

CARITAS UNIVERSITY AMORJI-NIKE, EMENE, ENUGU STATE**Caritas Journal of Management, Social Sciences and Humanities**

CJMSSH, Volume 4, Issue 1 (2025)

Interrogating the Role of Social Media on Voter Behaviour in Nigerian Elections**Onwunyi, Ugochukwu Mmaduabuchi****Authors' Affiliation**

Department of Political Science
Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba,
Delta State.
Email:
ugochukwu.onwunyi@gmail.com,
Phone: +2348138394223

Keywords

Social Media,
Politics,
Elections,
Voter Behaviour,
Campaigns

ABSTRACT

The intention of this research was to shed light on the implications, uses, and role of social media in the Nigerian electioneering campaigns and political processes at large. It, therefore, increases our understanding of how social media impact elections and democracy in Nigeria. It was deduced that in the Nigerian general elections, social media was used due to its participatory nature. The study is qualitative in nature as data collection was basically secondary, while the Uses and gratification theory was utilized as the theoretical framework of analysis. The study revealed that; the potency of social media in the political campaign processes and the election was not appreciated by some scholars; again, social media were used in Nigeria as a weapon to undermine and even destroy the image of other political parties, especially the People's Democratic Party and All Progressive Party. From the findings, we make the following recommendations; Nigerian politicians should continue to use the social media to engage the electorate during political campaigns especially the youth who are avid users of the social media; based on the findings of this study, Facebook is the most utilized social media platform by the presidential candidates. The study therefore recommends that in future elections, other social media platforms likes YouTube, Instagram, and Blogs should be employed by politicians during electioneering campaigns; Finally, Nigerian electorate should ensure that their voting pattern in future elections should not be influenced by political candidate's religious affiliations or ethnic considerations but on the credibility of candidates.

Introduction

The use of emotional appeals in political campaigns to increase support for a candidate or decrease support for an opponent is a widely recognized practice and a common element of any campaign strategy (Brader, 2006). Campaigns often seek to instill positive emotions such as zeal and hopefulness about their candidate to improve turnout and political activism while seeking to raise fear and anxiety about the opposition. Zeal tends to reinforce preference for the candidate and party, while fear and anxiety interrupt voter behavioral patterns and leads individual voters to look for new sources of information on divergent political issues (Marcus et al, 2000). Sources of information available to a voter vary widely including the traditional media, TV, radio and newspapers. However, with the advent of online social media forum, most voters can access information, debate on the information and also give feedback on his own views, opinions and expectations from the party and candidate.

Although the social media has helped in increasing the popularity of candidates and their parties, it has the capacity to make or mar their chances and voter's perception of the party or candidates. Rumors, falsehood, propaganda and derogatory information about individual candidates or parties are commonplace online and spread faster than anticipated, often with disastrous outcomes. This is largely attributed to the lack of editorial filtering, and the anonymity of most online users. The internet encourages anonymity of its users, which means that those who write and comment often use nicknames or pseudo names. Hence, anonymity provides an excellent opportunity for writing false stories or spreading rumors about candidates and their parties and this often leads to rancor fear and anxiety about the opposition party.

This has a huge influence on voter behaviour, as most voters who read stories online have a tendency to believe such stories without crosschecking facts and take decisions based on this propaganda. This is a widely known fact among political parties and they use it to their advantage in bringing down their opponents. Previous research has found that it is possible to influence a person's attitudes toward a political candidate using carefully crafted information about such candidate online, which in turn may influence the voter's behavior towards the candidate.

Social media has also been used by various parties to propagate false news and propaganda about the opposition in order to disfavor such party or candidate in the eyes of the electorates while exonerating theirs. This has a huge influence on voter behaviour as many voters make decisions based on such news they read online.

Furthermore, According to Onwunyi and Undegbunam (2022), social media has made voters privy to any kind of information about politicians and their lives as there are no longer any isolated places or hiding holes. The private and public lives of society's most influential figures including politicians have been made public online. This is because in today's world, once a politician declares for a post, his entire life including his educational background, his family, his job and any past mistakes or excesses are made public on social media platforms for people to comment, discuss and publicly judge. Many politicians have been found in compromising positions with their words or phrase taken out of context and magnified to huge proportions by opposition parties in order to discredit them.

Many atimes, people go to the extent of recording private conversations or actions of these candidates and make the recorded audio or video public on various social media platforms such as Youtube quickly, with a view to elicit response and vicious backlash from voters and other online users. The belief is that it will go a long way in influencing voter's behaviour and turning such voter against the candidate since the voter can now judgmentally make decisions about the candidate based on what he said, did or other information about him or her. Even though, such information are refuted sometimes by the concerned party or individual, it remains valid in the minds of many voters who may have made up their mind already or simply are not aware of the true situation.

Theoretical Orientation

In conducting this study, the Uses and Gratifications theory was used as the base. This theory was popularized by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumber and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 and is grouped under the limited or indirect effect theories. The Uses and Gratification theory discusses the effects of the media on people. It explains how people use the media for their own need

and get satisfied when their needs are fulfilled. In other words, it can be said that the theory argues what people do with media rather than what media does to people. Also, this theory is in contradiction to the Magic Bullet theory, which states that the audience is passive. This theory has a user/audience-centered approach. Even for communication, say – interpersonal, people refer to the media for the topic to discuss among themselves. By referring the media, they gain more knowledge and exposure to the world beyond their limited eyesight.

Unlike other theories concerning media consumption, UGT gives the consumer power to discern what media they consume, with the assumption that the consumer has a clear intent and use. This contradicts previous theories such as mass society theory, that states that people are helpless victims of mass media produced by large companies; and individual differences perspective, which states that intelligence and self-esteem largely drive an individual's media choice. Given these differing theories, UGT is unique in its assumptions;

- The audience is active and its media use is goal oriented
- The initiative in linking need gratification to a specific medium choice rests with the audience member
- The media compete with other resources for need satisfaction
- People have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests, and motives to be able to provide researchers with an accurate picture of that use.
- Value judgments of media content can only be assessed by the audience.

According to Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso(2008) the theory is concerned with what people do with the media rather than what media do to the people. It is based on the assumption that consumers of media influence the impact that media have on them. It takes a humanistic approach to the uses and effects of media on the people. Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) believe that the major thrust of the theory is that media consumers have certain needs which make them to be selectively exposed to, attend to and retain certain media messages while rejecting and discarding others. This is because of the perceived gratifications they derive from such messages. So the

media consumers are not passive consumers without a choice, but they play an active role in interpreting and integrating media output into their own lives.

Consumers of social media are not without choices or analytical abilities. Rather they are intentional and conscious seekers of such information which satisfies certain needs and provided some desired gratifications. They are able to select and use the technology in ways that suit their purpose and achieve their desired goal. So the audience is not spoon fed consumers of whatever is thrown at them. But they have a choice and they make conscious effort in deciding what they want to hear and see, the audience is largely active and not passive. Furthermore, the political participants and the voters are also able to consciously select and choose the media of their preference and the information content of their desire during electoral campaigns and other political activities.

Adeyanju & Haruna (2012) notes that the main thrust of the theory is that audience members have certain needs which make them to be selectively exposed to, attend to, and retain media messages because of the perceived gratifications derivable from such messages. Thus, this theory emphasizes the fact that people are important in the process of communication because they choose content, make meaning and act on that meaning.

Applying the uses and gratification theory to this study, users of social media are intentional seekers of such messages. They are able to select and use the technology in ways that suit their purpose. Thus, they as the audience are active and not passive. Similarly, political candidates are also able to select and use media of choice and message content of their choice during electoral campaigns and other electioneering activities.

Methodology

The research is qualitative; therefore, it relied on secondary data like journal, articles, books, editorials etc for all its data. Content analysis was used for data presentation and analysis. Due to its dependence on secondary data, the text of hypothesis, findings of the study and results will be judged based on the extracts from available scholarly works on this study.

Other researches undertaken by various individuals scholars will be put into consideration while concluding the results of this study.

Social Media and Politics

Based on the assertions of Onwunyi and Udegbonam (2022), the arrival of social media has greatly enhanced all aspects of human communication. The new technology due to the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature has barely made everyone who can use it as a mass communicator. This brings to fruition the prediction of Marshal McLuhan in 1964 that the world would someday become a "global village" where what happens in one part of the world would be known instantly and simultaneously worldwide. Today, one can stay right in his bedroom and access information, entertainments, events and enjoy full interaction with the world just by pressing a button. Writing on this development, Adibe and Odoemelum (2010) observe that the new media of communication have in no small measure helped human society to be aware of each other.

According to Sherman (2000) the term "social media" was in 2007 coined by Danah in Boyd of the School of Information at the University of California and Nicole B. Ellison of the Department of Telecommunications, Information Studies and Media at Michigan State University. Even though the term is usually regarded by several people to mean the same with similar concepts like new media and social networking, however, the two concepts are not actually the same. In order to rightly contextualize the concept of social media, it is imperative to consider what social networking sites are. Boyd and Ellison (2008) opined that "social networking sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, articulates a list of other users with whom they share a common connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". Boyd and Ellison's definition provides us with an understanding for describing social media. According to them, social media is a medium that allows individuals to share important information with friends. Social media therefore, is a subset of information communication technologies. Corroborating Boy and Ellison's definition, Chijioke (2013) asserted that "social media are simply internet based interactive platforms through which people can create and exchange information in a participatory manner on a real-time basis." He went further to note that they are online democratic and participatory communication

channels that allow inhibited exchange of information and documents among users.

According to Arthur (2011), social media are internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute, and search for information online. It is the interactive or collaborative nature of the medium that makes them "social". In a nutshell, this paper defined social media as online tools that allow communication of information online and make participation and collaboration possible. Specifically, social media here is used to refer to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs, MySpace, Friendster, Linkedin and many others. The advent of the internet which brought about the development of different forms of social media platforms is increasingly supporting democratic participation and free flow of information between individuals in emerging democracies. Citizens are not merely consuming information content, but are privileged to become content producers, thereby encouraging participatory democracy which is the hallmark of democracy. According to Agudosi (2007), political communication is the dissemination of information about the functioning of a political entity in order to influence the behaviour of the audience in a variety of ways. He went further to say that it is also the interactive process concerning transmission of information among politicians, the news media and the public. On the same view, Graber and Smith (2005) opined that political communication involves the construction, sending, receiving, and processing of messages that potentially have significant direct or indirect impact on politics. Political communication is an increasingly important area in communication and media studies.

A study by Okoro and Diri (2009) has shown the importance of the media in contributing significantly in creating public awareness and mobilizing participation in the political process. The media therefore help citizens to reach informed decisions about what course of action to take and also offer the populace the platform to be educated on political relevant information. It is on this premise that Rush and Althoff (1972) cited in Akasoro (2011) conceived political communication to be the process by which politically-relevant information is transmitted from one part of the political system to another, and between the social and political systems.

It is a continuous process involving the exchange of information between individuals and groups of individuals at all levels of society, and includes not only the expression of the views and wishes of members of society, but also the means by which the views and proposals of those in power are transmitted to the society and the latter's reaction to those views and proposals. From all the above definitions given by various scholars, political communication is essentially important in a democratic society since the mass media are the purveyor of political information and education of the electorates.

According to Clark and Aufderheide (2009), social media are increasingly becoming popular among politicians and their organizations as a means to disseminate political messages, learn about the interest and needs of constituents and the broader public, raise funds, and build networks of support. Lending credence to this assertion, Hong and Nadler (2011) observed that in a very short space of time, politicians in modern democracies across the world have eagerly adopted social media for engaging their constituents, entering into direct dialogs with citizens and enabling vivid political discussions. Raiz (2010) equally posited that in the past five years, elections conducted in Africa witnessed a massive use of social media during electioneering campaigns by key political figures, political parties and civil society organizations. This development has made researchers in recent times to investigate the influence of social media in the sphere of political communication. This perhaps explains why researchers like Graber and Smith (2005) contend that a great deal of research efforts has gone into assessments of the role played by new media in providing information to those citizens and politicians alike who need to fulfil their civic duties. A number of studies have been conducted by scholars on the growing influence of social media during political campaigns, for instance, a study by Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) attempted to determine whether social media usage actually impact on political self-efficacy and involvement of electorates during the 2008 United States Presidential election. Their findings show that there was a drastic rise in the use of social media by political candidates as well as the electorates. According to them, 27% of young people reported obtaining political information from the social media.

Corroborating their finding, Owen, Soule, Nairne, Chalif, House and Davidson, (2011) remarked that the 2008 US election marked a breakthrough year for political use of new media and social networks specifically. They further opined that social networking websites played an especially innovative and important role in the protracted primary race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Obama subsequent victory at the main election was largely attributed to his massive use of the social media during the electioneering campaigns (Onwunyi and Okonkwo, 2021).

Similarly, Warren (2009) investigated the use of social networking site Facebook in 2008 presidential election in America. The study was specifically designed to analyze whether Facebook might be a practical campaign tool to target young voters, particularly college students. A survey research method was adopted for the study to collect data from 212 students at the University of Central Missouri to determine if Facebook was a viable campaign tool. The study concludes that college students that participated in the political activities on Facebook felt more motivated to vote in 2008 presidential election and the students who had Facebook account had better identified with the candidates due to their presence and the information they received on Facebook. McLaughlin and Osborne (1997, p.10) Cited in Alakali, Titus, Akpan and Tarnongo (2013) revealed that nearly three-quarter (73%) of American internet users, or 54% of all voters went online in-2010 for news or information about midterm elections or communicate with others about campaign and the information voters are getting online, appears to have sway. In addition, one third of respondents said the information they saw online made them to vote for or against a particular candidate. This underscored the role of social in the US presidential elections.

Social Media and Vote Behavior: The Nexus

Today, the tie between marketing and policy raises many reflections. All over the world, political scientists underline how marketing methods influence the political world. Candidates rely on advertising during their election campaigns. These are often analyzed through semiotics and media planning. Besides, the political polls are based on marketing studies (tracking studies, exit poll studies...). Political meetings, reductions offers for new members to

adhere to a party during a certain date, candidacy announcements are at the heart of marketing.

The study of political parties' location by region is also done by using geomarketing methods. Other tools of the "participatory democracy" are reminiscent of the relationship marketing and "one-to-one" by which candidates would attempt to limit the intermediaries between themselves and the voters, to build a relationship that is no more one-sided and promote dialogue and fidelity. Marketing is influenced by the technological revolution and the development of the internet. Such influence has increased with the advent of social networks. In fact, online social media play today a role, admittedly very important, in the information environment like its predecessors, radio, television and the Internet in its beginning. Social media opens up new paths of influence and speech. They have a role, increasingly important, in the orientation and understanding of political behavior. Online social networks are a modern way to keep abreast of political affairs. Politicians seek increasingly to adapt their messages to these new tools to reach an audience which may be potential voters. In this regard, Barack Obama has made social networking a cornerstone in the organization of his two electoral campaigns in 2008 and 2012. His campaign team tried to make his message visible on the social web, to communicate it to his potential electorate, to ensure the proper understanding and dissemination and bring together a community around a project of a candidate.

Today the world is interconnected almost instantly via social networks that have disrupted the traditional ways of communication and impacted the social and political lives of individuals. Indeed, social media are competing with traditional media even in the political context (Waddell, 2009). We talk about the emergence of web marketing policy. Thus, for politicians and their organizations, social media are considered as election campaign tools since they help to spread political messages and discover the areas of interest and needs of voters and the general population. Social media can now promote greater pluralism in political speeches. We think that over time social media will grow in importance compared to traditional media as a source of political information (Waddell, 2009). Thus, parties and political leaders have gradually involved in the new sphere of web 2.0 to provide an online reputation called e-reputation.

We also note the emergence of "community management CM": community managers contribute to the effective management of the online reputation and presence of politicians. In this respect, digital marketing has recently emerged as essential to increase and improve one's online reputation. Social media have a significant potential to promote political participation and a potential to influence the turnout of voters. Indeed, by making use of the rational choice model, reducing costs of obtaining the information leads to an increase in the individual vote probability. The common will to win potential voters on the Web was inspired by a careful observation of the US 2008 election, with the example of Barack Obama.

The 2008 election was the first election where candidates have used social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter (Woolley, Limperos & Oliver, 2010). That was the way that President Obama used especially Facebook, YouTube and political blogs to reach users (Hanson et al. 2010). Throughout the year 2011 the use of social media has experienced a very strong growth in all Arab countries. Social networks were considered as a simple tool for social networking and entertainment, now they are becoming ubiquitous in all aspects of the daily life of millions of Arabs. Social media effects are discussed in the occurrences and achievements of the Arab Spring (Howard & Hussain 2011). Policymakers have gradually recognized this trend and became involved in it regularly. In a similar framework, despite the late follow-up of such a trend in France, politicians have also involved themselves to the online social media. This promoted, from the presidential election of 2012, the emergence of Facebook pages or Twitter accounts specifically dedicated to parties and politicians. Now, the web has become a "massive communication weapon". Thus, with the emergence and dominance of social networks, political organizations have realized the importance of investing massively social networks. They seem able to reduce the time allocated to communication and, therefore, increase colossally the targeted public.

In fact, social networks can replace the movements of politicians by exchanges on the web. The emergence of social web tools and their rapid development revolutionized political practices, insofar as they have a significant impact on citizens. Moreover, they are sometimes called "e-citizens." Without going so far,

social networks can be a real interactivity between citizens and politicians. Moreover, they can be considered a true "power-cons" in the sense that they can directly influence their environment through a formal or informal social "networking" through reading, debating, proposing or making choices, by revolting, manifesting, criticizing ... Thus, this social networking has created a new form of citizenship by promoting the direct contact of the citizen who would be able to perform and to have a say in politics. In the same vein, the social web can be a very powerful tool for call for vote. In addition, social networks represent an opportunity to get closer to voters out of the "institutionalized" codes of political communication (Léon Walry, 2014). In short, the virtual space becomes a place for socialization to accentuate citizen participation in elections and to confirm their involvement in politics.

In this regard, Clarke (2010) assume that social media personalize politics and enhance public confidence in government institutions and public personalities. Also these types of online exchanges may remedy the idea that public institutions are "too rigid and passive" compared to "contemporary society". Furthermore, social media can encourage young people to participate in the democratic process. According to research conducted in the UK, young people are more likely to use the internet to learn about politics than older people (Di Gennaro & Dutton, 2006). According Walry Léon (2014), social networks can be considered as "powerful new cars launched on the road to the Internet. Without a good knowledge of social networks, slips and accidents are inevitable". Thus, it remains unclear how to use them properly, as their use is not safe and can cause inconveniences, the fact that from the moment we do not take care of the diffused messages on the web, the risk of misinterpretation and controversy becomes wider and swells quickly with the users' comments. In addition, the risks of social media lie in the security, privacy and freedom of expression. They could make it more difficult to protect the public image of a person or institution.

In the last two decades, democracy has spread across the globe in unprecedented ways. Democracies increased from 48 in 1989 to 95 today (Monty and Benjamin, 2011). After the end of cold war democracy began to spread like wide fire which led to the end of dictatorial rule in many African countries. Presently, Democratic activists and ordinary citizens

throughout the world have over and over again proved that democracy is a universal value and make democracy become a global desire in the modern world.

According to Global Commission Report on democracy and security (2012) the Arab Awakening confirmed that the popular demand for democracy is not bound by region, ethnicity, culture, or religion. Perhaps the most compelling evidence that democracy is a universal value comes from the many authoritarian governments that seek to wrap themselves in the veneer of democratic legitimacy. In the last 12 years, for instance, all but 11 countries in the world, democracies and non-democratic regimes alike, held national elections (Hyde, 2011). Even China, where some leaders criticize democracy as a Western value, has experimented with elections at the local level. With the advent of social media tools such as twitter, face book, instagram among others which have contributed largely to the success of electioneering process in the world over. The media helps in performing her surveillance function and mobilizing the electorates to taking informed decisions on parties and candidates with whom to support or cast their votes (Anderson et al., 2017:69-70).

In line with Moveh (2015:2) the process of election administration in many new democracies continues to generate a lot of controversy; particularly with regards to the level of independence of Election Management Bodies (EMB,s), their professionalism and the acceptability of the elections they conduct. However, election management bodies around the world have employed a number of innovative approaches, some of which are now considered best practice to improve the management and conduct of elections. Electoral reforms that have been instituted include the use of information and communication technology, adoption of more transparent and inclusive processes, professionalization of the organization, amendments to legal framework and improvement of relationships with external stakeholders. As a result of these efforts, the past several years have seen the varying successes of a number of election management bodies in recent times have recorded a great deal of success in the manner by which they prepare, organize, administer and conduct elections (Ayeni & Esan, 2018:1).

Democracy and the process of democratic experiment in Nigeria has been faced with enormous challenges and prospects. The fate of democracy especially the Nigerian experience is one bedevilled with ethnicity, massive corruption, mismanagement of public funds, electoral fraud and malpractices, flagrant disregard for the rule of law, constitutionalism and abuse of fundamental human right being perpetuated by political office holders and politicians which are still prevalent in this current democratic era (1999- date) are clear examples of pseudo-democracy (Okuchukwu, 2015:13).

According to Anderson et al., (2017:70) Information and communication technologies appear to resuscitate hope for social and political change in Africa and, indeed, ICTs have been at the centre of the democratic project in many countries. Conforming to Assibong and Oshanisi (2018:1) in recent times, Nigeria, as well as other nations across the globe, has included technology in their electoral processes. These reforms contributed largely to the success of the 2011 elections, yet the risk of flaws affecting Nigerian elections still remains. Part of the reforms lead to the introduction of card reading machine in the conduct of 2015 general election. The use of ICT in election management became imperative to the elimination of multiple registrations, which had remained one of the most vital political weapons for rigging elections by unscrupulous and savage elements. This unique technique was employed to capture mass involvement in governance and empowerment of the teeming electorates to participate in electoral processes.

The Role of Social Media during the Election in Nigeria

Nigeria has witnessed an exponential growth in internet usage. From a modest 200,000 users in 2000, now an estimated 51 per cent of the population uses the internet (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>).

There are a total of 186,410,197 active mobile lines in Nigeria as of February 2015 according to the Nigerian Communications Commission, (http://www.ncc.gov.ng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=125:subscriberstatistics&catid=65:industry-information&Itemid=73) a twofold increase from the 93 million reported in 2011 (Miniwatts, 2012). Much of this increase is driven by a growth in mobile web access. A Gallup poll from

2012 found that almost 73 per cent of Nigerians owned a mobile phone (<http://www.bbg.gov/blog/2012/08/20/new-bbg-gallup-data-shows-dramaticrise-in-mobile-use-in-nigeria/>). That figure is now expected to be over 80 per cent. The Mobile Africa 2015 study, which surveyed 3,500 mobile users in five countries across Africa, reported that 47 per cent of Nigerians used their phone to access the internet (<http://www.itnewsafrika.com>).

The elevated position of social media in Nigerian society and public life can also be seen from the changing nature of news websites which have informed Nigerian about the 2015 election. Twitter and facebook was the major used media platform during the election. The last election was largely influenced by social media which actually led to the surprised victory of APC presidential election due to the huge investment of APC by employing strong media influencer. According to Jamie et al., (2015) Nigeria has witnessed an exponential growth in internet and social media use. From a modest 200,000 users in 2000, by 2015 around 30 per cent of the population is online, increasingly on smart phones.

Although, this began before the 2011 general election but during the 2015 election this received a huge boost because as earlier said there was a widespread media attention for its role in informing, engaging and empowering citizens in Nigeria and across Africa. In the research conducted by Jamie and associates (2015) found that Twitter was ten times more active over the election period than at „normal“ times. In their diagnosis they argued that 12.4 million tweets were tweeted about the elections over the period; and these tweets tended to be divided into „reportage“ (i.e. people describing events) and “comment“ (i.e. people commenting on events). Furthermore, there were 1.38 million unique Twitter users posting content about the election on Twitter, 216,000 Facebook users interacting with content on popular public Facebook pages.

A practical examples was twitter which gave the APC a upper hand and influenced their voting pattern and behaviors to the fact that APC Buhari's campaigns, his use the twitter app to campaign their political agenda by laying emphasize on the major issues confronting the then administration such as corruption, the Immigration employment saga, the Boko Haram insurgency and crisis in the Niger Delta.

Even before the elections polls were conducted in twitter which shows that would win the election which led to the change of the 2015 elections. Which means the social media gave a daily report regarding the analysis before the election based on happening situation across the country which Nigerians were posting on either facebook or twitter.

The social media in Nigeria gave daily reports about election reports, monitor real situation across the country where Nigerian report situation from their places and Tag other important bodies responsible for the election such as INEC, news channels, international organisations and matters like that. The media was at the forefront of the agitation for electoral reforms, reporting irregularities and malpractices that characterized the 2003 and 2007 elections and called for immediate actions after elections (Omoera, 2010). There is sadness in every Nigerians eye regarding election due to the huge electoral mal practice. To Nigerians everything about the elections in remains bad because mandate are bought and sold without reflecting the Nigerians mandates. However, the media played a crucial role in the emergence of Buhari as the president of Nigeria and for the first time in 16th years PDP lost presidential election. Everything worked well for Buhari due to the media and Nigerians were able to report real voting situation to INEC handle to face book page.

For Nigerian politician, they are aware that social media have changed the way Nigerians think, write and react to all the political process build up before and after elections. They all have political digital campaignist who strategically manage their social media platform either through face book, YouTube or twitter to sell their political agenda and party manifestos to the public to know their candidates and why they should vote for their party. Through the reading or watching this in return influence their voting decision. Therefore there is a strong relationship between social media and politics. The new digital media tools as earlier mentioned have not only changed political campaigning through the internet and news reporting but as well influence voting and vote casting. In developed countries like US votes are also cast online. As well electoral fraud are also reported online with this, in Nigeria social media can serve as means to reduces electoral violence and with hope that 2019 could be fair and better than 2015 general elections.

Social Media on the Voter Participation in Nigeria

Today, the tie between marketing and policy raises many reflections. All over the world, political scientists underline how marketing methods influence the political world. Candidates rely on advertising during their election campaigns. These are often analyzed through semiotics and media planning. Besides, the political polls are based on marketing studies (tracking studies, exit poll studies...). Political meetings, reductions offers for new members to adhere to a party during a certain date, candidacy announcements are at the heart of marketing. The study of political parties' location by region is also done by using geomarketing methods. Other tools of the "participatory democracy" are reminiscent of the relationship marketing and "one-to-one" by which candidates would attempt to limit the intermediaries between themselves and the voters, to build a relationship that is no more one-sided and promote dialogue and fidelity. Marketing is influenced by the technological revolution and the development of the internet. Such influence has increased with the advent of social networks. In fact, online social media play today a role, admittedly very important, in the information environment like its predecessors, radio, television and the Internet in its beginning. Social media opens up new paths of influence and speech. They have a role, increasingly important, in the orientation and understanding of political behavior. Online social networks are a modern way to keep abreast of political affairs. Politicians seek increasingly to adapt their messages to these new tools to reach an audience which may be potential voters. In this regard, Barack Obama has made social networking a cornerstone in the organization of his two electoral campaigns in 2008 and 2012. His campaign team tried to make his message visible on the social web, to communicate it to his potential electorate, to ensure the proper understanding and dissemination and bring together a community around a project of a candidate.

Today the world is interconnected almost instantly via social networks that have disrupted the traditional ways of communication and impacted the social and political lives of individuals. Indeed, social media are competing with traditional media even in the political context (Waddell, 2009). We talk about the emergence of web marketing policy. Thus, for politicians and their organizations, social media are considered as election campaign tools since they help

to spread political messages and discover the areas of interest and needs of voters and the general population. Social media can now promote greater pluralism in political speeches. We think that over time social media will grow in importance compared to traditional media as a source of political information (Waddell, 2009). Thus, parties and political leaders have gradually involved in the new sphere of web 2.0 to provide an online reputation called e-reputation. We also note the emergence of "community management CM": community managers contribute to the effective management of the online reputation and presence of politicians. In this respect, digital marketing has recently emerged as essential to increase and improve one's online reputation. Social media have a significant potential to promote political participation and a potential to influence the turnout of voters. Indeed, by making use of the rational choice model, reducing costs of obtaining the information leads to an increase in the individual vote probability. The common will to win potential voters on the Web was inspired by a careful observation of the US 2008 election, with the example of Barack Obama.

The 2008 election was the first election where candidates have used social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter (Woolley, Limperos and Oliver 2010). That was the way that President Obama used especially Facebook, YouTube and political blogs to reach users (Hanson et al. 2010). Throughout the year 2011 the use of social media has experienced a very strong growth in all Arab countries. Social networks were considered as a simple tool for social networking and entertainment, now they are becoming ubiquitous in all aspects of the daily life of millions of Arabs. Social media effects are discussed in the occurrences and achievements of the Arab Spring (Howard and Hussain 2011). Policymakers have gradually recognized this trend and became involved in it regularly. In a similar framework, despite the late follow-up of such a trend in France, politicians have also involved themselves to the online social media. This promoted, from the presidential election of 2012, the emergence of Facebook pages or Twitter accounts specifically dedicated to parties and politicians. Now, the web has become a "massive communication weapon". Thus, with the emergence and dominance of social networks, political organizations have realized the importance of investing massively social networks.

They seem able to reduce the time allocated to communication and, therefore, increase colossally the targeted public.

In fact, social networks can replace the movements of politicians by exchanges on the web. The emergence of social web tools and their rapid development revolutionized political practices, insofar as they have a significant impact on citizens. Moreover, they are sometimes called "e-citizens." Without going so far, social networks can be a real interactivity between citizens and politicians. Moreover, they can be considered a true "power-cons" in the sense that they can directly influence their environment through a formal or informal social "networking" through reading, debating, proposing or making choices, by revolting, manifesting, criticizing ... Thus, this social networking has created a new form of citizenship by promoting the direct contact of the citizen who would be able to perform and to have a say in politics. In the same vein, the social web can be a very powerful tool for call for vote. In addition, social networks represent an opportunity to get closer to voters out of the "institutionalized" codes of political communication (Léon Walry, 2014). In short, the virtual space becomes a place for socialization to accentuate citizen participation in elections and to confirm their involvement in politics.

In this regard, Clarke (2010) assume that social media personalize politics and enhance public confidence in government institutions and public personalities. Also these types of online exchanges may remedy the idea that public institutions are "too rigid and passive" compared to "contemporary society". Furthermore, social media can encourage young people to participate in the democratic process. According to research conducted in the UK, young people are more likely to use the internet to learn about politics than older people (Di Gennaro and Dutton, 2006). According Walry Léon (2014), social networks can be considered as "powerful new cars launched on the road to the Internet. Without a good knowledge of social networks, slips and accidents are inevitable". Thus, it remains unclear how to use them properly, as their use is not safe and can cause inconveniences, the fact that from the moment we do not take care of the diffused messages on the web, the risk of misinterpretation and controversy becomes wider and swells quickly with the users' comments. In addition, the risks of social media lie in the security, privacy and freedom of expression. They

could make it more difficult to protect the public image of a person or institution.

Social Media and General Elections in Nigeria

According to Otunji (2019), the CMC's Digital Marketing expert, while discussing on the impact of social media in the 2019 general elections gave a presentation that detailed the highlights, trends, insights and the general overview of the elections on social media; particularly Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

To measure the positive and negative impacts of social media on the outcome of the presidential elections in its entirety, the nature of conversations before, during and after were meticulously observed and it was discerned that most of them stemmed from the Nigerian youths. The hashtag '#NigeriaDecides2019' predominantly accompanied the conversations during these periods – other commonly used hashtags include '#ElectionDay', '#AtikuIsWinning', '#PMB4Plus4' and a host of others. Also considered as a possible influential factor on the outcome of the presidential elections is the impact of social media influencers. Social media influencers have the ability to influence the decision making of users across all platforms and this was particularly leveraged on by some presidential candidates, including Atiku Abubakar, Fela Durotoye, Omoye Sowore, just to name a few.

There are two kinds of social media influencers, namely macro-influencers and micro-influencers. Macro-influencers typically have a copious amount of following, usually about fifty thousand to a hundred thousand and have a vast reach and engagement with their contents. Micro-influencers on the other hand usually have a fewer number of followers but have incredibly engaging contents which allows for a high conversation rate. Some noteworthy macro-influencers with the highest level of engagement before, during and after the elections include JJ. Omojuwa, Badmus Hakeem, Ani Nomso and Lazy Writa. Among all the social media platforms, Twitter formidably stood out in terms of general engagement, with memes, videos, gifs and infographics mostly being used in conversations by users. Polls on the platform were also heavily used by influencers and regular users to determine the

political convictions of Nigerians as well as the personal perceptions of the presidential candidates.

Although not a social network, the messaging app WhatsApp also had an impact on the presidential elections. The reach however could not be measured, owing to the end-to-end encryption feature of the app. Rather, broadcast messages were used to ascertain the level of engagement. WhatsApp notably contributed to the negative impact on the elections as fake news about national insecurity were heavily proliferated on the app, aggrandizing the existing fear of violence among Nigerians. The subjective nature of the messages shared among individuals on the app also contributed to the overall turnout of voters in various parts of the country, especially in Lagos.

Although social media played a major role such as engaging people, awareness generation for candidates, passing information (both negative and positive) in the 2019 presidential elections, it was discerned that it was not substantial enough to impact the turnout of voters or sway the results. This was evident in the results of some of the candidates with grandiose social media presence. A typical example is Omoyele Sowore who has over 81, 000 followers but only managed to garner 33, 983 votes! Another typical example is Atiku Abubakar who led most of the polls conducted on Twitter, eventually, these did not equate to the number of total votes he gathered.

All in all, it was determined that for social media to be effective enough to impact the overall turnout of voters, demographics should be a preeminent consideration. It was discovered that majority of voters during the 2019 elections were older people, most of who are not tech-savvy and have relatively no social media presence. Many are also located in the outskirts of the city with limited access to internet. A large part of these voters basically consumes traditional media and to reach them, traditional media vehicles and channels must be effectively exerted. Apathy among social media users was also identified as a contributing factor to the overall turnout of voters as many often doubted the credibility of the electoral system, citing electoral malpractice as a reason for choosing not to vote (Otunji, 2019).

According to Ayeni (2019), another factor which was concluded could make the impact of social media on the elections considerable is technological

advancement in the electoral system. Millennials find the current electoral system monotonous and arduous as shown in their conversations and as such, many of them find it difficult to go out of their way to vote. If the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) could integrate a technology into their system that enables people to vote from the comfort of their homes, then the ample amount of active social media users during the elections will correspond to the total number of voters.

Conclusion And Recommendations

In summary, the intention of this paper was to shed light on the implications, uses, and role of social media in the Nigerian electioneering campaigns and political processes at large. It, therefore, increases our understanding of how social media impact elections and democracy in Nigeria. It was deduced that in the Nigerian 2019 general elections, social media was used due to its participatory nature. It was used as a platform for political campaign organization, electioneering crusades, ideological trumpeting exercises, and mobilization of voters. Thus, the civil society deployed the arsenal of social media effectively to distribute information.

Furthermore, there was evidence to show that during the period of the campaign, Tweet meets and hangouts were the in-thing within Nigerian online sociopolitical networks. During the collation of results, citizen journalists and the civil society used social media to inform the public as regards the results in several states across the country. This validated social media role as watchdog and a reportage route for political processes in Nigeria, thereby adding value to the political culture.

This study has shown that the role of media in political participation in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasised. As the world moves from what it used to be to a digital world, Nigeria should not be left in the dark. We should rise to use the many dividends of technology to our advantage. As a developing country, the social media can help in cutting down cost of seeking public opinion and to ensure that the will of the masses are translated into policies that will benefit all. Social media offer participatory democracy at its best, the technology that promotes transparency, efficiency and greater accuracy in the political process.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Nigerian politicians should continue to use the social media to engage the electorate during political campaigns especially the youth who are avid users of the social media.
2. Based on the findings of this study, Facebook is the most utilized social media platform by the presidential candidates. The study therefore recommends that in future elections, other social media platforms likes YouTube, Instagram, and Blogs should by employ by politicians during electioneering campaigns.
3. Nigerian electorate should ensure that their voting pattern in future elections should not be by influenced by political candidate's religious affiliations or ethnic considerations but on the credibility of candidates.

References

- Abubakar, A.A (2011) *Political participation and discourse in social media during the 2011 Presidential Electioneering*. Paper presented at the ACCE, Covenant University, Ota. September 2011.
- Akinwunmi, A.O. (2011) *New Media, Political Campaigns and Violence in Nigeria*. Paper Presented at the ACCE, Covenant University, Ota. September 2011.
- Akpan, C. S., & Nnaane, B. (2011). *The New Media Revolution*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press.
- Akpoveta, E.E. (2015). "Assessment of the Impact of Social media on the 2015 electioneering in Asaba Delta State. A *paper* presented at 17th Annual Conference of ACCE, University of Calabar: Calabar.
- Aleyomi MB, Olanrewaju OPA (2014) *The Impact of Social Media on Citizens' Mobilization and Participation in Nigeria's 2011*
- Chatora, A.(2012) *Encouraging Political Participation in Africa: The Potentials of Social Media Platforms*. Google search [http://www.role of social media in encouraging political participation in Africa](http://www.role%20of%20social%20media%20in%20encouraging%20political%20participation%20in%20Africa).

- Chen, P. J. & Vromen, A. (2012) *Social Media, Youth Participation and Australian Election*: <http://www.aec.gov.au/abot-aec/research/caber/files/ib.pdf>, accessed.
- Chukwu, P. (2007) *The 1999 Constitution and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC): Prospects for Impartial Supervision and Conduct of Elections*. In Jega Attahiru and Oke, I (Eds.) *Elections and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*. Nigeria: Nigerian Political Science Association.
- Chukwuma O (2018) A Discursive Analysis of Social Media Usage for Political Communication in Nigeria. *Int J Transformations*
- Cozma, R., & Postelnicu, M. (2008). "Political Uses and perceived effects of campaigning on My space". Paper presented at the annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism & Mass communication, Chicago, IL
- Gunter, J. (2011). "Journalists Increasingly Using Social Media as News Source". [Http://www.Journalism.com.uk/newsjournalists-increasingly-using-social-media-asnews-source-finds-study/52/9544193](http://www.Journalism.com.uk/newsjournalists-increasingly-using-social-media-asnews-source-finds-study/52/9544193). Accessed 18th May, 2020.
- Hague, R. & Harrop, M. (2001). *Comparative Government and Politics*: United Kingdom Macmillan publishing Ltd.
- Hampton, K., Goulet, L. S., Rainie, L., & Purcell, K. (2011) Social Networking Sites and our Lives. <http://pewinternet.org/reports/2011/technology-and-social-networks/summary/findings.aspx>.
- Hanson, G., Haridakis, P., Wagstaff, A., Sharma, R., & Ponder, J. (2010). "Political cynicism in the Age of Facebook, MySpace and You Tube". *Mass Communication and Society*. Vol. 13 (5).
- Igbinidu, C. (2011). "Social Media and the 2011 Elections" <http://www.businessdayonline.com/ING/index>. Accessed 3rd May 2020.
- ITU Cellphone Report (2014). Available on www.ITU.int. Retrieved June 12th 2020.
- Jacka, J.M. & Scott, P.R. (2011). *Auditing Social Media: A Governance and Risk Guide*. United States. John Wiley and Sons Incorporated.
- Onwunyi, U.M, Okonkwo, K. J (2021). Youths and Cyberces in Nigeria: Implications of the Nationwide Covid 19 Lockdown. *International Journal of Legal Studies (IJOS)* 10(2), 209-232
- Onwunyi, U. M and Udegbumam, VE (2022). Social Media and Voter Sensitization in Nigeria: A Retrospective Analysis of the 2019 General Elections. *Asian Journal of Social Science And Management Technology* 4(5)
- Okoro N, Nwafor KA (2013) Social media and political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections: the lapses and the lessons. *Global J Arts Humanities Soc Sci*, 1: 29-46
- Okoro, N. & Nwafor, K. A. (2013). Social media and political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections: The lapses and the lessons. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and social sciences* 1 (3), 29 – 46.
- Okunna, C.S. & Omenugha, K. (2012). *Introduction to Mass Communication* (3rd edition). Enugu: New generation books.
- Onyike, I.E.; Ekwenchi, C.D.; Chiaha, D.C. (2015). The influence of the Social media campaigns on the attitude and practice of voters in the 2015 general elections. Paper Presented at the 17th Annual Conference of ACCE. Calabar: University of Calabar.

Pexton, P. B. (2011). "At the Post Reporters get socialized to Social Media". <http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinion/at-the-post-reporters-get-socialized-to-social-media/2011/07/01/AG31-Ocul-story.html>. Accessed 1st July, 2020.