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# **Social Media as Tools for Political Views Expressed in the Visuals Shared among Social Media Users**

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## **Abstract**

Globally, there is a conspicuous paradigm shift in political communication as a result of the emergence of social media. In contemporary political communication, highly sophisticated software and hardware are used to manipulate texts and visuals in a manner that best conveys the feelings of the users. This reality has greatly modified representational political communication which has challenged the thinking of contemporary scholars as they jostle to describe and explain such visual communication techniques. The prevalence of this scenario among Nigerian social media users is the motivation for, and the problem of this study. Consequently, this study examined the nature of political pictures and illustrations common on social media and examines the implications of such visual representations on political mobilization and participation. It is hoped that this study will significantly expand literature on social media –political communication nexus.

**Keywords:** illustrations, political communication, pictures, nature and social media

## **Introduction**

Expression of political views is one of the central ingredients in a democratic set up. Political views are so central in a democracy such that political gladiators attempt to gauge the views of the masses about them and their political parties with a view to responding, where need be. Political views, when examined from a broader perspective, is an aspect of political participation that defines the involvement of people in the politics of their countries. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) must have been thinking along this line when they conceptualize political participation as affording people in a democracy an avenue to establish a two-way information exchange with government officials. The import of the submission of Verbal et al to the current study is hinged on three areas- communicating concerns, preferences and compelling response. The essence of expression of political views is, thus, to communicate

concerns on important issues with political under tune, show the preferences of the communicator and eventually propel action from the government or political gladiator. Over time, the expression of political views among the citizens has experienced a paradigm shift from the hitherto street protest, communiqué, press briefing to incorporate visuals on the social media. This, has by implication, redefined the dynamics of political communication. Ezeah and Gever (2016) posit that communication between the citizens and politicians is now largely done with the aid of social media powered by the Internet. Brants and Voltmer (2011,p. 3) provide more insight into the change in political communication by noting that the alterations in nowadays' political expression can be understood as happening in two different, albeit closely independent aspects. These are horizontal perspective which explains the association between political players and the press – that is, the political communication heavy weight who are equally in a race with each other. Hence, are creating and passing political messages for internalization of the general public. The vertical approach denotes the link between the two sets of political communication gladiators on the one hand, and the citizens as the main addressee of these messages on the other. The submission of Brants and Voltmer implies citizens have adopted a new dimensions in their communication to the political class using the social media. In political communication, the citizens are often at the centre because in a typical democracy, legitimacy belongs to the people. Politicians and political parties often try as much as possible to control and direct public opinion with the aim of ensuring that they make political capital out of it. Negative perceptions about politicians and could lead to corresponding rejection during election and vice-versa. It is an attempt to constantly keep in touch with the citizens that most politicians have created special offices on social media and appointed people to manage their social media account.

Social media are Internet-powered communication channels that enable users to continuously exchange information (Boyd & Ellison 2007, Nwanton, Odoemalumn, Orji-Egwu, Nwankwo & Nweze 2013, Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, Udejah & Gever 2015). All social media are Internet based, they allow for instantaneous communication, as audio, video, texts, and images can be shared. They allow individuals to have their personal accounts usually passworded. Social media are interactive but optional as nobody is coerced to access social media (Udejah & Gever, 2015). The unhindered access, with little or regulation, offered by the social media has significantly shaped the direction and pattern of visual political communication among its users. Historically, the use of social media for politicking is attributed to former United States President Barack Obama. During his presidential campaign in 2008, Barack had extensively deployed the social media as communication instruments to solicit votes from Americans.

Biswas, Ingle and Roy (2008) recalled that the 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama provides strong evidence of the benefits of applying social media for political campaigns. According to Biswas et al, almost every facet of that campaign used social media to propel its message to supporters including advertising, advance work, organizing in all 50 states, and fundraising. Facebook, YouTube and especially Twitter were used to let Obama supporters know how he felt about important issues. In Nigeria, the 2011 electioneering campaigns greatly made use of the social media. For example, former president Goodluck Jonathan launched his presidential campaign via the social media. Dagona, Karick, and Abubakar, (2013) reveal that the 2011 general elections were the first attempt in deploying the social media by political parties, political candidates, and the civil society organizations for political communication. Dagona et al add that the election history-making because it was the first time the new media technologies like Facebook, Blogs, LinkedIn and other social networks played critical roles in

politicking in Nigeria. Okoro and Santas (2017) in a study reported that the use of social media significantly influenced the outcome of Nigeria's 2011 elections. Since social media have become part and parcel of electioneering, pictures have been used to express political views. With the advent of the social media, memes have become very common among its users as memes of political office holders are posted on social media in different ways that best convey the views of the user.

Although literature focusing on the change in political communication, with emphasis on Nigeria, is enormous (e.g., Ijwo, & Ikani, 2011; Odoemelam, & Nwafor, 2012; Okoro, & Kenneth, 2013 Oyebode, 2014), the same cannot be said of studies that examine social media as tools for political views expressed in the visuals shared among social media users. This reality has created a gap in literature that requires scholarly attention. The researchers have also observed that, even though many Nigerian social media users have expressed their political views through visuals on social media, significant studies have not investigated the dominant themes of these visuals as well as why they are shared.

### **Objectives and Significance of the Study**

The objective of this study was to determine the use of visuals to express political views among social media users. In doing so, the researchers raised the following questions: (i) how do social media users express their political views through visuals? (ii) What is the dominant themes on political visuals shared among social media users? (iii) why do Nigerian social media users express their views in visuals?

The result of this study provides essential information regarding the use of visuals to express political views. In doing so, the result also sheds lights on the reasons behind the use of

such visuals as well as the dominant themes of such visuals. This findings could prove useful for political communication experts, political communication researchers, politicians as well as political scientists. The result of this study could also be beneficial to communication experts in designing political communication messages, especially for the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. In general, communication experts globally could benefits from the result of this study considering that social media have emerged as critical players in electioneering. From the United States, to France, to Russia, social media have proven that it has come to stay in playing critical roles in leadership recruitment process. Therefore, people from different parts of the world will find the results of this study useful.

In addition to practical and scholarly significance, this study also has a theoretical significance. by using the social representation theory, the study has shown how social media users' inner disposition impact on the way they express their political views through pictures. Consequently, the study provides the theoretical support for subsequent researchers who may be interested in understanding how the psychological disposition of social media users influence their political views.

### **Social Media Platforms and Visual Political Communication**

Social media platforms are phenomena that provide an avenue for users to send and receive information (Kane, Alavi, Lubianica & Borgatti 2013). Simply put, social media platforms describe those different Internet- powered communication media through which information are instantaneously exchanged in different forms like texts, illustrations, pictures, video etc. Examples of social media tools are: LinkedIn, Youtube, Blogs, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google+, etc. Hallikainen (2015) argues that individuals and organizations make use of new

communication tools on a daily basis. These platforms have offered an express opportunity for visual political communication. Therefore, there is a conspicuous paradigm shift in political communication as a result of the emergence of social media platforms. In contemporary political communication, highly sophisticated soft ware and hardware are used to manipulate texts and visuals in a manner that best conveys the feelings of the users. This reality has greatly modified representational political communication. Social media users in Nigeria have adopted memes and other means of visual communication to express their political views. These memes, which are usually in caricature format, are shared among users for wider circulation. In most cases, it is very difficult to identify the original sources of these memes because each user shares memes as though he/she were the original source. The memes are also found on different social media platforms likes Facebook, Instagram etc. The following visuals were found on social media platforms among Nigerian social media users. See figures 1-5.

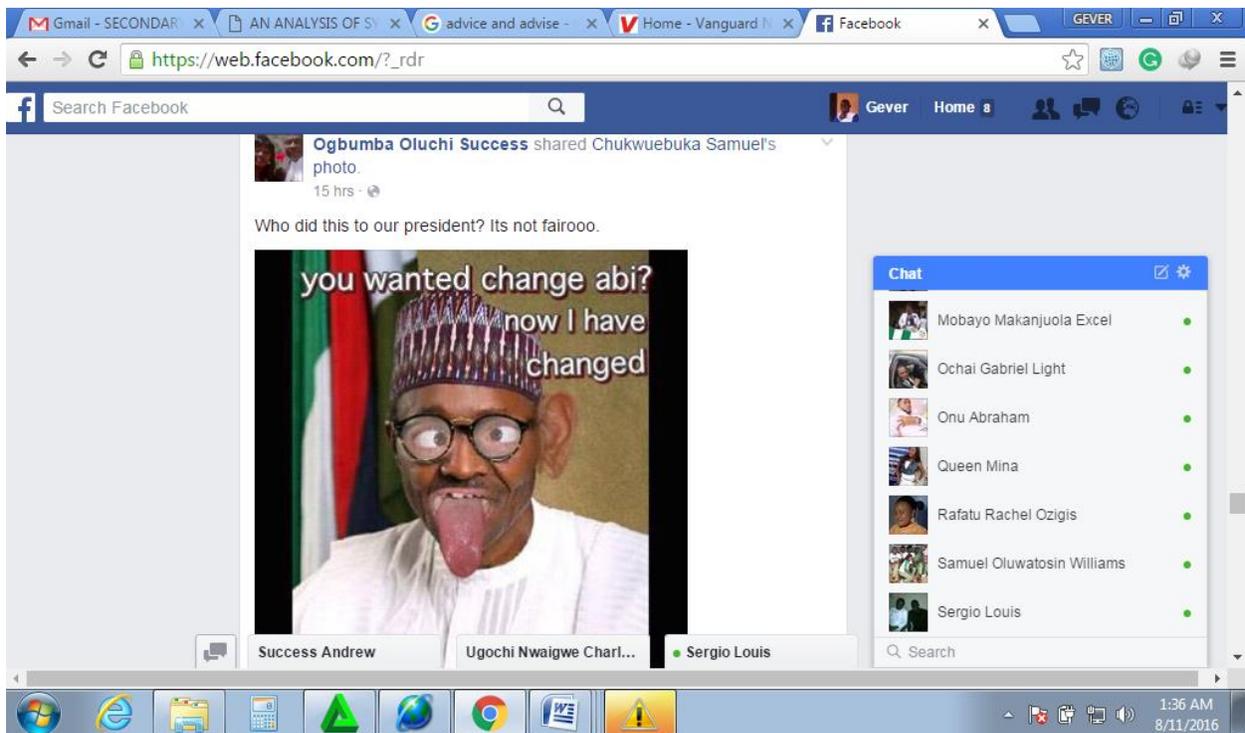


Figure 1 A meme of Nigeria's President



Figure 2 A meme depicting public disaffection for the President



Figure 4 A meme showing Nigeria's growing inequality



Figure 5 A real picture showing disaffection to a Rep member over his contribution on the flour of the House



**Figure 6 Satire visual**



**Figure 7 Attack Visual**

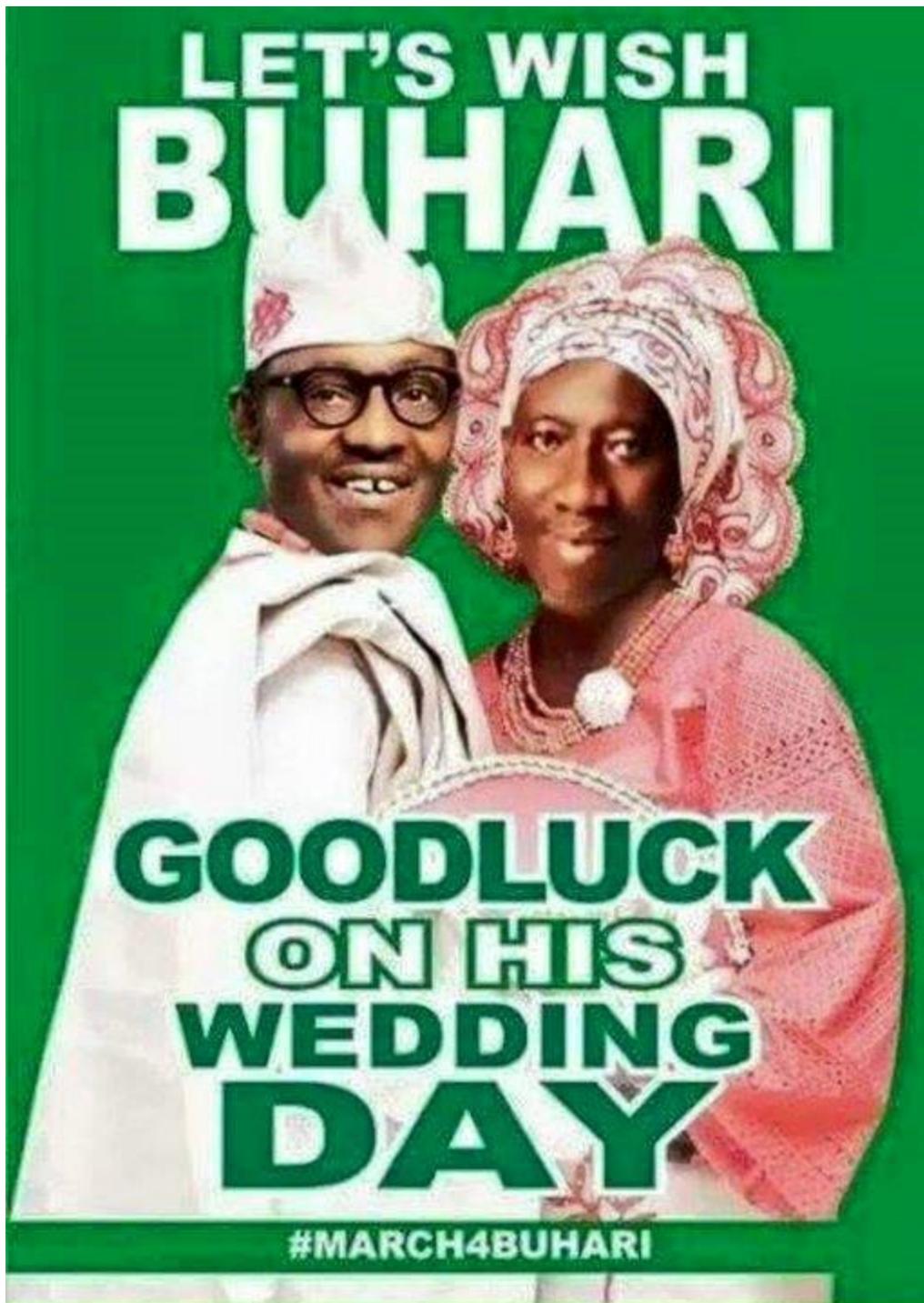


Figure 8 Mobilization visual

It can be noticed that most of the visuals presented above are memes which express the views of the senders on political issues. Kavanagh, and O'Sullivan (2007) and Parker (2007) submit that the core to gaining insights into the connection between both caricature and Internet satire, together with carnival is the emergence of a performance. Social media users have deployed jokes in their political communication through visuals in a manner that induced laughter. Hariman (2008) opines that parody and similar forms of political humor are important in contemporary political discourse. The submission of Hariman provides insights into the power of visuals-they break the boundaries created by written word.

Ohme, de Vreese and Albaek (2017) carried out a study to examine the impact of social media on political behaviour. The researchers compared first-time voters with experienced ones. The researchers also compared effects of these two groups' political information exposure on their vote choice certainty during the 2015 in Denmark. Ohme et al furthermore tested how the relation between exposure and certainty can be mediated by active campaign participation. An 11-wave national panel study was conducted, using a smartphone-based assessment of citizens' ( $n = 1108$ ) media exposure and vote choice certainty across the campaign period. The result showed that first-time voters' social media exposure is responsible for their increase in certainty as the campaign progresses, while this effect is absent for voters who are experienced. The interest of the current study to the findings of Ohme et al is that social media could be effective tools for providing political socialization and engineering political participation.

### **Nigeria's 2019 General Election in Perspective**

An election is a fundamental process that allows citizens in a democracy to decide who will represent their interest in government. Elections are particularly needed in a representative democracy where elected members represent the interest of the general public. As cardinal component of democracy, elections presents a platform for people to exercise their rights in the process of leadership recruitment. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2017) says that elections are essential because elections are not just elections: they are part of a process. Second, elections determine leadership, and either continuity or change in this leadership. Third, even flawed elections may have value in institutionalizing electoral integrity, provided that subsequent electoral cycles reinforce key democratic or electoral principles. Since the return to democratic rule, Nigeria has had general elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and the 2019 elections are just around the corner as at the time of this paper. Among all the general elections, 2011, 2015 and 2019 are of particular interest.

To start with, it was during the 2011 general election that social media became prominent campaign tools in Nigeria. During that time, president GoodLuck Jonathan kick-started his campaign via the Facebook. Other candidates also followed suit. The 2015 and 2019 election share some contrasting features. For example, The 2015 general election witnessed what could best be deserted as media war. Political parties and their candidates where deeply engaged in different communication strategies with a view to scoring political points. Different political parties such as the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), The All Progressive Congress (APC), Kowa Party, Hope Democratic Party, Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN), Alliance for Democracy among others featured candidates for the lection. Of all the political parties, the PDP and the APC were the two major contenders especially for the office of the president. This made the political parties to be deeply engaged in different communication strategies. Nigeria's 2015

general election went down to history, not only as one of the most keenly contested, but as an election which result ended the 16 years rule of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) at the national level. That election did not only produce an opposition candidate, .Mohammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC), as the president but also led to the loss of many states (eg Benue, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Adamawa, Niger, Kebbi, Bauch) by the PDP to the APC. The PDP also lost its majority studies from both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Also, as a build up to the election, five Governors, Rotimi Ameachi from Rivers, Rabiu Kwankwaso from Kano, Abdufah Ahmed from Kwara, Aliyu Wamakko from Sokoto and Murtala Nyako from Adamawa defected from the PDP to the APC. These states were hitherto considered as the strong hold of the PDP. Also during the build up to the election, Ondo State Governor defected from Labour Party to PDP while the then Speaker of the House of Representatives (now Sokoto State Governor) Aminu Tanbuwa defected, for the first time in the fourth republic, from the PDP to the APC. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo also tore his membership of the DPD and endorsed the APC. Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar who lost the APC presidential primary ticket to Buhari also teamed up with the former to mobilize votes against the PDP.

But that was in 2015, in 2019, Atiku has defected to the opposition PDP and is now its presidential candidate. Obasanjo who endorsed Buhari in 2015 has now endorsed Atiku. Other APC heavy weight who joined the party in 2015 and worked for its vicotory are now in the PDP. Examples of such persons include Bukola Saraki, the current Senate President, Aminu Tambuwa, the current Governor of Sokoto State, Samuel Ortom, the current Governor of Benue State, Abdufah Ahmed, the current Governor of Kwara State, Rabiu Kwankwaso a serving Senator from Kano State, among others. Also, for the first time the ruling party is going into an

election with both leaders of the National Assembly being members of the opposition party. The campaign atmosphere is simply tensed. For the presidency, even though the Independent National election Commission has cleared 73 candidate to contest for the number office in the land, it appears the race is between Buhari and Atiku.

It is noteworthy that the religious and ethnic sentiment that played out during the 2015 general election are completely lacking. During that time when Buhari contested against Jonathan as the two leading candidates, Buhari was a Muslim northern while Jonathan was a Christian Southerner. But in 2019, both Buhari and Atiku are Muslims, both of them are also from the North.

### **The Power of Visuals**

Visuals have been thought to be very powerful tools in learning, communicating, marketing etc. What people see lasts in their memories more than what they are told or read about. For example, reading about an accident occurrence may not make a powerful and lasting impression of the incidence as viewing visuals of the accident occurrence. So also will words not effectively described political views than visuals. Lester (2000) corroborates that identification of symbols used in visual presentation commands a lasting impression in the minds of those who view such images. Psychologist Jerome Bruner of New York conducted a study which proves that people remember; 10% of what they hear, 20% of what they read, 70% of what they

see and do (Jacquiline, 2012). Although people do not necessarily need to be literate before interpreting visuals, visual literacy is a fundamental requirement. The concept of visual literature is attributed to John Debes who described it as the capacity to understand, share and translate objects and symbols in an area incorporate and use them to creatively exchange views with others (Debes, 1969). It is important to add here that there may be difficulty in measuring the visual literature level of people ostensibly because of the different interpretations that people are likely to attach to visuals. Nonetheless, visuals have been found to be very powerful in attitude change.

Sani (2014) did a study to determine the utilisation of spoken words and image metaphors in the expressing satire in Nigerian political cartoons and reported that pictorial metaphor is a creative and thought-stimulating rhetoric that greatly drives the minds of media users more swiftly than its verbal version. Although Sani did not examine these visuals vis-à-vis social media, his study provides the basis for understanding the centrality of visuals in communication. Jacquiline (2012) analyzed television non-commercial advertisements associated to HIV/AIDS with a view to identifying the import of visual messages in the management of this disease. The result showed that visuals are very effective for message understanding and attitude change. Even though the study of Jacquiline was not centred on political communication, the result showed the power inherent in visuals. Thompson, Graham and Russo (2005) reported similar result when they examined the degree by which image aspects of music play a role to meaning sharing that occurs between actors and their audience. The researchers reported empirical result that pictorial aspects of performance greatly determines opinion and views concerning musical structure (pitch related features) and active interpretations of music.

The use of pictures to express political views appear to be a global trend. Kulkarni (2017) says that following the emergence of digital technologies, Internet memes have gained prominence such that memes have become popular channels that communicate information through humor and satire. The researcher further carried out a study to determine how Internet memes have been utilized to disseminate political satire as well as how this correlate political engagement, influence on political views and voting behaviour. The survey research design was used as the design of the study with the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The result showed that Internet memes are used as a tool of political discourse but does not have a major impact on audience although it improves political engagement of the digital natives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study finds expression on the theory of social representations to explain how social media users in Nigeria express their political views through visuals. Serge Moscovici postulated the theory in 1961. The theorist did a research to ascertain the reception and sharing of psychoanalysis in France and found a group of elaboration of a social object by the community because of behaving and message sharing (Moscovici 1961). Moscovici (1988) posits that the theory borders on the contents of everyday and how people reason and act. Moscovici adds that social representation “make[s] it possible for us to classify persons and objects, to compare and explain behaviours and to objectify them as part of our social setting” (Watzlawik et al 2017). Höijer (2011) applied the theory in a study and the outcome showed that it could be useful for media studies. Höijer notes that the theory offers a framework for communication scholars who are interested in social media. The submission of Höijer is very apt to the current study because it provides a theoretical base for investigating how social media users in Nigeria represent political issues in Nigeria in visuals. Based on this theory, we argue that political

visuals shared on social media are a representation of the cognitions of the masses vis-à-vis political issues , political parties and political leaders. Therefore, this theory is relevant to the current study because it provides insight for the understanding political views of Nigerian social media users expressed in visuals.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Participants**

A total of 32 social media users made up of 16 males and 16 females from Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria took part in the study. The mean age of the respondents was 23 years (range 18-28 years) age. The number of years the participants had been social media users range from 4 to six 6 years . A filter questionnaire was used to determine if respondents express their political views in visuals on the social media. It was during the filter questionnaire that the initial 45 participants for the study was reduced to 32. The purpose of the filter questionnaire was to make sure that only social media users who express their political views in visuals as well as are exposed to political views expressed in visuals took part in the study. The essence was to better understand their experiences vis-à-vis visual political communication on social media. The commonest social media among the participants was the Facebook followed by Whatsapp, Twitter in that order

The respondents for this study were recruited through a snow ball technique where by initial eligible participants were identified and then requested to suggest other participants. This process was initially designed to last for two weeks but lasted for a whole month (September 10-October 9<sup>th</sup> 2016) because some eligible participants declined to participate in the study.

### **Data Collection**

The purpose of the data collection for this study was to: know how social media users express their political views through visuals; know the dominant themes of political visuals shared among social media users and know why social media users in Nigeria express their political views in visuals. Therefore, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were held with the participants at designated places like residential houses and schools. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. We audio-recorded the interviews with the aid of three trained research assistants. Each interview started with an explanation of the aim of the study. Afterwards, the respondents were told to sign a consent form. The interview began with a broad question: “What is your experience with regards to expressing your political views in visuals?” We asked follow-up questions to guide the interview process. At the end of each interview, the participants were requested to provide at least two recent political visuals they had shared on social media and indicate the specific social media platforms through which they had shared the visual. The respondents were also requested to indicate why they shared such visuals through such a social medium. The purpose was to analyse such visuals and determine the dominant themes among them.

### **Data Analysis**

For this study, “all interviews were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy by the interviewers. Three coders conducted the first level of analysis. Initially, the interview transcripts were coded independently. A process was followed whereby a code, preferably a single word, was assigned to each new idea represented in the raw data. As new codes were identified, deductive processes guided the description of how the codes were interrelated. These key concepts continued to be developed and compared with the raw data until all 35 of the transcripts had been coded. All of the transcripts were coded independently by at least one coder and all

codes were subsequently reviewed collaboratively and refined or verified by two additional coders” (Maggi et al 2014). Also, the visuals presented by the participants were also screened for eligibility before inclusion for analysis. The screening was done by two independent coders using the guidelines we provided.

After we transcribed the data, we used thematic analysis in our analysis. A codebook was used for ease of analysis. We developed the codebook using the three steps guidelines of Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012,p.53). At first, we read through the whole data and took note of important aspects based on the research objectives. Consequently, we categorized the codes in accordance with the research objectives as shown below:

1. How social media users express their political views through visuals
2. The dominant themes of political visuals shared among social media users were coded as follows:
  - a. attack theme: Themes were considered as attack if they expressed negative things about politicians and their activities.
  - b. Satiric theme: Themes were considered as satiric if they only made mockery of politicians and their activities.
  - c. Mobilization theme: Themes were considered as mobilization if they instigate people to action.

3. Why Social media users in Nigeria express their political views in visuals

## **Results/ Discussion**

The result of this study was presented in accordance to the study objectives. The essence was to ensure clarity and free flow of ideas.

## **How social media users express their political views through visuals**

During the interview, most of the participants reported that they adopt different approaches to express their political views on social media in visuals. Among the approaches is the choice of social media platform. Therefore, the Facebook was reported as the most preferred social media for expressing political views in visuals. The participants reported that Facebook was most preferred because it offers a better opportunity for the sharing of news feeds especially with its features like *share*, *like*, *react* and *comment*. One of the respondents puts it: 'When you want to attract public attention, Facebook will certainly be your best option.' Another respondents puts it:

More and more people use Facebook and politics being a very interesting aspect, expressing my political views in visuals on Facebook normally attracts public attention and reaction. Often times, my friends share such visuals on their timelines and this helps in the circulation of my views.

The participants also reported that the nature of the visuals is another thing they take seriously. According to them, political visuals are always hilarious, hence the use of political memes. A respondent simply puts it: 'I make sure my visuals are amusing to catch attention.' Another participant notes: 'My political visuals must give you a reason to laugh.' One respondent put it: 'I like memes, they perform wonders.' The time of sharing visuals was also another strategy. The participants reported that political visuals were mostly shared in the evening because more social media users log to their social media accounts in the evening. One of the respondents quips: 'I believe that visuals shared in the cool of the evening will have more viewership than those shared in the afternoon.' Another respondents adduced reason for considering time in the sharing of visuals thus: 'Nigerians are not lazy, so they work in the day time and chart in the

evening, I am conscious of this when sharing my visuals.’ Generally, the respondents reported that they express their political views in visual with the hope that other social media users will see it and form opinion from same. The result of this study has re-enforced the idea that social media have changed the face of political communication globally. In contemporary political communication, social media occupies a central place. Ezeah and Gever (2015) corroborate that there exists a paradigm shift in political communication as a result of the emergence of social media. Stieglitz, Brockmann and Xuan (2012,p.1) affirm: ‘social media platforms such as social network sites (SNSs), microblogging services or weblogs can also be successfully used by political actors to disseminate information to voters as well as to contact and discuss with them.’ Nulty, Theocharis, Popa, Parnet and Benoit (2015,p.) sum the centrality of social media in political communication thus:

Social media play an increasingly important part in the communication strategies of political campaigns by reflecting information about the policy preferences and opinions of political actors and their public followers. In addition, the content of the messages provides rich information about the political issues and the framing of those issues during election.

The submission of Stieglitz, Brockmann and Xuan and Nulty et al have implications on the result of this study because they showed that Nigerians social media users have recognized the power of social media in political communication as such, they make efforts (such as the choice of social media, the time of sharing political visuals, the type of visual) at ensuring that visuals effectively communicate political messages.

### **Why Social media users in Nigeria express their political views in visuals**

Generally, the participants reported that they express their views in visuals so as to attract and sustain the interest of other social media users. This, according to them, is because of the fact that visuals attract more attention than written words. One of the respondents puts: 'Visuals communicate easily.' The respondents also reported that most social media users do not like reading long texts but could spend reasonable minutes viewing visuals: 'many people, including myself, will rather view visuals for 10 minutes than read text for 5 minutes' so reported one of the participants. The participants also reported that there is power in pictures than written words. A participant puts it: 'visuals perform magic beyond expectations.' Also during the interviews, the participants reported that they express their political views in visuals because visuals offer a platform through which subjects in a story can better be understood. The participants further reported that with visuals, people can better relate with the information they get from the social media and march it with real life situations. A participant explains:

It is through visuals that when you are talking about a political party, for example, you display its Logo, if it is an individual, you use his or her image, if you are talking about a popular idea, you use similar visuals to elaborate, you add humour and your message lasts longer than expected. Visuals are the way to go.

The result of this study has implications on the social representations theory of Serge Moscovici (1961). Moscovici reported a collective elaboration "of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating. The relationship of this finding and ours is that, our result suggests that social media users in Nigeria collectively elaborate visuals for the purpose of communicating among themselves. This is more so that we did not find evidence to suggest that social media users face challenges to understand and interpret visuals shared by

others. Therefore, the result of this study support the social representations theory of Serge Moscovici.

### **The dominant themes on political visuals shared among social media users**

A total of 64 political visuals were received from the study participants. Based on the coding of the visuals from the independent coders, most of the visuals were satiric followed by attack theme and lastly mobilization theme. Hence the researchers adopted qualitative analysis, the difference among the themes of the visuals were not quantified. Some of the visuals are as follows: see figures 6-8.

Figure six is satiric because it makes mockery of an important national issue-the sale of Nigeria's national assets. It also suggests the dissatisfaction over the sale of the asset, hence, the satiric visual.

Figure seven attacks the speed with which Mohammadu Buhari is running his government. It simply indicates that he is being very slow in his decisions and policies. This visual is a reflection of the popular 'Baba Go Slow' that some Nigerians call the president on account of his slowness in taking decisions.

Figure eight mobilizes support for President Mohammadu Buhari when he was contesting against the incumbent Goodluck Jonathan. The visual was meant to mobilize support for his candidacy. Visuals are very powerful communication tools. They propel action, educate the viewer and inform them. Lampe (2014) avers that visuals are very powerful communication tools which when properly used could make communication easy. Lampe further posits:

‘The visual cortex is the largest system in the human brain. While reading is a skill we must learn, picture processing is an ability we’re all born with, and the language of pictures is universal.’ Our result suggests that expressions of political views in visuals is usually by the determined the mood of the user, his aim and target viewers. This, thus, eventually leads to a particular theme in a visual shared on the social media.

### **Conclusion/ Recommendations**

Based on the result of this study, we conclude that social media users in Nigeria in expressing their views in visuals through the social media take into account many considerations like the type of social media, time etc. The reason for the use of visuals to express political views is largely because of the power inherent in imagery. The basic contribution of this study is that it has provided evidence for understanding how Nigerian social media users express their views in visuals, why they chose visuals and the themes in their visual political expressions. It is hoped that this result will be relevant in the understanding of the emerging trends in political communication. We also hope that this result will be useful in the planning of political activities such as political education, political mobilization and political socialization. This is because, the result has provided a guide for, not only assessing the political expression of Nigeria social media users, but also communicating with them. Based on the result of this study, we project that Nigeria’s 2019 general election will witness an increase in the use of visual expression. Political activities in Nigeria are normally propelled by high propaganda. People who possess the financial strengths deploy it to recruit ‘online dogs’ to craft different messages in visuals against their opponents. We project that a similar scenario will play out as Nigeria goes into another election year. Some of the visuals circulated about political opponents are very demeaning, some completely true, yet others are entirely out of context. Consequently, this result serves to

raise a point of caution for readers who consume political visuals shared via the social media about political opponents in the 2019 general election. This, thus, calls for the need for the mass media to plan and execute campaigns to create awareness to the general public on the need to be careful in their exposure to visuals shared through the social media.

The contribution of this study, notwithstanding, it has some limitations. First, we did not measure the influence of political visuals on mobilization and participation. We also did not examine the sharing of political visuals on social media long demographics variables like gender, age, location, educational level etc. Consequently, further studies are recommended to expand and accommodate these areas. We also recommend that further studies should be conducted to determine factors that influence the type of political visuals shared on the social media among Nigerian social media users.

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