Nigerian Users' Evaluation of Credibility of Social Media Sites

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Abstract
There is a reasonable growth in the use of social media sites as means of communication among different categories of people across Nigeria. This paper examined Nigerian users' evaluation of credibility of the sites. The paper adopted survey research method with a sample of three hundred drawn by the application of multi-stage sampling technique while questionnaire was used as instrument of data collection. The paper found out that the social media sites were rated as credible means of communication in Nigeria, whereas Facebook was assessed as the most credible among them, some contents of the sites were revealed as not credible to their Nigerian users. The study recommends that users be wary of the contents adjudged as not credible and eschew abuses of the sites. Also, media practitioners and academics were advised to be on the vanguard of educating the public on best ways of using the social media sites in the country.
Keywords: communication, credibility, sites, social media, users,

Introduction

The medium of every communication is as important as the communication emanating from there. That is simply why McLuhan (1964) cited by Logan (2011, p.40) states that "the medium is the message." Perhaps, this submission more than any other thing underscores the importance of a medium of communication. The import of it is that, to a greater extent the medium is the yardstick to measure the communication coming from it. Little wonder, Chiakwelu (2015) notes that when it comes to western media, the prevailing norm in Nigeria and Africa is that "whatever emanates from the BBC is nothing but the truth." It implies that when the medium is trustworthy then the message from it would be trusted and vice-versa.

The twenty-first century is characterized by multi-sources (media) of sending and receiving messages and information. This very era has been variously described as an information age, maybe largely because of the divergent communication medium prevalent now. The modern communication technologies are responsible for the availability of the avalanche of the channels of information. The social media also known as the social networking sites are part of the latest means of interaction which the modern technologies bequeathed to this century and its people. They are redefining the processes, patterns and sources of human communication in the world presently.

The growth in the use of the social media has been astronomical unlike the case of other prior means of communication before the emergence of the new communication technologies of today. *Awake!* (2011, p.24) buttresses this point by noting that "social networking has become hugely popular. The social networking site *Facebook* gained 200 million users in one 12-month period!" This was a milestone in audience coverage which none of the earlier invented medium of public communication ever came close to. *Awake!* further explains the length of time radio, television and the internet took to reach their reasonable number of audience in millions. "It took 38 years for radio to reach 50 million users, 13 years for television to attract the same number, and 4 years for the Internet to do so," (Awake, 2011, p.24).

Perhaps the reason for the unprecedented growth in the spread of the social media among the people is because they are communication technologies which enable their users to be producers as well as receivers of information. That upgrading of the status of media audiences from being largely content consumers to being actively content producers or contributors is a feature that distinguishes the social media from the conventional mass media. The latter has been promoting hegemony in media content production and distribution while the former (social media) emerged and democratized the whole processes empowering virtually every person to participate in public communication process.

Presently, the social media are unimaginably popular in the hands of their teeming users notwithstanding the point that they empower and encourage amateurs to generate and distribute the contents of public communication. With this current trend, almost everybody could lay wager that he or she is a reporter hence they have the enabling technologies. The situation is changing what is hitherto known as the mass media news. It has equally altered the gathering, processing, packaging and delivery of the media news as obtained before now. All these alterations engendered by the social media culminate in certain changes to the existing conventional media; that is evident in the observation of Aja (2011, p.4) who firmly argues that "traditional media organizations such as radio, television, newspapers and magazines seem to have lost prominence and their audience. They make little or no positive change in the society." 'Their news and information, as the European Society of Professional

Journalists (2004, p.1) observes, are being increasingly circumvented by users who… use alternative media sources.'" These opinions are in line with the view of McLuhan cited by Logan (2011, p.40) who avers that "a new medium is never an addition to an old one, nor does it leave the old one in peace. It never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them,' (McLuhan, 1964, p. 174)."

With the prevailing practices which the social media ushered into modern journalism, many ethical canons of the profession are often partly or entirely not observed by the users of the new media who are reporters sans journalistic trainings. Similarly, in most countries of the globe the legal frameworks guiding journalism as a profession might have no bearing on the social media-made reporters who report events just like the journalists attached to mass media institutions known and legally recognized in a nation. The virtual base of the social media sites also makes it extremely difficult for the operations of their users to be ethically monitored or legally regulated in the developing countries.

Based on the exigencies of the forgoing, it therefore becomes imperative to ascertain the views of the people with regard to the credibility of the social media which many rely on them for sending and receiving messages or information. This is highly expedient as mass media organizations, advertisers and other corporate entities patronize the social media channels like individual persons. Meanwhile sometimes many a person cry foul that the information the audience received from the social media site about them is either completely false or a doctored version of an event or an issue. So, this study is set to find out the credibility of social media in the estimation of their Nigerian users.

In the contemporary age, there are numerous social media sites available for usage among Nigerians of all classes. Many other new ones spring up, so it may not be tenable for one to know exactly all the social media channels used by Nigerians currently. This prevalence and continuous emergence of the social media sites make it very difficult if not entirely impossible for one study to cover all the social media networks available to Nigerians in the country now. Therefore, in this paper, we delineate the social media to include: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Twitter. We chose those four sites because we have observed them through our pilot study as the most popular social networking or social media sites used mostly by Nigerians.

Statement of the problem

In every communication enterprise, the importance of the medium of the messages or information could not be overlabored. Put differently, messages are taken as sound as the medium where they originate from. Therefore, if a medium is adjudged as unreliable, the tendency is that the messages coming from there shall never be seen as credible; perchance the Latin maxim which says 'nemo dat quod non habet,' (no one gives what he has not) best captures the scenario.

The social media are increasing in both usage and coverage scope across the globe. They are gradually becoming the dominant means of keeping in touch with one another as well as the major channels of public communication of this era. Both individuals and the corporate organizations make use of the social networking sites for their distinct communication purposes. These new means of interactions are expanding the frontiers of reception as well as dissemination of information and communication all over the world. No wonder, in spite of their numbers and even the ones springing up, more users connect to the social media regularly. Many researchers including (Idakwo, 2011; Ezeah, Asogwa & Edogor, 2013; Enobakhare & Orem, 2013; Danladi, 2013) have variously pointed and or found out that the use of the social media is on the increase among Nigerians.

However, with the popularity which the social media sites have attained, it is paradoxical to see some Nigerians express utter denial of some of the messages divulged through some of the new media channels. Thus, the problem is, with the scenario described above, are the social media credible channels of communication among their Nigerian users? Which of the social media site is more credible among Nigerians? Are there contents of the social media which are often considered as not credible by the users? These outlined points form the problems which this paper has systematically found answers to.

Research objectives

The following are the objectives guiding this paper:

1. To ascertain whether the social media are credible sources of communication among Nigerians.
2. To find out whether there are social media sites which are more considered credible by the people
3. To ascertain the contents of the social media which the people often classify as not credible.

Research questions

The following are the research questions which this study has found answers to:

1. Are the social media credible as sources of public communication in Nigeria?
2. Which of the available social media sites is more credible among Nigerian users?
3. Are there contents of the social media often considered as not credible by their users?

Review of literature

1. Mass Media and Credibility

Two of the cardinal roles which the mass media perform include "serious informational and educational functions," Okunna (1999) cited by Ebeze, (2002, p.374). These responsibilities which the mass media exist to among other essential things shoulder for the audience need that the latter have trust of the former to survive in carrying out the onerous tasks. Hasan (2013, p.180) states without mincing words that, "credibility is indeed the very life-blood of the press." Therefore, those in charge of any mass medium endeavor to ensure credibility as one of the constituents of their organization's personality. Little wonder, media institutions are advertently peopled by experts and their messages are "formulated by professional communicators," (Defleur & Dennis, 1991) quoted in Ndolo (2006, p.18). Psychologically there may be an element of credibility emanating from the audience's knowledge of the presence of the trained personnel directly involved in the process of gathering, processing and dissemination of the mass mediated messages.

Undoubtedly, that accounts for the reason people pay attention to messages delivered through certain recognized magazines, newspapers, radio and television more than others. With this view, it could be extrapolated that credibility is an essential attribute which all mass media outfit should keep. The degree at which any medium maintains it, determines their level of relevance and thus the level of respect they command among the audience. Nwabueze (2006, p. 86) argues that, "if a medium is not credible… the promotional content will also be affected. The target audience may not get the message. Even where the audience receives that message, it will have little or no effect."

Had the then American press lacked the substance of credibility, Jefferson, might not have "preferred newspapers to government," (Ndolo, p. 2011, 5). The same essence informs why the audience depends on the mass media to evaluate the significance of any matter. "Audiences not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue from the emphasis the mass media places upon it," (Combe & Donald, 1976) cited by Hasan (2013, p.126). That very element inherent in the press probably is the reason Agbese (2008, p.15) argues that:

> It is impossible for most people today to imagine a morning without the radio or television news or newspapers. The day begins for most of the people with the news. The reporter's voice [media message] is the first voice we hear every day and possibly the last one we hear before retiring to bed at night. The reporter [the press] has become part of our daily public and private lives. His power lies on the public's dependence on him. 'Bracketed emphases are ours.'

The above submission underscores the reliance of members of the society on the mass media due to the significance which the institution has as a corporate member of any nation of their operation. It goes to imply that whenever any medium loses its credibility, its contents and overall stature would have no essence. People could hardly afford to do without the press or media which have built and sustained credibility among their audience. History is replete with stories of personalities who met their waterloo for daring to do without such a press. Agbese (2008, p.14) recounts the tales as follows:

> Former Nigerian president, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, decided to stop reading Nigerian newspapers and magazines "in order to enjoy the peace of mind that I had longed for all my life." Shagari was overthrown in a military coup only four months into his second four-year term as president… The late Richard Nixon, the 37th president of the United States, hated journalists and never hid his contempt for them. He once dismissed journalists derisively as a "tiny fraternity of privileged men, elected by no one." This tiny fraternity of privileged men dug into the Watergate scandal. Watergate, not the press, ruined Nixon's political career…

In an empirical study, McCroskey & Teven (1999) cited by (Hellmueller and Trilling, 2012, p.6) "examined the body of literature on source credibility and argue that one dimension—goodwill—of the construct has been 'lost'. The authors argue that Aristotle's conceptualization of ethos/source credibility was based on three dimensions: competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill (p. 90). The authors refer to Aristotle's conceptualization as it serves as milestone in rhetorical communication theory." So, credibility is a tripod on which any media that worth their salt should be expected to rest upon. Credibility is a substance for meaningful existence and sustenance of the operations of any medium of public communication.

In an empirical study conducted in Nigeria titled, 'influence of ownership on media credibility: A study of Ebonyi Broadcast Corporation (EBBC), Abakiliki,' Aja (2011) among other things found out that government owned media institutions lack credibility among the audience compared with the private owned media outfits in Nigeria. Thus many Nigerian audience members construe most of the information or news from the government owned media establishments as not reliable. That is apparently because some of them slant their news to the favor of the government. The government pays the personnel of their media organizations and as a popular maxim in journalism has it, 'he who pays the piper dictates the tone.' So, most media establishments owned either by any State or Federal government of Nigeria are seen as government's propaganda instruments. Udeajah (2004, p.158) captures that view better as he notes that in Nigeria "government-owned media, like NTA and FRCN were merely information houses for government activities and policies where news focus was to have government favourably mentioned."

2. Overview of Social media as channel of public communication

The major distinguishing factor between the social media and the conventional media is that the former generally are seen as the media organs in the hands of the users for the users and by the users, that is unlike the latter (conventional media) which the structure is grossly characterized by the existence of experts as media content producers for the entire audience. As a result, the social media are presently well established means of public communication which many people use to share ideas, information, feelings and experiences, "people increasingly use social media to get first-hand news and information, Abbasi and Liu," (2012, p.1).

In an empirical paper entitled 'social media tools as medium for knowledge sharing among students and academic staff of Nigerian Universities: case study of students' and academic staff of the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria,' Bakare, Chiemenem, Bamigboye and Okonedo (2015, p.35) submit that "social media tools has (sic) paved way for millions of people across the world to locate, connect, make friends, share ideas, solicit supports, and mobilize people with similar interest e.g. against unfavorable government policy, despotic or weak leaders, injustice etc."

In Nigeria particularly, another researcher, Idakwo (2011) among other things submits in his study entitled 'the use of social media among Nigerian youths,' that social media have been accepted widely as channels of public communication. According to him, "social media have moved from being just interactive to a form of mass media. Social media have been predicted as a strong force in shaping public opinion especially in issues of politics, social causes and sexuality. Social media have also been an expression of the complexities between the media and society," (Idakwo, 2011, p. 23). The elaborations of the works cited above point to some uses of the social media and partly what they have ushered into the public (their users) as means of communication.

However, the credibility of the social networking sites especially among Nigerian users needs to be fathomed as well as measure the credibility of each of the medium from the social media stable. That lacuna was pointed out by Jacobson (2012, p.20) who posits that "most studies either have assumed one source to have higher credibility than another…" Partially towards that direction, Idakwo (2011) for instance, discovered that most people use *Facebook* more than other social media channels in Nigeria. But no recent study has measured the credibility of social media generally and the sites making up the channels.

The social media "have touched and affected all aspects of human lives and endeavors, which have gone a long way in enhancing the way we live and relate with one another globally," Bakare, Chiemenem and Bamigboye (2015, p.35). Hence the social media have been found to wield great influence among their users and how they relate; the question of their credibility easily comes to mind. In the times of crisis and other occurrences, social media offer lay people the opportunity to report what transpires like journalists. "During social movements such as Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and the Arab Spring, people extensively used social media to organize their events and spread the news," (Abbasi & Liu, 2012, p.1).

Similarly, in Nigeria, during the fuel subsidy removal saga in 2012, social media users apply them to organize protests in different cities in the country. Also, the wide demand and protest for Boko haram to return their abducted students from Chibok in Borno State, Nigeria fondly refer to as 'Bring back our Girls,' has been fostered through the channels of social media. So, as the usage of the social networking sites widens these days in Nigeria, it is necessary to systematically measure their credibility among the users who consume the contents and create them too.

3. Social media and credibility

"The effectiveness of communication is largely determined by the credibility of its source," Hovland and Weiss (1951) cited by (Hellmueller & Trilling, 2012, p.1). The social media are the only communication channels which arrogate to the audience, the powers of message producers as well as consumers. This is contrary to what is obtainable in the conventional media sphere where the message producers are often quite different

from their consumers. The result of the users being content producers is captured by Abbasi & Liu (2012, p.1) who report that:

> Using social media, people easily can communicate and publish whatever they like. As a result, people are able to create huge amounts of data. For example, users on Twitter create 340 million tweets every day. Users on YouTube upload 72 hours of video every minute. In wordpress.com alone, bloggers submit 500,000 new posts and these posts receive more than 400,000 comments everyday.

With the scenario above and the rapid popularity which the new media or the social networking sites enjoy, it is only necessary that we examine the users' views vis-à-vis the credibility of the media they control greater percentage of the production and the consumption of the contents. In all public communications, the medium is an essential component that cannot be overlooked for any reason. According to (Metzger et al., 2003), cited by Kang (2010, p.3) "it has been suggested that the credibility of the channel/medium of communication influences the selective involvement of the audience with the medium." To that effect, it becomes quite pertinent to methodically find out from Nigerian users, their views pertaining to the credibility of the particular social media site they use.

Media researches have shown over the years that the audience (the user) selectively expose themselves to a particular medium for certain reasons. For instance, Okunna (1999, p.172) states that "in a study by Tan and Tan (1986), they established that using television is a wonderful facilitator of good mental health, a quick and "relatively safe antidote for many of the psychological maladies of the modern life, including stress, boredom, loneliness (and) even depression." It goes to mean that if the users' would adjudge social media sites as credible, it implies that there are contents the sites creditably offer that propel the audience to accord them the status of being credible.

There are divergent social media sites which are ubiquitous and provide their users the benefits of making choices of the site to use. It is needless to note that, that privilege of choice the social media offer to their users have altered their audience status "instead of being passive recipients of messages, publics are now active enough to select communication channels, especially when they care about an issue (Rubin, 2002) cited in Kang (2010, p.4). But the trustworthiness of a medium could determine the user's choice of consumption of the content or preference for another medium as a substitute, "in traditional media as well as social media, the credibility of the source has a great effect on the process of acquiring the content and changing audience attitudes and beliefs." (Abbasi & Liu, 2012, p.3).

Theoretical perspective

This paper finds expression in one of the theories of media effects called "medium is the message" McLuhan (1964-62) cited by Hasan (2013, p.131). With regard to the theory, Agba (2002, p.255) explains that "in 1964, a Canadian scholar, Marshall McLuhan, propounded a theory- 'the medium is the message.' McLuhan says each medium activates a particular mixture of the senses, which makes the form of the medium, rather than the message, determine ways of perceiving and articulating understanding." Therefore, with the views of McLuhan, the medium commands or influences the psyche of the audiences as regards to their perception or comprehension of a message. The implication is that mass mediated messages' significance before the audiences are tied to the personality of the medium through which the messages are disseminated. In that respect, advertising practitioners and other media experts have to consider the medium which they recommend to their clients for each given message or advert copy or commercial.

Still citing McLuhan to buttress the point that the medium controls the senses of the audiences about their views toward the message, Agba (2002, p.255-256) maintains that "print, McLuhan says, made people to think in linear directions, use individualized logic and consciousness. He notes that the electric technology extends man's central nervous system (brain and spinal cord)…" From the foregoing and by our observations in the social media, it could be said that the social media on their own easily ignite the users to react and act in oneness like people of the same village; this depicts the McLuhan's idea of the world being a 'global village,' Agba (2002). Instances to illustrate the above notion could be gleaned from the actions of the social media users during the popular uprising that hit the Middle East few years ago christened variously in the media as 'Arab awakening.' In the mass revolts, the world witnessed people spontaneously mobilized for protest through the messages they shared amongst themselves on social media platforms.

The channel through which one passes his or her ideas, experiences or advertises a product is the message itself. The meaning is that once the medium is not trustworthy the message from it will equally not be trusted. So the medium communicates an information, saying it in advertising parlance, the expression is 'caveat emptor,' (i.e. 'buyer beware,' but in this case the message receiver is the buyer). In their empirical treatise titled 'the credibility of credibility measures: a meta-analysis in leading communication journals, 1951 to 2011,' Hellmueller and Trilling (2012, p7-) state that "media credibility studies… look at rather mezzo- or macro-level

instead of the micro-level. The credibility of each message, the argument goes, is directly influenced by the medium in which it appears." This notion indicates the magnitude of relevance of the medium through which the messages are delivered to the audience.

With the points raised and elaborated above, we can easily visualize the relationship between this study and 'the medium is the message theory as propounded by McLuhan.' We have endeavored to show that the message's importance is hinged on the medium. That justifies the efforts toward establishing in this paper the credibility or otherwise of the social media as the popular sites of public communication in this epoch. The emphasis is whether the users perceive the social networking sites or the social media as credible channels of communication, thus accepting their messages.

Method

The primary data for this paper originated from the opinions of Nigerian users of social media, thus survey research design was adopted for it. The decision is in line with the view of Ohaja (2003, p.74), who asserts that "whenever the major source of primary data for a study would be the views of … any particular group a survey would be called for."

The population of this study is made up of all postgraduate students of the University of Nigeria, residing in their postgraduate hostel located in Nsukka Campus. The hostel has an estimated number of 177 rooms with each being occupied by three students as roommates. That is to say 177 x 3, this gives a total number of 531 students living in the basement, first floor to the fourth floor making up the hostel. Also, another estimated 70 students reside in the extra-large rooms called extensions in the hostel. Thus, there is an estimated sum of 601 students in the whole hostel comprising extension rooms, basement rooms, rooms in the ground floor, second floor, third and fourth floor.

The reason for using the students was because given their level of educational attainment, most of them are users of the social media and there is often a fairly internet service within the hostel that enables students use the new media more; both on their personal computers as well as on their cellular phones. Also, we considered that with the students' level of maturity in age, reasoning and educational status, they could sensibly assess the credibility of the social media.

The sample size of the study is 300. This number was selected following the guideline given by renowned media researchers, Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p. 103) who suggests that one rule recommended for a multivariate studies such as this "is as follows: 50=very poor; 100=poor; 200=fair; 300=good; 500=very good; 1,000=excellent" (Comprey & Lee, 1992).

Multi-stage sampling technique was used in selection of the sample elements studied. With simple random sampling (pick without replacement method), students occupying the second floor and the fourth floors of the hostel were selected. By the use of quota sampling pattern, equal number of male and female students were selected from the picked floors. With the steps, students on the two floors (second floor for female and fourth floor for male) initially selected using simple random sampling were subsequently chosen. There are two hundred and forty students who are legal occupants in both of the floors (each of them has one hundred and twenty students). Again, we applied quota sampling to randomly select thirty male and thirty female student occupants further from first and third floors where male and female students reside respectively. This brings the number studied to three hundred students.

The instrument of data collection for the paper was the questionnaire structured using close-ended and open-ended questions to elicit the various opinions of the respondents on the subject matter.

The test of validity was done by using submission of a drafted copy of the measuring instrument to a senior academic in mass communication that went through it and vetted the contents. Thereafter, through face validation, he confirmed that the instrument was valid enough to be used to measure the opinions that would correctly answer the research questions for the study.

The reliability of the measuring instrument was established by administering copies of a pre-test questionnaire randomly to some respondents within some of the rooms in the postgraduate hostels. However, the details of the findings of the pilot test were not presented in the final analyses of this paper, as they were basically used for confirmation of the reliability of the measuring instrument for the paper.

Data presentation and analysis

The questionnaire used as the instrument of data collection for this paper was divided into two parts. One part has questions designed to capture the demographic features of the respondents to the questionnaire. The second part of the questionnaire was structured in a format that would easily elicit useful opinions of the respondents on the paper's subject matter. Out of the three hundred copies of the questionnaire distributed, two hundred and ninety-six were intelligibly filled, returned and were used for the analysis.

Demographic data of the respondents

Figure1: Sex classification of respondents
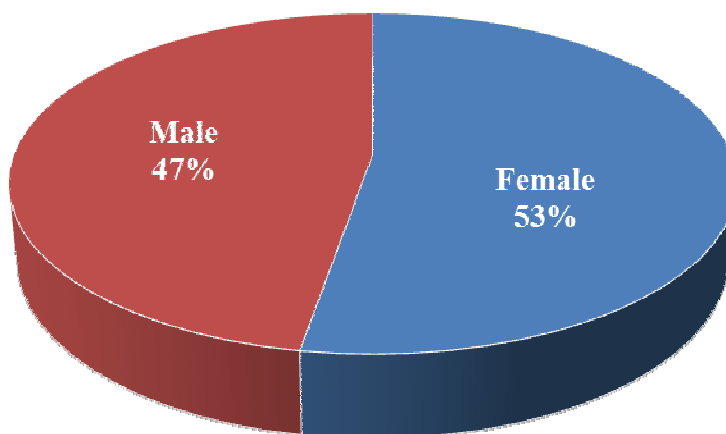
Source: researchers' survey, 2015

From data we gathered on gender classification of the respondents, the female were 156 in number while the male were 140. The information is converted into percentage through the use of excel work sheet and the results are displayed on the chart above, where the female respondents take 53% while the males take 47% .

Table 1: Age Distribution, religious background and educational status of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage 100%	Religion	Frequency	Percentage 100%	Education	Frequency	Percentage 100%
15-25	40	14%	**ATR**	Nil	Nil	BSc./BA	180	61%
26-35	170	57%	**Christianity**	291	98%	HND	30	10%
36-45	76	26%	**Islam**	5	2%	Msc./MA	39	13%
46 / above	10	3%	**Others**	Nil	Nil	PGD	47	16%

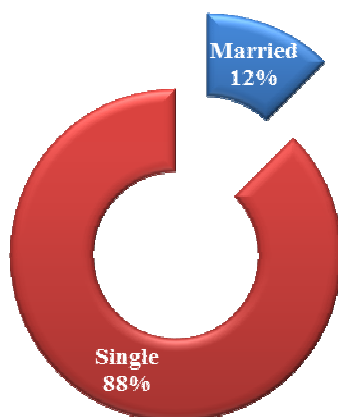**Source: researchers' survey, 2015**

From the data on the table about the age status of the respondents, 40 of them (14%) fall within the age brackets (15-25); 170 other respondents (57%) fall within the ages (26-35); 76 others (26%) fall within the age brackets of (36-45) and the other 10 (3%) fall within the ages of 46 and above.

On religious background, none of the respondents admitted to be a member of African Traditional Religion (ATR), 98 respondents representing (98%) admitted that they are Christians while 5 other respondents (2%) accepted to be Muslims.

For educational qualifications, 180 respondents which is (61%) of the sample accepted to be holders of BSc./BA; 30 other respondents (10%) acknowledge to be holders of Higher National Diploma; 39 others (13%) accepted to have MSc./MA, while 47 respondents representing (16%) admitted to be holders of Postgraduate Diploma (PGD).

Figure 2: Marital status of respondents

Figure 2: Marital Status of respondents

Source: researchers' survey, 2015

From the data obtained for marital status 37 of the respondents (12%) are married while 259 others are yet to be married. For better comprehension, the information about the marital status of the respondents was converted into the chart presented in figure 2 with the aid of excel sheet.

Analysis of the research questions

Before the answers to the research question one, we endeavored to ascertain whether the respondents use the social media by placing before them the statement used as the caption of the table two presented below. The respondents' various responses to the statement were summarized beneath:

2: Kindly indicate the social media you use among the list below, if you are using two or more, choose the one you use most:

| Social media sites	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	196	66%
LinkedIn	32	11%
Twitter	24	8%
YouTube	49	17%
None of them	0	0

Source: researchers' survey, 2015

The item above was used to ascertain whether the respondents actually use the social media or not. The statement was not accredited to any research question. From the answers provided above, it could be deduced that the respondents use the social media.

1. Research question one: Are the social media credible as channels of public communication in Nigeria?

The research question one of this paper was answered using items number 8 and 9 on the questionnaire with these questions to the respondents-

Question number 8: do you see the social media as credible sources of information? In their answers to that question, 201 respondents (68%) accepted that the social media are reliable sources of information to them. Another 87 respondents (29%) responded negatively to the question while 9 other respondents (3%) were undecided to the question. The data are presented in the chart below:

Figure 3: Credibility of Social media
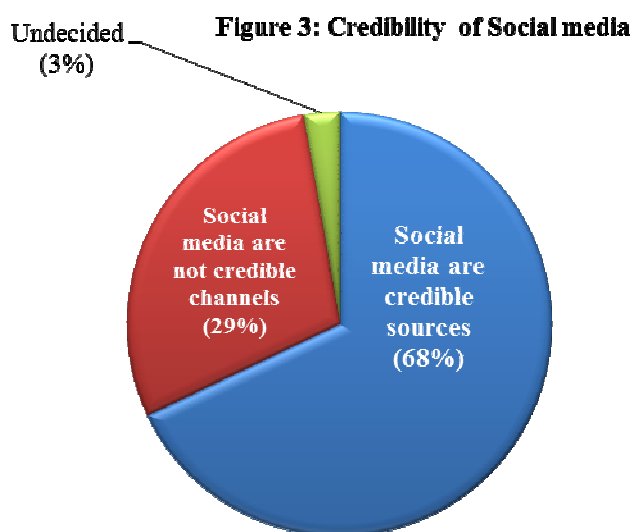
Source: the researchers' survey, 2015

In their answer to question number 9, the 201 respondents who affirmed that the social media are credible sources of communication justified their answers with the following reasons: 'senders of the messages got first hand information, some of the messages came from the mass media, many of the messages were backed with pictures of what was reported, senders of the messages could be reached for clarifications and many of the reports were known to the members of the public.

2. Research question two: Which of the available social media sites is more credible among Nigerian users? Items ten and eleven of the questionnaire were used to proffer answers to this question.

In their responses to the question (item) number 10- which of the social media do you believe is more credible source of public communication in Nigeria? 171 respondents were affirmative that Facebook is their most trusted social media site, 10 other respondents chose LinkedIn, while 8 other respondents selected Twitter, and 12 other respondents chose YouTube as their most reliable social media channel in Nigeria. Those details are represented in the chart below for better comprehension:
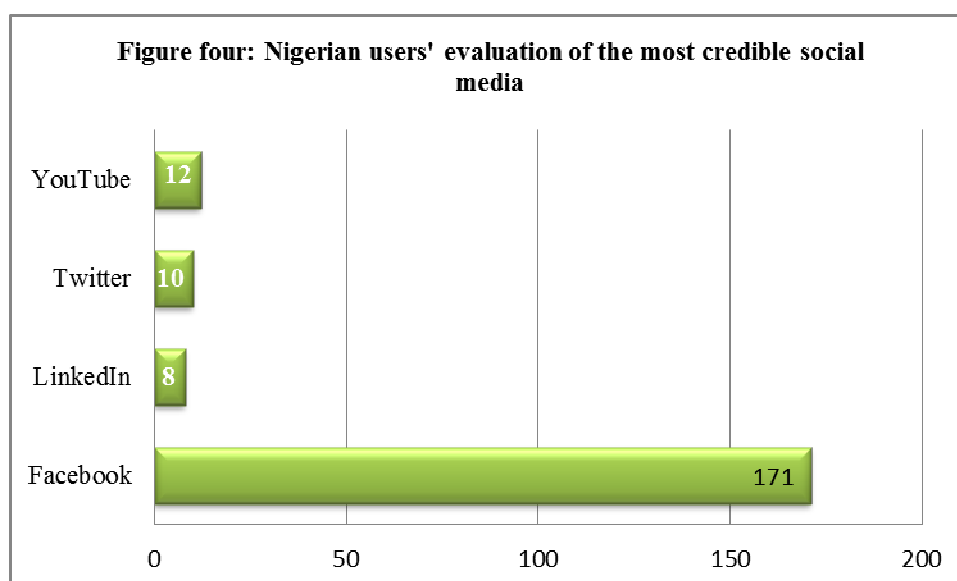
Source: the researchers' survey, 2015

Question (item) number eleven of the questionnaire was a follow-up to question ten of it. The question was used to ascertain from the respondents their reasons for choosing the social media site they selected as their most credible source of communication. Most of the 171 respondents who chose Facebook gave reasons like- 'it is available for use by many people, it is easy to use by members of the public, and it is used by many categories of people.' Most of the 12 respondents who chose YouTube said 'the medium essentially has the texts, pictures and video contents simultaneously.' The ten respondents who chose Twitter justified their decision noting that 'the site is often used by more mature people, that the users report events or disseminate information like experts unlike what is obtainable in some other social media sites like (names withheld), where much younger ones access.'   For LinkedIn, the 8 persons who chose it disclosed that the channel is for 'senior class, where those who have achieved certain things upstairs belong to showcase what they have, some others were of the opinion that the medium is not crowded.

3. Research question three: Are there contents of the social media you consider as often not credible?

Item (question) number 12 of the questionnaire was used to provide answers to research question three of the study. Are there contents of the social media sites you use but consider as often not credible? If yes, please briefly state such contents. The respondents' responses to that question were arranged and presented on the table below:

Table 2: Contents of the social media considered as not credible by the respondents

Items S/N	Respondents	Social media contents considered as not credible
1	36	Political contents with half truths, exaggeration of facts and figures,
2	28	Political contents debasing other politicians and their ideologies
3	33	Contents publicizing political parties and their works not established
4	26	Some contents with information encouraging tribalism in Nigeria
5	33	All religious contents attacking a religion or denomination
6	45	Contents displaying fake job alerts and other unreliable business information

Source: researchers' survey, 2015

The data presented on the table above summarizes the aggregate views of the respondents about the contents which they consider as not often credible on the social media. From the data, 97 respondents were of the opinion that contents of the social media bordering on some political issues are often exaggerated facts, figures, debasing and or fake publicity for politicians/parties' unsubstantiated feats, (items 1, 2 and 3, of table two above). 26 respondents (item 4) spotted contents encouraging tribalism in Nigeria, 33 other respondents (item 5) noted some religious contents as not credible with the reason that users attacked other religion or religious denomination.   45 of the respondents (item 6) outlined contents presenting information about business opportunities and job alerts as not credible, noting that most of them were fakes.

Discussion of research findings

This study recorded certain findings that are quite worthwhile to note about the subject matter of the enquiry. By the assessment of the users, it has been established that social media are credible sources of communication in Nigeria. This finding supports a submission in an empirical study conducted by Kang where it was reported that "credibility of social media is one of the key factors initiating and further increasing public engagement and communication effectiveness in the…social media," Kang (2010, p.1). This apparently confirms the reason for the rate of the popularity and rapid increase in the usage of the social media sites among Nigerians presently.

Also, the paper found out that among the social media sites examined, Facebook is the most credible according to the ratings of the respondents. That finding is in consonance with the results of a study by Idakwo (2011), which among other things discovered that most people use *Facebook* more than other social media channels in Nigeria. That is similar to the finding of Alabi (2013, p.70), which shows that among Nigerian undergraduates "762 (76.7%) …. can be categorized as having low addiction to Facebook, 216 (21.7%) are moderately addicted while only 16 (1.6%) have high addiction to Facebook." With the available data, Nigerian students have been generally found to be users of Facebook more than other social networking sites, although their level of addiction to it is low according to Alabi (2013), even at that our study proved that postgraduate students use the medium more than other social networking sites sampled.

In another finding of the work, the most contents of the social media sites that were considered as not credible have been ascertained with political-oriented contents being the topmost on the ladder. With the points outlined, it is decipherable that the social media sites' contents on political matters were laden with more of

propaganda. That was evident where the respondents noted that political contents were not credible as many of them were replete with exaggerations, false publicity, distortion of facts and figures on politicians and or party related matters as well as debasing of opponents. By a thorough assessment, we can see that all these mentioned points are often characteristics of political propaganda.

From the views expressed by the respondents, those contents hinging on political affairs are not regarded as credible. The data should be useful pieces of information to the politicians and their media staff who use various sites of the social media for their publicity. They have to note that Nigerian social media users take many of the political publicities on the channels with a pinch of salt.

In another finding of the study, the contents of the social media bearing job alerts as well as information on businesses were adjudged as not credible because most of the vacancies or details displayed were noted as fakes according to the respondents. The implication is that Nigerians who search for employment or business opportunities on the social media sites should trade with caution to avoid running into the hands of fraudsters on the social media. In this regard, one case that comes to the fore is the ugly incident of the death of a Nigerian lady Cynthia Osokogu that was allegedly killed in 2012 by her Facebook friends, who lured her into a business deal contrived on the platform with the promise to sell her some goods at cheaper rates, Kaydee (2012).

Moreover, other findings depict that the contents with information criticizing other religion or religious denomination as well as those encouraging tribalism were rated as not reliable by the respondents. The findings show that the users do not buy the idea of those using the social media platforms as means of fanning the embers of tribalism and or promoting religious bigotry. So, those whose stock in trade on the social media is to vituperate other tribes, other religions or denomination ought to be sure that many Nigerian users would not believe most of their ideas against the aforementioned.

Recommendations
From the findings of this paper, we recommend that:

1. Nigerian users of the social media should be wary of some of the contents they consume as unscrupulous users have been found to display misleading information that could be harmful to the public.

2. Social media users in the country have to be aware that some political contents were mere propaganda tools apply to debase other politicians or political party's ideologies as well as exaggerate and or falsify some information on political–related issues.

3. Members of the public are encouraged to desist from the various abuses in the usage of the social media for the interest of greater number of Nigerians found to be users of the sites in search of various relevant pieces of information.

4. Media practitioners and academics should devote time to educate the people to avoid negative uses of the social media as they form major credible channels of public communication in Nigeria now.

5. Social media users should go extra miles to verify from other credible sources on some of the information they get from the sites since anybody can post anything on the social media.

Conclusion
In the present time, social media sites are being used exceedingly by good number of Nigerians of distinct status and categories; the youths, the adults as well as the male and the female constituents of the country have been documented to be involved. Due to the tremendous increase in the uses of the sites, the researchers deemed it worthwhile to examine the credibility of the new means of communication. That becomes imperative to fathom the rate of credibility of each of the selected social media among their Nigerian users. From the findings of the study, it has been established that Nigerian users evaluated the social media as credible channels of public communication. However, there are contents found to be subjected to abuses by the unscrupulous users. Thus, members of the public were encouraged to be cautious of that reality in other not to fall victims.

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