

# Tracking Social Media

THE SOCIAL MEDIA TRACKING CENTRE  
AND THE 2011 NIGERIAN ELECTIONS



### ***About the Authors***

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### ***About The Social Media Tracking Centre***

**Mr. Amara Nwankpa**, an IT professional and member of the Enough is Enough coalition led a group of young tech savvy volunteers to explore how social media platforms worked during the 2011 Nigerian election period; what trends developed; possible course corrections and what groups could learn from one another's experience. This report documents an unusual story of cooperation among civil society groups and individuals, INEC, foreign partners and Nigerian government agencies. It includes extracts from Mr. Nwankpa's power point presentations at weekly briefings.

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## INTRODUCTION

As a result of renewed confidence in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the April 2011 Nigerian elections were optimistically anticipated to be a marked improvement over the discredited 2003 and 2007 elections. The recently appointed INEC Chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega, a respected academic and principled activist, had completed a largely credible registration exercise and a higher proportion of the population was expected to participate in the election process. The INEC Chair encouraged the citizenry to not only cast their vote but protect that vote by remaining behind at the polls to witness counting procedures.

The Canadian High Commission sponsored a one-day roundtable on March 4, 2011 entitled "Promoting Two Way Communication between INEC and its Stakeholders". The roundtable was organized by the Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation and Enough is Enough (EiE), a coalition of Nigerian youth organizations, to address strategic communication issues in order to better ensure transparency and encourage public participation in the election process.

Facilitated by Dr. Judith Burdin Asuni, Executive Director of AA PeaceWorks and Mrs. Jacqueline Farris, Director General of the Yar'Adua Foundation, the roundtable featured four presentations: social media, websites, informal networks, and incident reporting systems. INEC was well represented at the roundtable, at the end of which Dr. Mohammed Kuna, Special Assistant to the Chairman, asked EiE to assist INEC with the development of their strategic communications network.

Volunteers from EiE, embedded within INEC, established a social media structure to allow for open interaction with election

stakeholders, including setting up facebook, twitter and youtube platforms. This was done within five days, significantly strengthening the organization's capacity throughout the election period.

Several civil society organizations established reporting platforms via SMS, twitter, websites, blogs, and phone lines. These included IAmLagos, established by a small group of volunteers and ReVoDa, set up by EiE. Reclaimnaija, based in the Community Life Project in Lagos, linked phone calls and SMS directly to INEC's hotlines. Project Swift Count, funded by the National Democratic Institute, deployed observers in the field, connected via SMS to a nerve centre in Abuja, complete with 36 state monitors and 6 zonal coordinators. A group of mainly Abuja-based civil society organizations established a Civil Society Election Situation Room, which received reports from the field during the election process and relayed information to INEC, the Police Service Commission and Nigeria Police.

INEC's own Situation Room engaged civil society. The Police Service Commission, Nigeria Police and Civil Defence Corps set up hotlines for reporting problems, as did the National Security Advisor to monitor incidents of violence. Political parties and politicians also employed social media to varying degrees.

Traditional media, such as Channels Television with its facebook, twitter and online broadcasting, and Daily Trust and 234Next featured online and paper editions as well as facebook and twitter feeds. Suddenly the internet and phone lines were abuzz with election related activities.

But what impact would any of this have on the election process? Discussion among a

small group of participants of the March 4 roundtable resulted in the idea of setting up an independent ad hoc centre to track the use and effect of social media. The reasons were two-fold. First, as the organizations involved in election monitoring activities using social media would be focused on fulfilling their primary mandates rather than tracking trends, it was felt that important real-time data on the role played by these technologies would be lost by the time a post-election review could be conducted. Second, an ad hoc centre approach would provide a reporting mechanism and forum where organizations would feel comfortable sharing their experiences and laying the foundation for future work.

Mainly the brainchild of Foster Tucker, an American consultant to the International Federation of Electoral Systems (IFES), the project was expected to explore how social media platforms were working during the election period; what trends might be developing; possible course corrections and whether groups could learn from one another's experience. Based on his experience in Afghanistan, the Philippines and elsewhere, Tucker expected the data to offer stakeholders an opportunity to perfect a monitoring mechanism that could track subsequent elections.

Within the ten days prior to the first election on April 2, the Tracking Centre was conceptualized, funded, and staffed. Amara Nwankpa, an IT professional who is the head of LightUp Nigeria and a member of the Enough is Enough coalition led a group of young tech savvy volunteers who took responsibility for implementation of the project. Funding and coordination came from the Yar'Adua

Foundation. The tracking centre operated over four election periods during the month of April 2011. This report documents an unusual story of cooperation among civil society groups and individuals, INEC, foreign partners, and Nigerian government agencies. It includes extracts from Amara Nwankpa's power point presentations at weekly briefings.

The report will also attempt to describe the Social Media Tracking Centre and analyze the role of social media in the 2011 elections within the rapidly changing context of social media worldwide and the Arab Spring. Although the estimated 70,000 voters who contributed reports and comments may seem small out of a registered 73 million voters, this is the first Nigerian election in which social media played a role and appears to be the beginning of a new trend.

It is fair to say that Nigeria may have begun its own 2011 Spring with a heightened level of awareness and participation by citizens in their governance process.

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## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA TRACKING CENTRE

Statistics presented at the March 4 roundtable indicate that out of a population of approximately 150 million Nigerians, 87 million own mobile phones that can send and receive SMS messages and 44 million have internet access. Approximately 3 million Nigerians are on facebook and 60,000 on twitter.

The sheer availability of this new media is changing the electoral environment where previous elections were often manipulated behind the scenes with results altered by politicians and the electoral commission itself. This led to apathy among voters as they felt disconnected from the political process.

The introduction of social media meant that even untrained citizens could share their objective and subjective election experiences. The Reclaimnaija launch in late March 2011 demonstrated a change in mood as hundreds of community activists, ranging from motorbike and taxi drivers to market women, hairdressers and battery chargers, stood and held their mobile phones aloft, chanting "The power is in our hands."

Across the country, a non-violent Nigerian Spring of citizen empowerment was witnessed and key government agencies expressed receptivity to citizen participation. As a result, there was need to document this momentum in numbers and attempt to put meaning to it.

As explained above, the Social Media Tracking Centre was conceived following the March 4 roundtable. With funding from the Yar'Adua Foundation, a suite was rented in a modest hotel in Abuja for the four periods of the April elections. Amara Nwankpa and Foster Tucker sought technical assistance from the Berkman Center at Harvard University, and later Georgia Tech University.

Volunteers who contributed their time and expertise included: Emmanuel Otokpa, Rosemary Ajayi, Manre Chirtau, Alkassim Abdulkadir, Diane Nduonofit, Eunice Atajir, Fatu Ogwuche, Debbie Mangut, Byenya Chirtau, Yemi Adamolekun, Chioma Chuka, and Aninoritse Odeli-Serrano. The limited budget of N2million allowed only for payment of hotel rooms, food, phone cards and incidentals. Volunteers used their own laptops equipped with internet modems. A printer and large screen enabled the Centre to follow trends.

The Tracking Centre was open from Friday afternoon preceding the Saturday elections and ran through Monday mid-day in order to capture traffic related to election results. The exception was the Tuesday, April 26 Gubernatorial and State Assembly election when the Tracking Centre was open from Monday evening to Wednesday mid-day.

International election partners, including the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the British High Commission Department for International Development (DFID), the MacArthur Foundation, the Canadian High Commission and a European Union delegation visited the Tracking Centre.

During the first election, Sweeper (Swift River) software was used to mine real time content from seven platforms: Reclaimnaija.net; ReVoDa; Nigerianelections.org; INEC; IFES/NEVR, twitter and facebook. Ushahidi software was used to categorize and map posts and comments. Data collation included incident reports, including violence, fraud and administrative lapses, incidental or deliberate disruptions of network providers as well as geographic specific information. Information was crowdsourced. Reports, pictures and videos were voluntarily provided by voters in order to express opinions, present evidence and garner feedback.

As momentum built over subsequent elections, with 50 tweets per second, Sweeper was overwhelmed. The Tracking Centre was challenged to identify tools able to collect data in real time. Amara worked in partnership with the Technologies & International Development Lab at Georgia Tech University in the U.S. to develop and adapt a software tool, Aggie the MetaAggregator in order to allow tracking of interactive communication.

Aggie proved to be most effective in providing an interface for scanning reports and providing a map based incident reporting mechanism for some areas of the country as well as an automatic classification of reports based on content and election related locations. For example, Aggie shows the rising number of incidents on April 18 following the Presidential election. It also tracked references to two key words that trended highest on that day: Buhari (CPC Presidential Candidate) and Kaduna (a northern state) where most reports of violence originated.

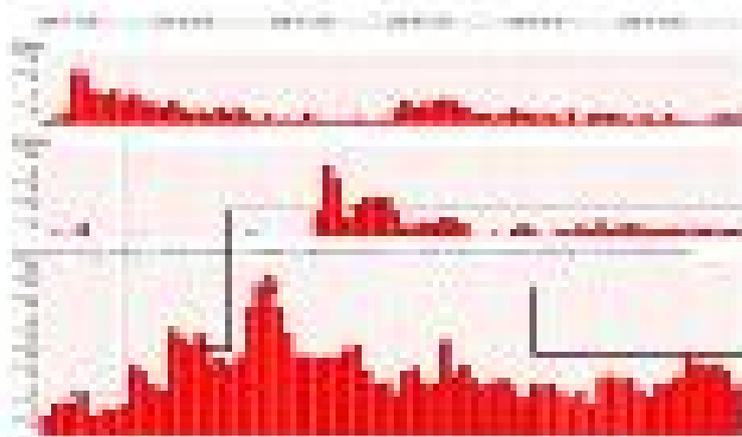
...out of a population of approximately 150 million Nigerians, 87 million own mobile phones that can send and receive SMS messages and 44 million have internet access. Approximately 3 million Nigerians are on facebook and 60,000 on twitter.

### Mayhem after the Elections

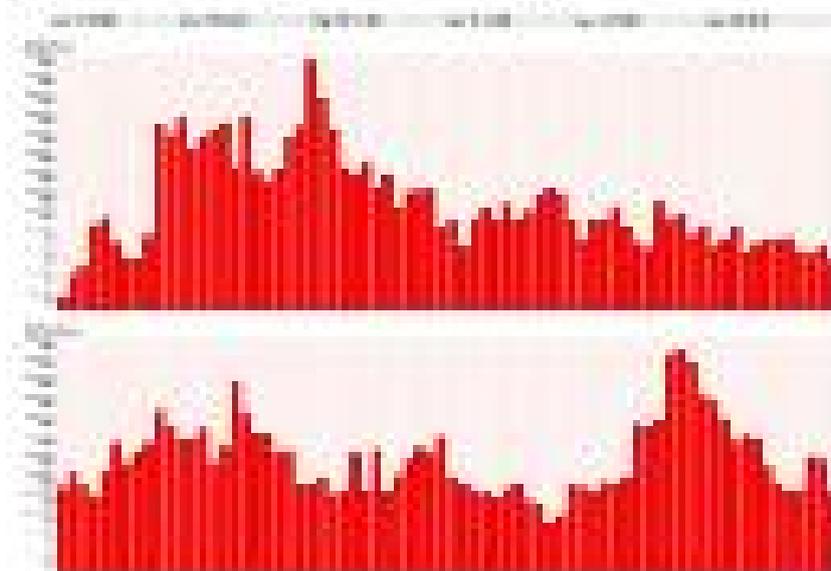
Monday Morning...

Aggie has the most aggressive... (unreadable)

From: [unreadable] [unreadable] [unreadable] [unreadable] [unreadable] [unreadable] [unreadable] [unreadable] [unreadable] [unreadable]

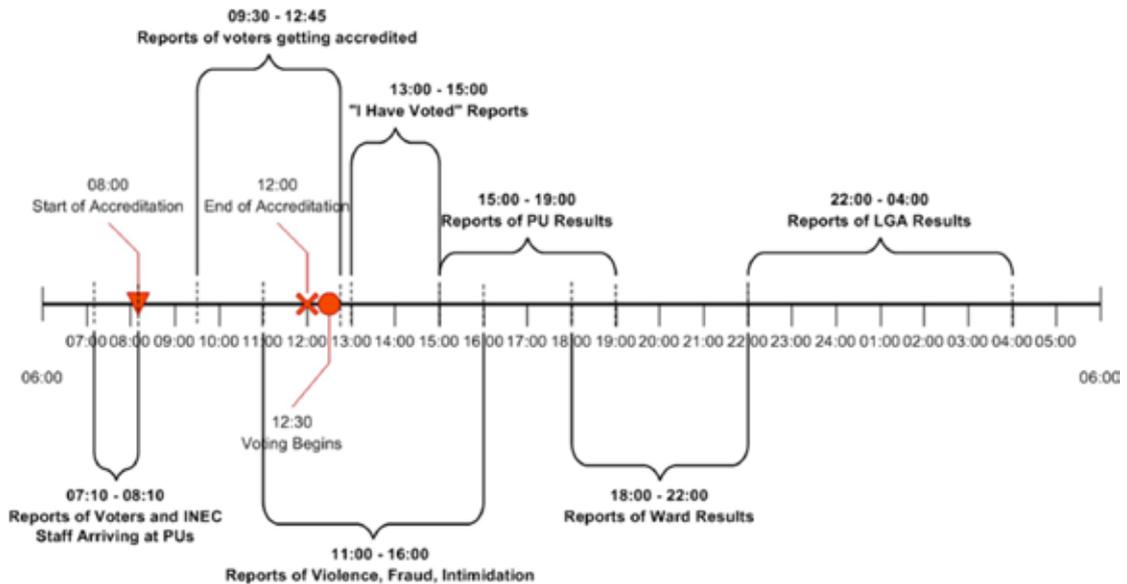


### Aggie was Having a Record Day...





The information gathered was also collated into a visual representation of an average election day, as shown in the following slide.



Weekly meetings were held following each election. Visual and narrative reports were presented regarding patterns of the election, use of social media, and development of new technology tools. Participants included those who had attended the March 4 roundtable as well as an expanded group of interested parties. Senior INEC officials attended each meeting where there were discussions as to how this information might be used by INEC to improve its performance, as well as how civil society and government agencies, including INEC and the Police Service Commission, might work better together to ensure free and fair elections.

Recommendations to enhance INEC's internal and external communications, particularly with regard to posting important information on its website, were also made. Each successive election saw an improvement in the performance of the Social Media Tracking Centre and in the cooperation of key stakeholders in the electoral process.

## PATTERNS OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Social Media Tracking Centre collated information from SMS, facebook and twitter messages, photographs posted on line, as well as the number of voters who contributed these items. The table below shows data for each category. Twitter and facebook are combined but tracked facebook entries were negligible,

mainly because it is a closed system which cannot be easily monitored. Twitter became most popular during the presidential election with 77% volume of content; SMS 22% and others 1%. Nigeria set a new record for recent African elections in the number of reports tracked using social media.

Table 1  
Numbers and Percentages of Various Social Media Content

Election & Date	SMS	Twitter & Facebook	Photographs	No. Voters	Total
April 2 postponed NASS	15,132 (33%)	33,756 (61%)	369	12,000	49,257
April 9 National Assembly Election	94,592 (70%)	40,016 (23%)	534	60,000	135,142
April 16 Presidential Election	33,460 (22%)	130,426 (77%)	463	65,000	164,349
April 26 Gubernatorial and State Assembly Elections	14,791 (14%)	92,056 (85%)	319	35,600	107,166
<b>Total</b>	<b>157,975</b>	<b>296,254</b>	<b>1,685</b>	<b>70,000</b>	<b>455,914</b>

Numbers for the April 2 election are low as elections were cancelled at 12.00 noon before voting began due to widespread shortages of materials at polling units. Many of the tweets came after the cancellation and relayed surprise and doubt as to the likelihood of the rescheduled elections being held.

It is interesting that the following week, when the postponed National Assembly Elections were actually held on April 9, 70% of the content came from SMS messages, first reporting arrival or non-arrival of election materials, problems observed, reports of voters having been accredited and then voting. Results from polling units and collation centres were also sent to various reporting platforms. Reclaimnaija's SMS and GSM phone lines connected directly to INEC and many inquiries were dealt with quickly by the electoral commission.

Social media content peaked during the Presidential election on April 16. There were fewer SMS reports, however, numerous tweets circulated concerning post-election violence that occurred in parts of northern Nigeria

due to the perception of some northerners that their preferred candidate, General Buhari, should have won.

The Tracking Centre experienced intermittent network access on the day of the Presidential election. According to network provider MTN and other sources, a major submarine cable carrying internet traffic to Nigeria was severed in Lagos, resulting in severe service degradation. Volunteers were able to keep some degree of activity going with alternate service providers before access was fully restored at 3.00 pm. Elements tracked by the Technologies & International Development Lab at Georgia Tech University were not affected.

Activity in social media decreased during the April 26 gubernatorial election, perhaps due to reduced interest once the presidential race was over. The election was held immediately following the four day Easter holiday after a gap of ten days between elections, so some of the momentum might have been lost. Elections were also not held in six of the thirty-six states where the terms of sitting governors had not yet expired.

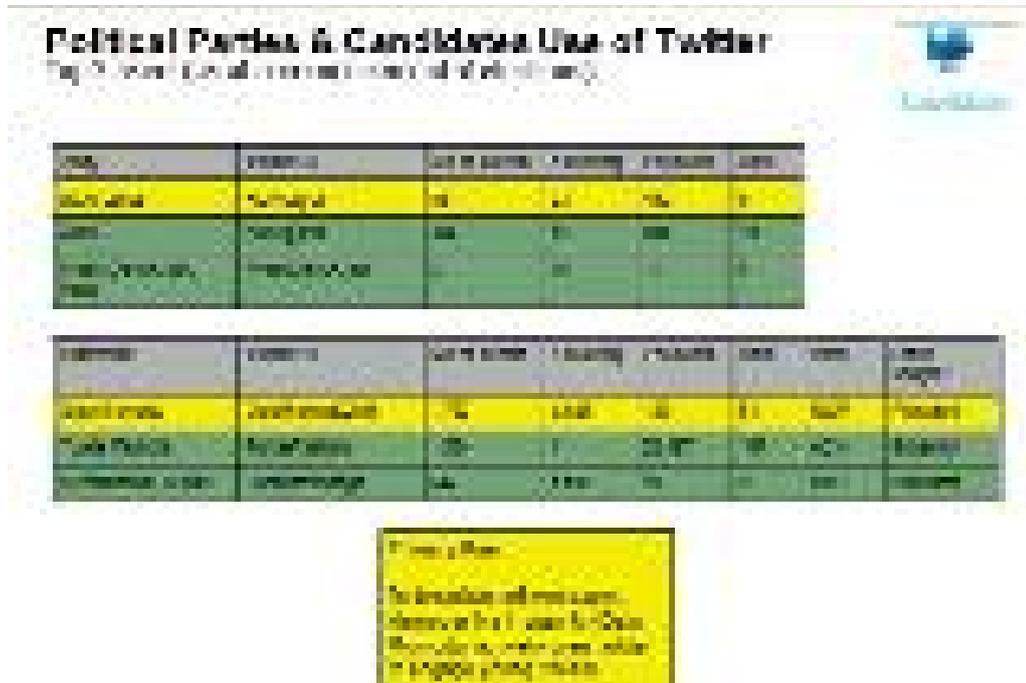
This election period marked the beginning of the use of social media by political parties, as shown below.



President Goodluck Jonathan initially declared his intention to run for President on facebook and kept up a steady stream of messages posted on his page. The other two top users of facebook were from the Action Congress of Nigeria party, with a predominately urban based constituency which had its own URL. Babatunde Fashola, the ACN gubernatorial candidate in Lagos was the only significant user of youtube.

ACN in Lagos and at the national level were also the highest users of twitter. Interestingly, a Presidential candidate with little hope of winning, Dele Momodu, used twitter

significantly as shown below. ACN also used SMS extensively. National Assembly results in Lagos State were sent by text messages from polling units to ACN headquarters and then forwarded to interested citizens. Generally information contained in the messages was in line with results later announced by INEC. One notable exception was reporting by ACN that the current Senate President and a member of the ruling PDP, David Mark, had lost in his constituency. This was repeated by ACN until INEC announced hours later that he had won and could be an example of purposeful or accidental misinformation based on partial returns.



## Summary

Analysis of a sample of the social media sites used by

Top 10 Media houses in Nigeria during the 2011 elections



*Note that INEC had almost 4,000 tweets, having risen from zero on March 10 before twitter was operational. Twitter ultimately proved to be the most efficient way to interact with INEC.*

## TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The above chart shows that 234Next and Channels Television scored in the top ten for use of social media. Both are traditional media houses that have adopted an innovative means of two way communication with their audiences. 234Next is a relatively new newspaper, which publishes a broadsheet on Sunday in addition to a regular format on weekdays. It also has a permanent twelve person online team that works in three shifts and has used social media since 2008.

Channels Television features regular live coverage through their website, ipad, iphone, and other devices. During the April 2011 elections, it established a four person social media team, with one each handling the website, twitter, facebook, and the fourth feeding information from the newsroom to the other three members of the team. This enabled simultaneous presentation on television, facebook, and twitter. Viewers were asked to comment and the station aired social media feedback several times a day.

TELL Magazine is a weekly publication which energized its website in late 2010 for the April elections. Their reporters around the country

submitted reports electronically or via SMS or blackberry messenger, which were then confirmed by INEC or the Nigeria Police before posting on the web.

Daily Trust newspaper has been on facebook since June 2010. Its number of fans has increased from 32,000 before the elections to 65,000 immediately after the elections. Now up to 89,000, Daily Trust estimates their fan base to be the highest in the country. This compares with the papers total print distribution of 50,000. Staff used questions from facebook fans in their interviews with the Chairman of INEC. Other media houses used social media to a somewhat lesser degree.

Staff of these four media houses were asked about the relationship between traditional and social media, and in what ways, if any, social media had aided their work. Virtually all respondents said that social media has helped them in their effort to provide accurate information to their audiences in a timely fashion. For example, the head of the news room at Tell said that social media keeps traditional media on its toes. While a medium such as twitter does not provide news in

depth, it does provide immediate alerts. He felt that their coverage would not have been as effective without social media. As a weekly publication, the magazine did not have to wait for a week or even a day to get out the news; social media is instantaneous.

The head of operations at Channels Television says they can reach viewers anywhere in the world 24/7. He also stated that social media is a social leveler, where class and education barriers are broken down, promoting communication between and among people who would not interact in normal life. The online editor at 234Next stated that Nigerians wanted to talk about the elections

and social media afforded them the platform. Daily Trust said that although they had the concept before April, the 2011 election was an opportunity to see how they could use facebook and SMS messaging in their distribution of news.

The April 2011 election was the first big test of use of social media by traditional media in Nigeria. All of the media houses visited said they hope to improve and expand their use of social media in upcoming elections. Some expect to revamp operations to create a seamless flow between print and social media.

## Social media changed how information was disseminated in Nigeria.

### OTHER EXAMPLES

Reporting platforms used by civil society groups varied according to available technology.

For example, the Project Manager, IAmLagos, reported a significant improvement in reporting results from polling units over the period of elections. IAmLagos made a concerted effort to systematically contact voters throughout all wards in the state to instruct them how to post election results. Sensitization was done through SMS, radio and email messages with an incentive scheme developed and prizes awarded. The IAmLagos

facebook page brought people to the website, twitter hashtag and call centre. Prominent advertorials in newspapers reinforced the information. This approach proved very effective in improving social media coverage of polling units in Lagos with 80% coverage achieved during the gubernatorial elections.

The Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN) monitored events using mobile telephone calls and SMS messaging as their primary reporting mechanism due to limited internet access in rural northern Nigeria.

The accessibility, low cost and possible anonymity of social media also meant that some were able to cross group lines to interact with “others” of different orientation.

## BIG STORIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA

A number of stories gained attention during the April 2011 elections. One of the first, of course, was the cancellation of the election on April 2.



The Chairman of INEC announced on national television that the election had been postponed but voting continued in areas where the message had not been received. Announcements by INEC on twitter confirmed the cancellation, which was then followed by much discussion on social media.

the foremost election, it also reflects the shock and concern about incidents of violence in the North that followed that election. Social media, especially twitter, was used to report occurrences - truthful as well as fabricated. The National Youth Service Corps (who were acting as ad hoc electoral officials) were able to communicate among themselves, and sadly, to confirm the death of one of their members.

It was shown above that social media content peaked during the Presidential election. While this may reflect the highest level of interest in



Twitter was also used to receive, confirm and forward information about the crisis in the North during the postelection period. Social media has been used in emergency response in other countries, such as Haiti, but this is the first time that it was used successfully in Nigeria.



Throughout the election, the Nigeria Police, Civil Defence Corps, and the Police Service Commission operated hotlines open to the public. Following the Presidential election, the National Security Adviser also established hotlines. The rapid exchange of information may have saved lives.

A big story in traditional media was the use of social media in Nigeria's April 2011 elections.



...citizens of all ages, education levels and from most parts of the country used social media during the 2011 election process.

This was the first time that social media had been widely used in any Nigerian election. Although a number of Nigerians have been on facebook for some years and a smaller number on twitter, it had never been used widely by a) any political party; b) any major government agency such as INEC or the Nigeria Police; or c) any civil society group such as Reclaimnaija or Project Swift Count for nationwide election reporting.

Social media is often considered the territory of young educated professionals, but in the 2011 elections it was used by a broad cross section of people. Unfortunately twitter does not contain identifying data on gender, age, and geographical location. Facebook often includes this information, but being a closed system, it is not available to the public. Therefore it was not possible to determine the participation of these demographic groups in the use of social media.

The following Aggie map from the Presidential election shows that some areas of the country witnessed significant social media traffic, while some areas were virtually untouched. Large sections of the country along the western and eastern borders, coincidentally predominately rural, are virtually unreported. Lagos, not surprisingly, has a large number of reports, as it is a sprawling urban area with a relatively high level of awareness and active civil society.

The map indicates areas where more citizen education might result in greater reporting in the next election. However, from anecdotal information such as the membership of Reclaimnaija and posts by people known to the Social Media Tracking Centre, it can be concluded that citizens of all ages, education levels and from most parts of the country used social media during the 2011 election process.

### Aggie's New Incident Mapping Screen ..



## ACCURACY OF REPORTS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

Based on the small numbers of polling units and collation centres that were compared for results reported by social media and those declared by INEC, it is difficult to say definitively that social media evidenced a true reflection of what happened on the ground. However, as the following slides show, there is a reasonable degree of consensus. Social media results are not official, but they can help corroborate results announced by INEC, especially those disputed by aggrieved parties.

The first slide shows that although ACN won virtually all of the Yoruba states in the Southwest National Assembly and gubernatorial polls, PDP with Goodluck Jonathan as its candidate, won the Presidential poll in these wards, and indeed all of Lagos State. The numbers reported by social media and announced by INEC are very close. The numbers are also very similar in Katsina State, in the far north, where the CPC candidate, Muhammadu Buhari had a high degree of popularity. As the CPC is disputing the Presidential election result, it is important to have independent validation of poll results.

### Results Trend from Social Media

Where: State - Benue State  
Region - Middle

Counting and collation  
Centre: B/C 78 79 80 81 82  
Unit: 28

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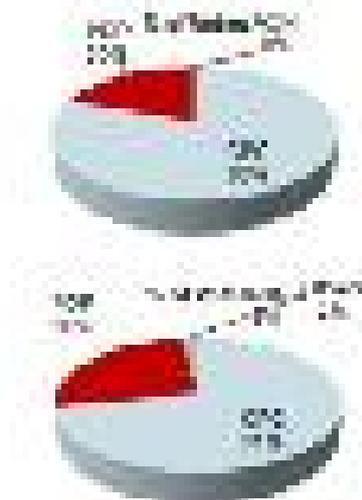
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Where: State - Benue State  
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## ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE 2011 ELECTIONS

As has been found in other countries, social media can be exploited for good or bad. Social media played a constructive role during the postelection violence as demonstrated in the slide above where the dispatch of crisis management personnel saved lives. It was also used to clarify false rumours.

On the other hand, it was unfortunately used to incite people to violence. An SMS which circulated just after the Presidential election, read: *"As a consequence of the unrest in Kaduna and Zaria, Governor Yakowa has imposed a 24 hr curfew on Kaduna and Zaria while he refused to impose same in Kagoro, Kwoi, Zango and Kafanchan, Zonkwa, M/rido and Gonin Gora; thereby allowing his Christian brothers to kill Muslims as they please. This is a clear danger of voting Yakowa as Governor."* Similar inflammatory messages were spread among

Christians and may have contributed to the killing of as many as 400 Muslims in southern Kaduna. Professor Jega, in an interview on AIT television, condemned the negative use of social media to spread false rumours.

Social media's role can be viewed differently depending on where you sit. There was an amusing incident during the National Assembly election in Imo State, in which a Nigerian living in the U.S. came home for the elections. Ms.Chika411 tweeted in the early hours of April 9 that one of the senatorial candidates, Kema Chikwe, was engineering completion of results sheets in a private home. Two civil society observation groups sent trained observers to verify this tweet. Over the course of the day, citizens followed proceedings with a flurry of tweets, not just around the country but around the world.

### Some Interesting Insights...



At the end of the day, Kema Chikwe was defeated by Chris Anyanwu and the news quickly spread. It was a victory for transparency and free elections. With so many civil society informal observers using their mobile phones and internet, the old techniques of ballot box stuffing or snatching could no longer go unobserved. Defenders of democracy, and of course Chris Anyanwu, were delighted with social media. Kema Chikwe was probably less delighted.

...the presence of social media and the willingness of INEC to receive and act on information gave Nigerian citizens the feeling that, perhaps for the first time, their voices would be heard.

## Some Interesting Insights...

### What did the #INEC2011 mean?



Certainly the presence of social media and the willingness of INEC to receive and act on information gave Nigerian citizens the feeling that, perhaps for the first time, their voices would be heard. They made an effort to register and vote, and also to protect their votes. Even non-activists followed poll results and continued checking in order to ensure

that what was happening on ground was what was being reported. The writer was in Lagos during the National Assembly election where average middle aged people pulled out their mobile phones to compare polling unit results pasted outside polling units with figures announced by INEC. This has never happened in Nigeria before.

**INEC experienced 25 million hits on its website in three days during the Presidential election alone.**

## NEW MEDIA IN POLITICS

Internationally, social media has played a role in episodes of contentious politics and was used widely by opposition groups during the Iran election of 2009. "Many observers saw new media as a necessary (if not sufficient) cause of the dramatic rise of the protest movement following the election, while a subsequent backlash has sought to dismiss its significance." (United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C. August 2010 Blogs and Bullets) The ongoing Arab Spring or Arab Awakening has caught the world's attention regarding the potential power of social media in mobilizing mass action to promote freedom and democracy.

There have been few solid studies on the impact of social media and most rely on anecdotal evidence, such as the MsChika tweet. Scholars at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. have attempted to analyze the impact of social media on five levels: individual transformation, intergroup relations, collective action, regime policies, and external attention. (Blogs and Bullets). Certainly the 2011 elections saw an individual transformation among millions of voters, especially youth, who had their voices heard for the first time through social media.

...President Goodluck Jonathan acknowledged the impact of social media in his statement that young people using technology engaged positively during the elections.

The accessibility, low cost and possible anonymity of social media also meant that some were able to cross group lines to interact with “others” of different orientation. For example, Daily Trust newspaper is based in Abuja with a focus largely on the northern part of Nigeria. However through the online service, people in other parts of the country who would not normally buy or even have access to a hard copy of Daily Trust, can read and interact on line. Facebook also offers the possibility of talking with friends of friends who are unlikely ever to meet in real life. One can follow celebrities, elected officials or activists on twitter, crossing group lines. The availability of social media during the April elections allowed people all over the world to follow and comment on what was happening in Nigeria.

Social media changed how information was disseminated in Nigeria. Citizens accessed information directly and more accurately, resulting in unsurpassed participation in politics during the 2011 elections. INEC experienced 25 million hits on its website in three days during the Presidential election alone. More than 70,000 Nigerians were able to contact the commission directly to report incidents and have their questions answered. Due to the inherent advantages of internet technology, measuring the flow of information was possible.

Social media tools also revolutionized the efficiency of election observing by increasing coverage and reporting while minimizing costs. International observer groups may begin to reassess funding large teams from abroad when given the opportunity to partner with social media savvy domestic observer groups who have established a track record for possessing the capacity, skills and resources to utilize social media. The cost-benefit analysis of doing so appears to pale in comparison.

We continue to grapple with measuring the impact of the Social Media Tracking Centre. Certainly documentation of the electoral record was accomplished and capacity built for future social media tracking projects around election and governance issues. The symbolic perception of a transparent process also made an important impact on voter awareness. It is impossible to determine but social media may have served as a deterrent to those who might have attempted to manipulate results. While traditional media continues to have the greatest impact on forming public opinion in Nigeria, social media fed the perception by traditional media of a transparent process.

In a post-election statement, President Goodluck Jonathan acknowledged the impact of social media in his statement that young people using technology engaged positively during the elections.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have emerged from a broad cross section of election stakeholders based on the successes and challenges of the 2011 elections:

### For INEC

1. SMS Messages
  - a. Organize SMS group accounts for presiding officers, polling clerks and returning officers for confirmation of logistics and easy dissemination of authorized information.
  - b. Use INEC registered voter data for dissemination of public information (with a reference to official INEC website or hotline).

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2. Website
  - a. Continue to update website as situations develop, particularly as election results are announced.
  - b. Continue to make the voters register database available on INEC website. Enable registrants to begin preliminary corrections on line.

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3. Ensure timely and proactive dissemination of information through INEC twitter, facebook and Blackberry accounts. Establish dedicated Blackberry lines for key partners.

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4. Incorporate use of social media in voter education dissemination strategies.

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5. Establish a social media tracking centre in order to interpret trends and monitor reports on election days.

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6. Establish a central data base for posting election results.

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7. Post polling unit specific election results and include disaggregated figures in order to foster confidence in the process.

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8. Train civil society groups, voters and INEC officers to tweet election results.

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9. Increase the number of volunteers posted to collation centres to monitor election results.

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10. Text results from all polling units to a vector collation centre.

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11. Include polling unit identification numbers for easy geographical location in all tweets.

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12. Consolidate INEC social media platforms for upcoming elections, especially the five gubernatorial elections in 2012.

### **For Security Agencies**

1. Continue to keep hotlines and facebook pages open for updated and accurate information on acute security matters.
2. Use these two way communication channels for citizen reporting on security matters.
3. Provide feedback to citizen reporters on actions taken.
4. Consolidate social media platforms for upcoming elections, particularly the five gubernatorial elections in 2012.

### **For Traditional Media**

1. Expand social media coverage of elections to provide information to audiences in a more timely manner.
2. Study how other media houses used social media and adopt some of the techniques.

### **For Civil Society**

1. Plan now to use and monitor social media in the 2012 elections.
2. Track campaign promises and assess performance of elected officials using social media platforms. Tracking enables aggregation of opinions in order to present trend issues relative to constituencies.
3. Use online forums, televised town hall meetings, radio programmes and televised debates to drive conversations around good governance.

### **For International Organisations**

1. Partner with domestic observer groups who have established a track record of utilizing social media tools.
2. Rely less on costly foreign observer teams who often restrict themselves to limited areas of the country.



Amara Nwankpa tracks twitter reports



Taking the pulse of social media



Volunteers at The Social Media Tracking Centre

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