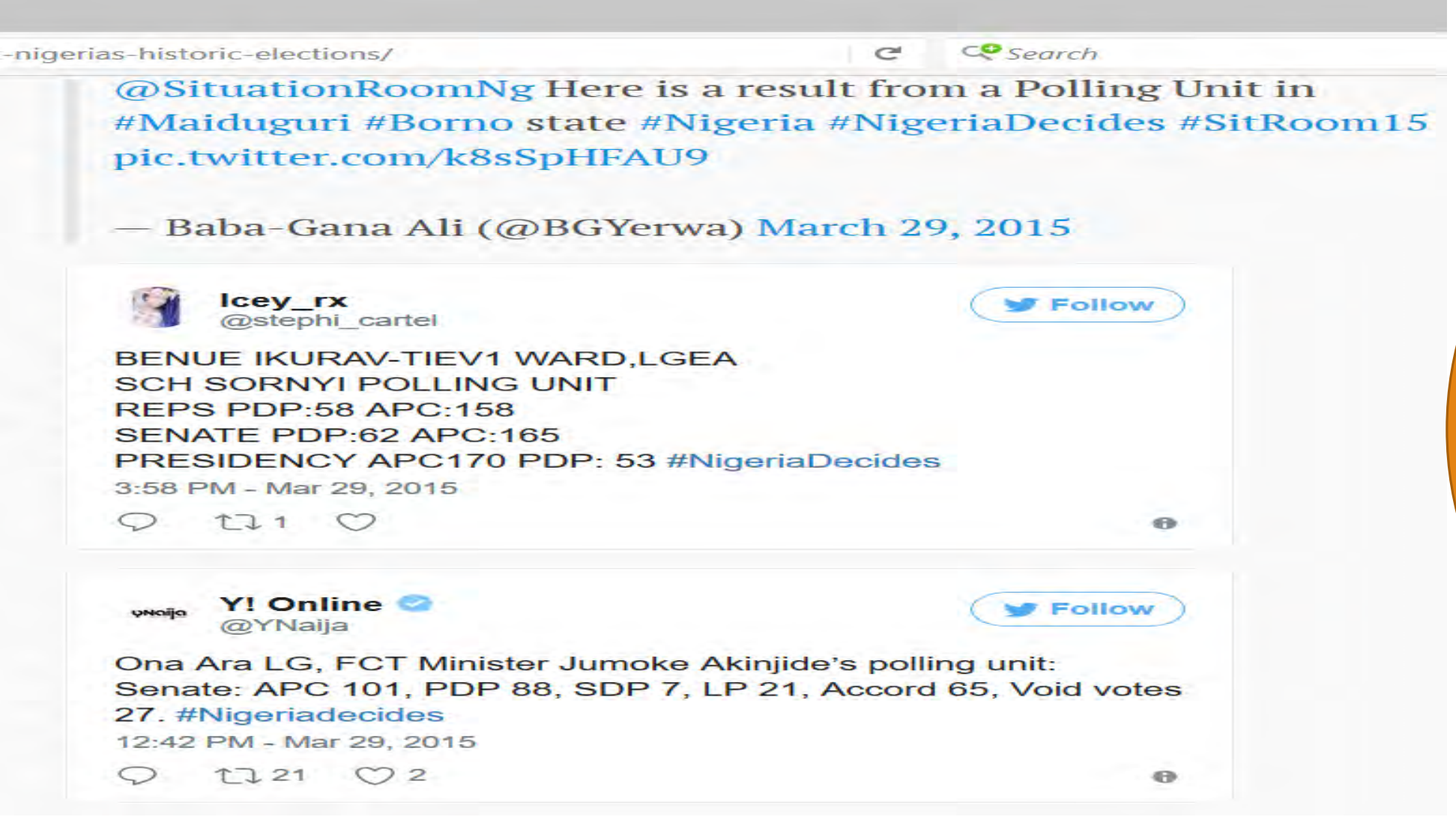
CAMPAIGN MESSAGE:

TRANSFORMATION

2.16%

National Peneration Rate*

ZONE	STATE	CITY
North-Central	Ekiti	Warri
With Highest	With Highest Penetration	With Highest Penetration



The use new media technology to promote the credibility and transparency of the electoral process. Voters posted results of the elections in their polling units in real time.

Preliminary Results

- We are making the corpus available online in a timely and responsible way so that that researchers can verify it build on it and use it to advance knowledge
- It also provides resources for political actors, stakeholders and policy makers to use the data map the development of democratic cultures in Nigeria, target influencers, monitor trends in the use of hate speeches, prevent outbreak of violence and the abuse of online platforms for propaganda
- It shows that more politically active southwest utilised online platform more that the north during the 2015 elections.
- Most active users of technologies are young and educated citizens. It may be suggested that the level of education may significantly influence the ability of the users of online platforms to influence others
- In 2015, Incumbency factor influenced the aggressive use of social media. Unlike in the USA where ruling parties/incumbent candidates build on the successes of the use of social media in previous elections(e.g. Obama 2008 vs Obama 2012), most incumbent candidates in Nigeria believed that it was their right to return to power without much efforts.
- The Opposition party(APC) was more aggressive and effective in the use of new media technologies and their electoral victory was partly attributed to the use of these technologies
- Financial costs and lack of sufficient IT experts to run online political campaigns may be a factor as many of the smaller political parties did not have serious online presence.
- Where opposition is active, use of social media platforms increases as other channels for mobilisation and civic engagement

- Online portals of some national newspapers provided alternative civic engagement space for interactions between the politicians, public officers and citizens
- Ordinary citizens in locations outside the site of political context were able to participate in ongoing political narratives
- Nigerians in the diaspora now participate in political conversation via online platforms
- Political actors now us social media platforms to negotiate political identities
- Social media platforms become a platform for discursive [re-] construction of political identities, political narratives
- Re-negotiation of language choices and identities in multilingual contexts[use of codeswitching as strategies to include and exclude online participants in the conversation

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