A Descriptive Analysis of Twitter Followership of the Major Political Parties in Nigeria

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Abstract
The role of twitter as one of the most popular social media application for organisations and political parties has been recognized by various scholars. Twitter has been used by parties as a means of sharing information and manifestoes, and also interacting with their followers online. The study was about how the Twitter followership of major political parties in Nigeria has changed since the 2015 elections. The major political parties for this study were the All Progressive Congress, APC and the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP. An internet research was carried out using the Twitter platforms for the APC and PDP. The research showed that for APC, their growth from 2014 to 2015 was "fairly significant" from 49 followers in 2014 to 244 followers in 2015, while the PDP recorded a "very significant" growth from 5839 in 2014 to 79,516 in 2015. Even though the result showed that the APC recorded a growth on Twitter, they are significantly lagging behind on the follower count as their aggregate Twitter followers are less than the number of voters that make up a polling unit in Nigeria. The surprising fact here is that APC defeated the PDP in the Nigerian presidential election of 2015 by over 3 million votes, yet is trailing the PDP on Twitter, we then have to ask if Nigerian voters have apathy for Twitter? It is recommended that further studies be carried out to ascertain what motivates political parties in Nigeria to use Twitter if as this research has shown there is no correlation between Twitter use and earned votes.
Keywords: Twitter, Social Media, Political Parties, APC, PDP, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

This paper has its foundation from the 2014 study conducted by Ihejirika, Mbazie and Ndinojuo (2015) on the use of social media by political parties in Nigeria prior to the general elections conducted in 2015. Here, we will focus only on the followership of the two major political parties in Nigeria on Twitter. By political parties in this paper, we are referring to the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC), and its main opposition party the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). This is because most of the other parties were observed to be lacking in infrastructure and organisation as well as not being visibly present in the digital mediascape in Nigeria (Ihejirika et al., 2015).

The followership and activity levels of the political parties according to Ihejirika et al. (2015) was low and one of the possible reasons ascribed by the study was the research period being devoid of political activities and elections. Thus parties may not be eager to sell themselves or broadcast their manifestoes. This study solely focuses on the Twitter growth of the two major parties in Nigeria after the 2015 general elections in order to review if there has been any improvement in the followership of the political parties on Twitter.

Elections, especially at the national level, are a major event for a democracy, as governments are born as a result of securing enough votes cast by legitimate voters (Gong & Lips, 2009; The National Conference on Citizenship, 2006; The Hansard Society, 2005). Election campaigning by political parties and candidates therefore is a critical activity during an election period, and essentially is seen as a form of advocacy, propaganda, or marketing for the purpose of vote maximisation (Anstead & Chadwick, 2008; Ward et al., 2008; Hill, 2009).

Effing, Hillegersberg, and Huibers (2011) point out that the use of mobile Internet gave an additional boost to the use of social media by political organisations as they try to keep up with an ever changing and growing media and social environment. They further imply that most of the parties are struggling to implement social media to their benefit. It seems that political parties are just riding the wave of social media without any strategy. This view in today's world has greatly evolved as political parties have different strategists whose job it is to guide and control how to maximize social media potential. Because of this, Political parties are expected to struggle less in 2015 in understanding and implementing strategies for their online presence compared to 2011. The figure below illustrates global social media ranking.
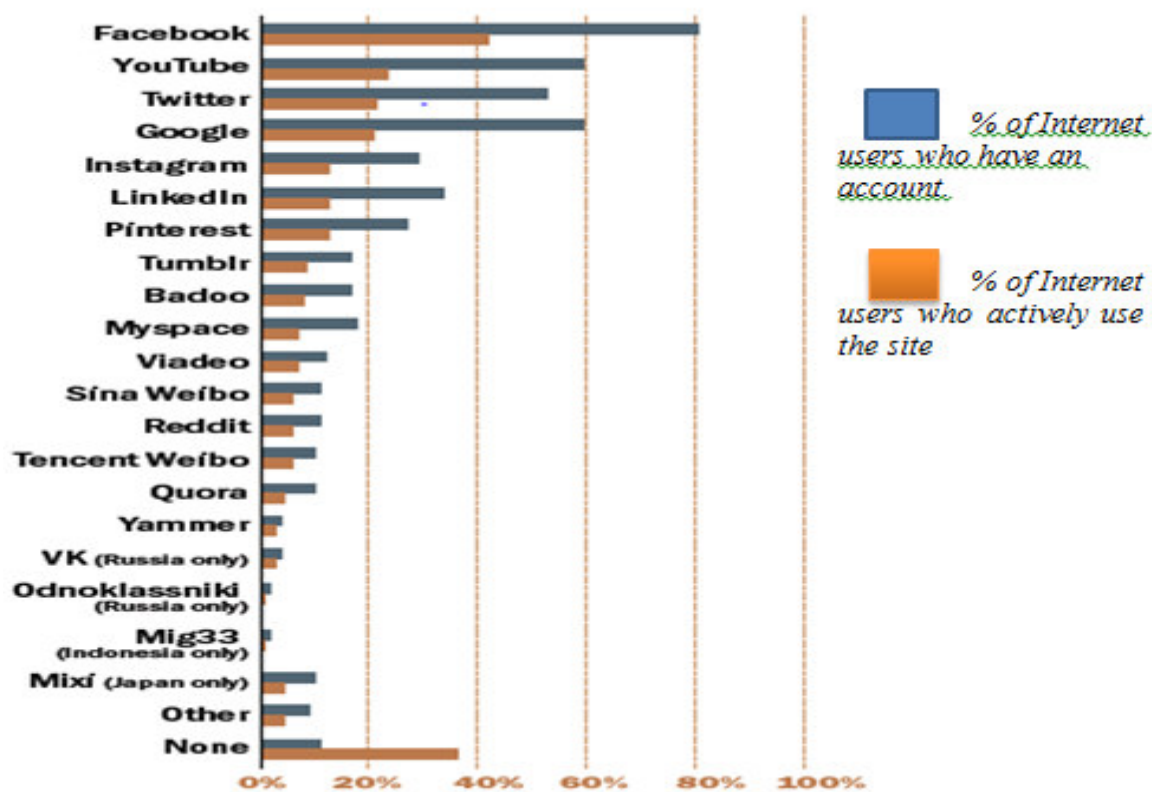
Figure 1: Global Social Networks Ranking in average number of accounts and active usership *Source: European Publishers Council, 2015.*

We can deduce from figure 1 that Twitter as the third most popular social network on the ranking after Facebook and YouTube. It can be positively used by political parties, and misuse can also have negative and sometimes disastrous outcomes for the party or candidates involved (Ndinojuo, 2015). The definition of active users in our context are "online users who have accounts and say they have used or contributed to the social network in the last month via any device". *(European Publishers Council, 2015)*

Macintosh and White (2006) as cited in Effing, Hillegersberg, and Huibers (2011) created a participation ladder with three stages of online participation, which is useful for explaining the social media phenomenon. They point out that;

> First, there is e-Enabling. This is mainly about giving access and information to members, citizens or users. The second stage is e-Engaging. During this stage, people can interact with the organization and start a dialogue. People are being consulted for certain projects, decisions or activities for instance with forums and polls. The third stage is e-Empowering. This stage is about working together with users, members or citizens. Empowering them with responsibilities, tasks and options to collaborate with the organization.
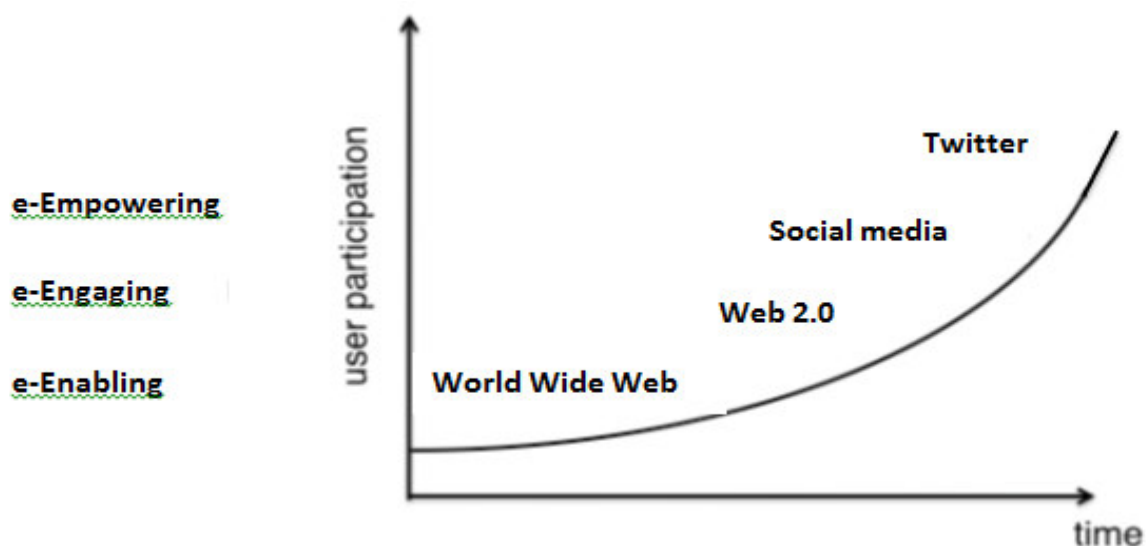
Figure 2: Social Media Evolution Model (Revised from Effing et al., (2011).

The model in figure 2 is revised from Effing et al. (2011) with Twitter included in the time growth phase being the difference from the original model. The y-axis represents the level of user participation by indicating the typical degree of participation from e-Enabling, e-Engaging to e- Empowering. The x-axis represents time. When time passes, new labels and definitions are created to understand how the Internet develops. Boundaries in this model are not precisely defined, but gradual. It shows the evolution from World Wide Web, to Web 2.0, to Social Media and for our research Twitter.

Web 2.0 is a new stage where the user participation increases. The emphasis is more on e-Engaging tools. This model makes clear that Web 2.0 is not a completely new kind of the web, but a new stage reached with higher user participation. With the current increasing use of Social Media, the user participation level can increase dramatically. The e-Empowering is very visible on Twitter where individuals, organisations and brands create their own following and empower themselves (and their brands). This does not mean that e-Empowering was not possible during the beginning of the World Wide Web. Social Media is a new stage of development where users are more actively participating than ever.

1.2 Statement of Problem
The major focus of this paper was to look at the growth of followership of Nigerian political parties followership on Twitter after the 2015 general elections. The study by Ihejirika et al. (2015) averred that about 20% of the 25 registered political parties by the Independent, National Electoral Commission, INEC Nigeria were available on Twitter and about 12% tweeted during the study period.

They further opined that the Twitter accounts of the two main political parties in Nigeria; APC and PDP did not have a large following especially when the numbers were compared with the population of internet penetration in Nigeria and also with the following on the Twitter accounts of the major political parties in Australia, France, Germany, United States and the United Kingdom. Based on twitter presence, we can say that, the political parties in Nigeria are crawling while the selected parties are more than walking and running. The figures are presented below.

Table 1.   Major Political Parties in Selected Countries showing Twitter Activities

S/No	Country	Two Major Political parties	Most Recent Presidential/General Election Results	Twitter Followers (2014) •*•
1	United States of America *	Democratic Party	65,918,507	289,000
		Republican party	60,934,407	265, 000
2	United Kingdom **	Conservative Party	11,334,576	104,000
		The Labour Party	9,347,304	125,000
3	France ***	UMP - Union pour un Mouvement Populaire	16,860,685	97,000
		Parti Socialiste	18,000,668	83, 000
4	Germany ****	Christian Democratic Union	14,921,877	47,000
		Socialist Democratic Party	11,252,215	50,000
5	Australia *****	Liberal Party of Australia	3,882,918	45, 300
		Australian Labor Party	4,702,314	58, 400
6	Nigeria ******	APC – All Progressive Congress	15, 424, 921	49
		PDP –Peoples Democratic Party	12, 853, 162	5839

Note: Sources of the information on table 1 include:
*Leip, 2012
**BBC, 2015
***Embassy of France in The United Kingdom, 2012
****Election Resources on the Internet, 2013
*****ABC News, 2016
******INEC, 2015a
•*• Ihejirika et al., 2015

This study is thus to look at the followership of the two main political parties in the period preceding the 2015 general election. One of the pitfalls of the Ihejirika et al. (2015) study was that it was carried out during a period of political inactivity and the parties have not gone through an election cycle since setting up the Twitter accounts.

Figure 3: All Progressive Congress 2014, Facebook (Ihejirika et al., 2015)
Figure 3 shows a computer screen grab of the Twitter homepage of All Progressive Congress (APC) in

2014. Figure 4 below displays the computer screen grab of the Twitter homepage fo the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in 2014 as shown in Ihejirika et al. (2015).

Figure 4: Peoples Democratic Party 2014, Twitter (Ihejirika et al., 2015)

Therefore, this study documents the growth in followership for the parties since joining Twitter and using the application during an election cycle. This can serve as a yardstick for future studies that will highlight their growth on Twitter and perhaps other social media networks. We will also look at the degree of the change using a rating developed for this study by Ndinojuo and Ihejirika (2015), and presented in table 2.

Table 2. *Followership Rating Increase Table*

Ratings	Insignificant	Fairly significant	Significant	Very Significant	Very Highly significant
% Increase	<100	>300	>500	>1000	>5000

The description of table 2 in relation to this research indicates that increments less than 50% are Insignificant, those greater 50% are Fairly Significant, greater than 100% are Significant, above 500% Very Significant and increments above 1000% are Very Highly Significant.

The objectives of the study were to find out the Twitter followership of political parties in Nigeria, and also to ascertain if their followership has increased significantly from the study of Ihejirika et al. (2015) using the ratings in table 2 above.

The following research questions were formulated for this study, they include;
1. What is the Twitter following of political parties in Nigeria?
2. Has there been a significant change in the Twitter following of political parties in Nigeria in the aftermath of the 2015 general elections either upward or downward?

This paper not only documents Twitter followership for political parties in Nigeria, it will also serve as reference material for future research on the role of Twitter in political affairs of political parties in Nigeria. It can also be a building block for analyzing growth of followership of political parties in Nigeria by other researchers.

2. Literature review

The impact of the internet on political parties has been a subject debated for almost as long as the internet has existed (Gaber et al., 2015). Elections empower citizens to choose their leaders. It gives all an opportunity for equal voice and representation in our government (Chin, Zappone & Zhao, 2016). The inherent potentials of Twitter as a tool appear to be most promising in political context as social software and an enabler of more participation and democracy has been studied by an array of scholars (Bächle, 2006; Green & Pearson, 2005; O'Reilly, 2005, Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012).

Garcia (2010) asserts that a study by Chadwick Martin Bailey and iModerate Research Technologies, found that consumers are 67% more likely to buy from the brands they follow on Twitter portraying the

influence such brands wield over their audience. In the context of politics and elections, voters could also favour voting for or against parties they follow on Twitter.

Kindelan (2011) further predicted that Twitter will play an important role in the presidential election held in 2012 in United States of America, as just over one-third of respondents said the information they saw online made them decide to vote for or against a particular candidate during the Mid-Term election of 2010. The 2012 presidential election could be described as the first major election where social media especially Facebook and Twitter played a key role in campaigns and mobilizations, and ultimately the election result.

Golbeck, Grimes and Rogers (2010) had earlier examined the use of Twitter by U.S. Congress members. They found that Congress members are primarily using Twitter to disperse information, particularly links to news articles about themselves and to their blog posts, and to report on their daily activities. Twitter is rather seen as vehicles for self-promotion. However, Twitter is also facilitating direct communication between Congress members and citizens, though this is a less popular activity. In a similar study, Lassen and Brown (2010) find that U.S Congress members are more likely to use Twitter if they belong to the minority party, if their party leaders urge them to, if they are young, or if they serve in the Senate. This assertion should also be a topic for further investigation.

Ammann (2010) focuses on the use of Twitter by U.S. Senate candidates and the content of their tweets during the 2010 midterm election season. Results show that candidates use Twitter as part of their political campaigns. However, the amount of use significantly varies by the level of resources a candidate possesses, state size, and the competitiveness of the congressional race. Also, the content of the tweets is largely related to candidate type and in some cases political affiliation of the candidate.

Tumasjan et al. (2010) elucidate that Twitter is extensively used for political deliberation and that the mere number of party mentions accurately reflects the election result. This is to say that; microblogging messages on Twitter validly mirror the political landscape offline and can be used to predict election results. Conover et al. (2011) examined two networks of political communication on Twitter, comprised of over 250,000 tweets from the six weeks leading up to the 2010 U.S. congressional midterm elections.

3. Research Methodology

This research made use of internet research, where the websites and Twitter accounts of the selected parties were reviewed for relevant data applicable to this study. Wikipedia (2016) defines internet research as the practice of using Internet information, especially free information on the World Wide Web, in research. It uses internet information or internet-based resources (like websites, search engines etc.), tends towards the immediate (drawing answers from information you can access without delay) and tends to access information without a purchase price.

Ndinojuo and Ihejirika (2015) define internet research as a research that utilizes only the internet and other internet related applications for data gathering and collection. They may include but not limited to web pages, applications and search engines. They may be conducted over internet enabled devices like computers (desktop and laptops), tablets, smartphones etc and also internet services like emails, social media (Facebook, twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat etc.)

The research population consisted of Twitter accounts of APC and PDP. The valid Twitter accounts of the sampled parties were those that are linked from the website of the selected political parties or those with the blue verification badge to indicate it "verified" status. All "verified" Twitter accounts carry a white check mark in a blue cloud. This verified badge appears next to a user's name on the profile and in searches.

The instruments of data collection used for this study were search engines, screenshot captor, for capturing screenshots (pictures) of the profiles of the sampled political parties as they appear on twitter and their various websites.

4. Presentation of Findings

The research findings were presented in this section and we started with answering the first research question;

1. What is the Twitter following of political parties in Nigeria?

In order to identify the Twitter accounts of the selected parties, the website of the parties were visited in order to link to their social media accounts.

Figure 5: Screenshot of APC website (October 2, 2015)

In figure 5, the red arrow is seen pointing to the Twitter account of APC on their website, clicking on the arrow redirects a user to the Twitter account of APC where the information about their followership is obtained. The data are presented below.
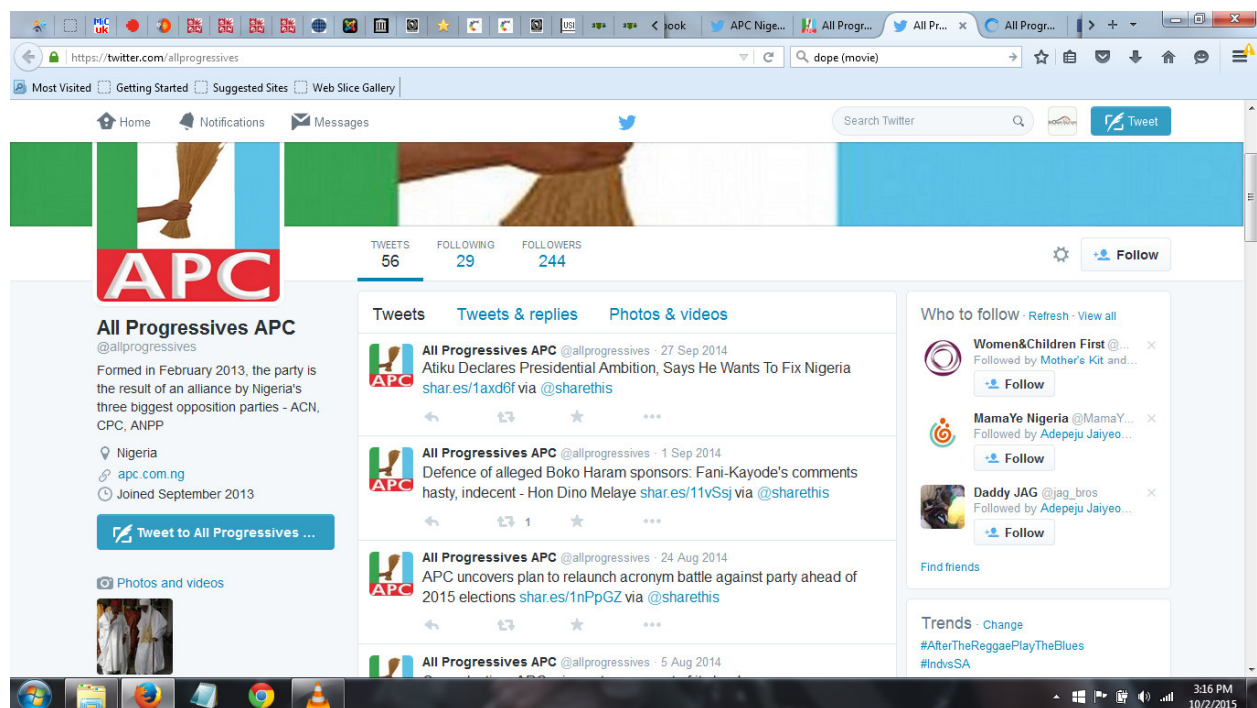

Figure 6: APC Twitter Account Information (October 2, 2015).

From figure 6, we can deduce that APC joined twitter in September 2013, have 56 tweets, and have 244 followers on twitter. Their followers were up from 49 in 2014 (on table 1) to 244 in 2015 after the general elections. This represents an increase of 398% Twitter subscribers for the APC.

Following the same procedure, the website of the PDP was also visited in order to get their authentic Twitter account information. A screenshot of the site is shown in figure 7.
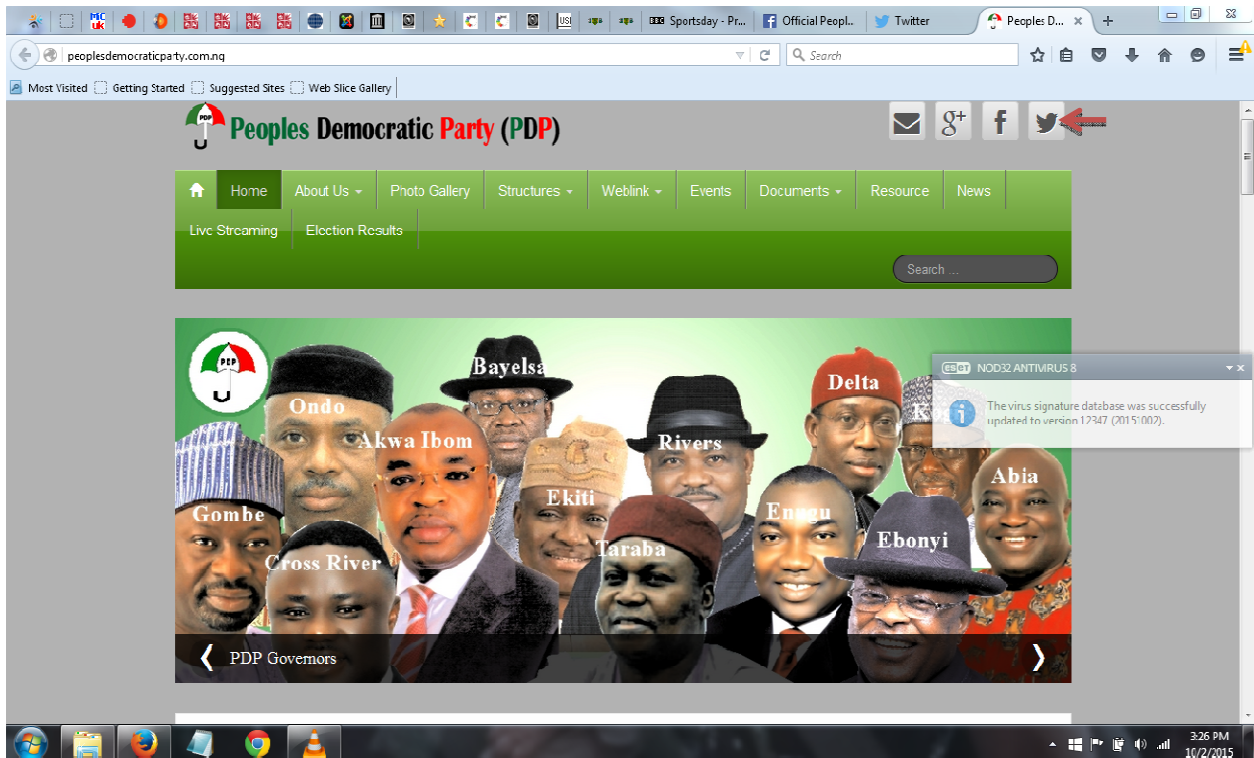
Figure 7: Screenshot of PDP website (October 2, 2015)

The red arrow is seen in Figure 7 pointing to icon that when clicked redirects a user to the Twitter account of PDP. Their followership information obtained is shown below.

Figure 8: PDP Twitter Account Information (October 2, 2015).

In the Figure 8 above, we can see that PDP have posted 3,504 tweets, and have 79,516 followers on twitter. Their followers were up from 5,839 in 2014 to 79,516 in 2015 after the general elections. This represents an increase of 1262% Twitter subscribers for the PDP.

Research question 2: **Has there been a significant change in the Twitter following of political parties in Nigeria between 2014 and 2015?**

Table 3. *Twitter Followership Analytics for APC and PDP*

	Twitter Fans 2014	Twitter Fans 2015	Increase from 2014	% Increase	Rating
APC	49	244	195	398	Fairly Significant
PDP	5839	79,516	73677	1262	Very Significant
Total	**5888**	**79760**	**73872**		

Using the ratings presented in table 2 as a guide, the data presented in table 3 shows that for APC, the growth has been fairly significant with an additional 195 subscribers on Twitter from 2014. The data on table 3 shows that APC has struggled to increase their Twitter followership. The percentage increase here can be misleading as it tends to show a fairly significant growth in followership but in reality, the total number of APC followers on Twitter does not equal the required number of voters that make up a polling unit which according to INEC is 750 (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2015b, p.6). In fact, the total number of Twitter followers for APC (249) is less than one third (250) the required number of voters in a polling unit (750).This disparity is better understood in the context that there were 119,973 polling units for the 2015 general elections (Alli, 2015), and APC won the presidential election with over 15 million votes to the PDP's 12 million votes (INEC, 2015a), as well as securing majority seats in both the senate and house of representatives defeating the PDP. This leads us to further ask, Do Nigerian (APC and PDP) voters have apathy for Twitter?

Table 3 also shows that for the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, followership on Twitter has grown from 5839 followers in 2014 to 79516 in 2015 after the general elections. This represents an increase of 73677 and a 1262% increase. From the ratings provided in table 2, the increase is "Very Significant".

This increase is "significant" in the sense that PDP was able to add 73677 followers on Twitter from 2014 before the general elections to 2015 after the general elections. If we look at it from the point of polling stations, this is about 98 polling stations more if they were to be voters.

It important to note however that not all Twitter accounts are actual voters, some twitter accounts are organisations, others are Nigerians who live abroad and may not be eligible to vote, some are unregistered voters and another percentage may not be of voting age. This however does not diminish the significance of the growth of Twitter followers for the PDP. We are tempted to ask then, how come with this very significant Twitter followership   growth PDP still lost the general elections?

5. Conclusion

Twitter is one of the leading social media applications used by individuals and organisations in their public communication. Political parties globally have successively keyed into the use of Twitter platform for their promotional and campaign activities. Nigerian political parties have also forayed into the Twitterverse with varying degrees of success. This study was to x-ray the growth of Twitter followers of Nigerian political parties from the pre-election period of 2014 to the post-election period in 2015. The study was restricted to APC and PDP. This was because they are the two main parties in Nigeria, and previous studies (Ihejirika et al., 2015; Ndinojuo & Ihejirika, 2015) have shown that the social media activities of other Nigerian parties are minimal and negligible.

This research has been able to show that the growth of Twitter followership for APC was fairly significant statistically (by definition of study parameters), but realistically insignificant because the total followership of 244 in 2015 is quite small for a party that won over 14 million votes in the general election.

The election results of 2015 indicate that Twitter cannot be used conclusively to predict election results in Nigeria. We saw where a party garnered over 12 million votes in the presidential election yet had less than 300 followers on Twitter. The uses and benefits of Twitter to political parties should be further investigated in order to find out the motivation for political parties use of Twitter in the public communication campaign.

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