

SOCIAL MEDIA AND NIGERIA POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NIGERIA 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the influence of social media on political development in Nigeria with a particular focus on the 2023 presidential election. Social media is increasingly becoming relevant and has always played a key role in shaping political behavior and environment of modern democracies and the Nigeria 2023 presidential election was no exception. This study accessed materials through secondary sources by consulting already existing literature such as journals, books and newspapers to better understand the issue under review which was also augmented with a descriptive research design. The study adopted Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) theory to better explain or point that the reason behind the general acceptance and increase in the use of social media in the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria is because of simplicity and usefulness for communication and spread of information or opinion. The study finds that social media is a relevant tool for political development in Nigeria as seen in the 2023 presidential election were it helped to sensitize, educate and arouse the consciousness of the masses. The study recommend among others that the use of social media as a tool for political engagement and participation should be encourage and promoted by the Nigeria government. Political parties and candidates should leverage these platforms to engage with the electorate, share their policies, and address concerns directly.

keywords: Social Media, Politics, Development, Assessment, Election

INTRODUCTION

The economic hardship that is reminiscent of the former administration has made most Nigerians tired of the old politicians, and they have opted to back a younger candidate who will bring about change. The present political climate has led to an increase in the usage of social media platforms for communication, understanding, and information sharing between the general public and political candidates. Social media has also been linked to applying pressure during political instability, and exploratory and investigative studies have generally found that social media platforms affect the general population (Okunna & Morah, 2023). Despite the media's and social media's established advantages in political engagement and mobilization, it is still unclear whether these platforms will be able to influence Nigerian voters and impact the outcomes of the democratic elections in a way that will significantly advance the political development of the nation.

The Internet is necessary for effective worldwide communication in addition to offering opportunities for more diversified and elevated degrees of civic engagement and political participation (Ohme, 2019). Mobile phones came into being in 1999, and since then, social media which is internet-based has spread throughout Africa, especially in Nigeria. According to Bello & Kaufhold (2023), social media use is both constant and increasing in developing countries.

However, the internet has become more widely used globally, with two-thirds of the 7.8 billion people who use it already doing so because of social media and social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Bello & Kaufhold, 2023). Social media use has enabled people to organize, interact with the outside world, and engage in social and political activities, particularly in emerging and developing nations (Howard et al., 2011; Mano & Ndlela, 2020). The high percentage of social media use among young people in Africa is believed to be tied

to the continent's long history of weak governance, which manifests itself in many forms of marginalization (Obisesan, 2022). Mano & Ndlela (2020) assert that Africans are increasingly engaging in political discourse through social media and mobile devices, frequently in ways that defy authority. The aforementioned assertions highlighted social media's essential qualities as a platform for political engagement.

On the other hand, modern media technology which is enabled by social media sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter has made it simpler for messages and information to spread. Scholars (Morah & Uzochukwu, 2020) agree that social media platforms allow users to introduce themselves, describe their networks, and make connections with others. Stated differently, social media platforms encourage self-awareness and active online political activity by facilitating the spread of political manifestos and debate shows. Rising technological digitalization has also improved Nigeria's voting process by reducing the incidence of electoral fraud and inaccuracy (The Vanguard, November 24, 2023).

The people of Nigeria strongly demanded that the results of the February 25th presidential election be posted on the BVAS and IReV computers. The former method allows voters to be identified and authenticated through fingerprints and face recognition, while the latter helps by providing an internet gateway through which polling unit results are uploaded, sent, and made publicly accessible for viewing (November 24, 2023, The Vanguard). Additionally, more people are participating in online activities, especially politics, due to the increase in smartphone ownership and social media use (Morah & Chiaha, 2021). Families may encourage one another and freely express their opinions in the family forums they set up on social media. Information about politics was often disseminated on Facebook and WhatsApp, according to Morah et al. (2019). Social media increases political efficacy, increases youth engagement, and increases public knowledge, claim Sumera et al. (2020).

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

CONCEPT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Digital platforms and technologies that allow people to create, share, and engage with information are collectively referred to as social media. This encourages user interaction and communication. These platforms help individuals, communities, and organizations interact, communicate, and express themselves. Social media has affected all human pursuits and business operations, changing every part of the planet. Because of engagement and involvement, social media, like mainstream media, is increasingly acceptable in social communication and mobilization. It has been making a major and unique contribution to political campaigns and communication.

Siapera (2018) defines social media as social media networks that integrate technology, human interaction, and user-generated content. Social media, according to Carr & Hayes (2015), are linked platforms for mass-personal communication that enable users to interact with one another and present themselves in various ways to various audiences. The primary source of value for these platforms is user-generated content. Some scholars contend that social media are digital instruments that make it easier to create and disseminate the influential and connected public (Hjorth & Hinton, 2019). In this context, "networked publics" refer to the capacity of social media to build online communities of people who meet electronically in order to coordinate and communicate as a hypothetical group. According to Agbo (2015), social media encourages participation, communication, sharing, collaboration, and connection.

Social media platforms have become essential tools for interaction and communication in today's environment. Social media has fundamentally altered the dynamics of communication and accelerated the pace at which information is shared. Kaplan & Heinlein (2010) describe social media as internet-based applications that facilitate the creation, sharing, and dissemination of user-generated content. Social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are designed with networking in mind; they allow users to communicate, share ideas, and maintain connections. These networks might be founded around a person's hobbies, occupation, or relationships. This change is fueled by social media's interactive capabilities, which enable real-time information retrieval, content

creation, and interpersonal communication. The rise of social media has been greatly aided by technological advancements, which have led to its broad adoption and cultural effect. Schwab (2015) highlights the significance of social media platforms as agents of social change by pointing out how technological improvements have made it possible for ideas to circulate swiftly through these platforms. In addition, the collaborative aspects of social media platforms foster a feeling of community among users, which makes it easier for information, ideas, and perspectives to be shared.

There are a lot of fantastic connection on social media. The capacity for users to instantly like, comment on, share, and react to content fosters a dynamic flow of conversation. Social media likes, shares, and retweets may cause information to go viral very rapidly. Viral content may quickly gain a significant following—sometimes even one that is global—in a little period of time. Social media platforms facilitate instantaneous communication between users through direct messaging, live broadcasting, and commenting. Politics, culture, and society are all significantly impacted by social media. In addition to spreading information, it affects political movements, social transformation, and the shaping of public opinion.

2010 saw a dramatic shift in Nigeria's usage of social media as a vehicle for political engagement. Up to 500,000 supporters of President Goodluck Jonathan were won over via the social networking network. He served as an inspiration to other Nigerian politicians. Social media facilitates communication and increases access to knowledge. Social media has rendered the challenges of distant communication obsolete. Social media had a significant role in the Nigerian presidential election of 2023 by organizing voters, distributing information, and influencing public opinion. The 2023 presidential election serves as evidence that social media's growing influence in Nigerian politics has a favorable impact on the country's political progress.

CONCEPT OF ELECTION

A group of people choose one or more candidates for public office or other positions of authority through a formal process called an election. Voting is a fundamental component of democratic regimes because it allows citizens to select their representatives and influence policy. Elections, according to Dowse & Hughes (1986), are a process by which members of an organization (a state, club, or voluntary group) select fewer individuals to hold positions of responsibility, as allowed by the organization's legal framework. Awopeju (2011) views elections in a similar way, seeing them as a process by which members of the community select representatives to occupy public office. Voters select public officials to occupy open positions through this process, which may take place on a regular basis (Omoniyi et al., 2007). Voting by eligible members of a group to choose representatives or executives is a technique used in government. Direct or indirect elections may be conducted. Voters who prefer a certain candidate or political party to be in power cast their ballots directly in a process known as a direct election. In contrast, voting for the electoral college, which chooses the winner, is an indirect election. Formal acts of communal choice, elections are preceded and followed by a sequence of related events. It entails citizens participating in politics and choosing their representatives (Rasak et al., 2022).

Nigeria's president is elected every four years and may serve just two terms in office. The candidate must get a majority of the vote and a minimum of 25% of the total in two-thirds of the states. Monitoring Nigerian elections to ensure they are free and fair as well as maintaining the electoral roll are the responsibilities of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

OVERVIEW OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Development mean different things to different people. Development may be viewed as a complex network of environmental and cultural ties that facilitates social and economic transformation. Modernism and advancement are frequently linked to development. A population's sense of worth is increased via development as their level of living rises from a lower socioeconomic, political, and educational standing to a significantly higher one. Development is made up of three processes:

personal development, which is concerned with an individual's psychological journey; cultural development, which is made up of societal norms, values, and traditions; and physical development, which includes the production of goods by humans using technological means. Among the several concepts of development mentioned by Ejumudo & Adogbeji (2024) are economic growth, improved welfare and human development, modernization, elimination of dependency, dialectical transformation, and capacity building. They further established that the aim of social progress is to reduce poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Adogbeji, Ushurhe & Okonkwo (2024) asserts that growth requires reducing deprivation or expanding choice. Deprivation is a multidimensional image of poverty that includes hunger, illiteracy, sickness and poor health, powerlessness and voicelessness, insecurity, humiliation, and lack of access to basic infrastructure.

Political evolution refers to the processes by which political cultures, institutions, and systems evolve throughout time. Civilizations undergo a wide spectrum of internal changes and transformations as they advance and modernize. According to Ifesinachi (2000), political development is usually examined in the framework of history, taking into consideration the ways in which earlier decisions, deeds, and occurrences have shaped the political system that exists now.

Political development includes the growth and evolution of institutionalization; in this context, political institutions like as legislatures, executive branches, courts, and bureaucracies are said to as having been formed and reinforced. A successful political system is one that can run itself in an autonomous, efficient, and predictable manner. A political system can become more democratic through a process known as "democratization," which is usually characterized by free and fair elections, the defense of civil freedoms, and the encouragement of political plurality. Another objective of political growth is political stability, which guarantees peaceful and orderly transitions of power and lessens internal strife. Ultimately, one of the most important aspects of political progress is more public involvement in the political process. This includes voting, engaging in political discourse, and becoming a member of civil society organizations; rule of law (whose establishment and maintenance are critical to political advancement). They include political culture (it is essential to develop a political culture that supports democratic values, tolerance, and civic engagement), transparent laws that protect the rights of all citizens, and effective governance (political development also entails the improvement of governance mechanisms, ensuring that governments are accountable, transparent, and responsive to the needs of the populace). A political system's underlying behaviors, attitudes, and convictions are included in this.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Research has shown that social media affects several areas, such as elections and political communication. Elections are necessary for democracies to function, as stated by Rasak et al. (2022). Elections are the cornerstone of a properly democratic society. It is sometimes described as a formal act of collective decision that is the outcome of a sequence of subsequent acts and associated processes. It entails citizens participating in politics and choosing their representatives (Rasak et al., 2022).

When Morah, Udeze, & Ekwenchi (2019) examined how Facebook users responded to election results, they found that mobile Facebook usage for political information is high. Furthermore, via increasing knowledge, improving political efficacy, and increasing engagement, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter give important information and have a significant influence on young people's political activity, according to Ejumudo & Adogbeji (2024) study on the subject.

Olubunmi & Folorounso's (2020) investigation on teenagers' use of social media for political activity indicates that during the most recent elections, young people utilized Facebook more than any other social media site. Finding out more about the respondents' usage patterns, how they interacted with various social media platforms, and what variables influenced their use of social media for political engagement were the specific goals of this study. Consistent with previous Ejumudo (2024) studies, the 322 participants in the study reported that the most popular platforms for youth political engagement were Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. A 2023 survey by Morah & Nwafor

(2023) found that 71% of Nigerian youth rely on Twitter for election-related news, and 39% believe the platform has been beneficial in swaying their choice of candidate. Additionally, 56% of respondents said Twitter positively influenced and encouraged their choice.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter helped to mobilize young voters, and many of them used these platforms to advocate for their preferred candidates in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. Hashtags like #YouthVote and #PVC (Permanent Voter Card) campaigns were often used to encourage voter registration and involvement. To engage voters directly, politicians and their backers turned to social media rather than conventional media. They organized online discussions, protests, and Q&A sessions using social media as well.

Prominent candidates with active social media teams were Bola Tinubu (APC), Atiku Abubakar (PDP), and Peter Obi (Labour Party). They regularly shared campaign promises, updated supporters, and debunked opposition misconceptions. It has become common practice to use celebrities and social media influencers to sway public opinion. Political parties made large investments in digital marketing, which led to the regular usage of sponsored postings and targeted ads before to the election (Okunna & Morah, 2023).

Social media was used for real-time election monitoring on the day of the Nigerian 2023 presidential election. Voter anomalies were captured on camera, real-time updates were shared, and the public reported issues with polling stations. Following the results on social media sites like Twitter was made possible by the trending of election-related hashtags throughout the day following the results' announcement. Even after the election, social media remained a forum for both celebration and criticism. Supporters of several candidates expressed their thoughts on the election results on different platforms, with some questioning the legitimacy of the results.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

In the twenty-first century, social media has emerged as a powerful force shaping international political landscapes. As a result of its impact on public opinion and its function in fostering citizen contact, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have revolutionized political communication by facilitating direct engagement between politicians, citizens, and governments. Additionally, by empowering individuals to create, self-publish, and disseminate content, these platforms promote democracy and create a networked public for social, political, and cultural goals (Uzuegbunam, 2020). Furthermore, it reduces venue costs by enabling professionals, civil society, and the government to engage at little cost with like-minded individuals (Dunu & Uzochukwu, 2015). Ejumudo & Adogbeji (2024) assert that social media played a pivotal role in the 2023 Nigerian general election by educating and motivating voters, perhaps yielding favorable outcomes in subsequent elections. Social media, according to Bhagwat & Goutam (2013), has a lot of advantages, including better information discovery, open communication, free messaging, blogging, photo storage, games, and creative expression. It can also bring people together who have similar interests, make new connections, save costs, and support the development of a sustainable democratic culture.

Ejumudo & Adogbeji (2024) findings about social media's effectiveness in promoting political involvement in Southeast Nigeria are corroborated by Anyanwu & Orji's (2020) study, which discovered that social media had a positive impact on 70% of residents' lives. Morah & Uzochukwu (2020) employed a similar survey to investigate the ways in which 200 company owners use social media for governance-related objectives in their study, "Social Media Use and Political Communication Challenges among Selected Entrepreneurs in Nigeria". Their results indicate that social media Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter in particular significantly increases interest in, engagement in, sociability with, and connections to artists and merchants.

Social media has altered political activity by making it quicker and easier to obtain. While conventional media sometimes requires time and money to engage with, social media allows users to connect with political information in real time, participate in political debates, and exchange

opinions. People may exchange political knowledge on social media, which makes it easier for them to stay up to date on current affairs Ruby (2023). The rise of citizen journalism on social media allows average people to report on political events without having to go through the gatekeepers of traditional media. Political campaigns, protests, and rallies may be more easily planned thanks to social media, and these events frequently lead to real political action.

Politics has changed significantly as a result of social media's ability to quickly and efficiently mobilize large numbers of individuals. Movements like the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, #EndSars, #Obidientmovement, and #MeToo have all used social media to organize, spread, and amplify their voices. Social media has democratized access to information and engagement, but it has also made public discourse more polarized. Social media algorithms sometimes result in "echo chambers," when users are exposed to content that primarily supports their own beliefs. Social media has contributed in a variety of ways to the democracy process. On the one hand, technology has made it easier for citizens of authoritarian countries to challenge the status quo. But authoritarian governments have also used technology to suppress opposition and spread false information.

In addition to its greater benefits in the political arena, social media is sometimes abused and has disadvantages. Information pollution from digital media ecosystems, such as false information, deceit, and fake news, is a significant problem. According to UNESCO (2018), misinformation is false and is spread by those who believe it to be true, whereas fake news is information that has been disguised and is deceptive. People who are aware of the falsehood of misinformation deliberately spread it. (Siapera, 2018; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015) Cyberbullying is the deliberate, long-lasting harm done through social media and electronic gadgets. Trolling is the term for malicious activity intended to cause harm and destroy relationships. According to Coles & West (2016) and Lindgren (2017), cybercrimes are dangerous attacks using digital technology, whereas cyberterrorism is the act of breaking into an opponent's website or account to spread terrorist propaganda. Hate speech serves as a precursor to identity-based violence, harassment, and discrimination. These include prejudice based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), a popular theory for analyzing how people learn to accept and utilize technology, serves as the foundation for this study. The TAM was proposed by Fred Davis, 1989; Bogazzi et al., 1992 (Morah & Okunna, 2020). According to the concept, when consumers are introduced to new technology, a number of factors affect their individual choices regarding when and how to utilize it. A person's opinions about the ease of use and utility of a new technology might affect how they feel about it and how they utilize it. There is a connection between TAM and TRA, or the theory of reasoned action. The goal of TAM is to simplify TRA and offer a generalization model with a theoretical foundation, parsimony, and the tools that a manager utilizes. TAM helps consumers predict and explain their information technology-acceptance behavior by allowing them to evaluate how new technology is adopted.

The inference is that if a technology is beneficial to a person and easy to use, that person is more likely to employ it. According to the theory, individuals choose to employ one new technology over another because they believe it to be more practical and easy to use. Thus, according to this study's application of the technology acceptance model, people quickly adopt new technology that improves and makes it easier for them to participate in Nigerian politics.

Social media platforms are thought to be helpful instruments for civic involvement as they let users engage in debates, express their thoughts, and organize around political concerns. Political news and information may be accessed quickly and freely thanks to social media, which is especially important in nations where conventional media may be banned or prejudiced. Social media is seen to be an effective tool for planning campaigns and protests as well as swaying public opinion. Because social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are often simple to use, a wide range of Nigerian demographics are encouraged to utilize them. Social media is widely available to a huge section of the population in Nigeria due to the country's high mobile phone penetration rate,

which makes it a handy medium for political activity. In addition, the ease of utilizing social media for political objectives has been influenced by the availability and price of internet connection. The population's degree of education and digital literacy also has an impact on how beneficial and easy social media is seen to be.

RESEARCH METHODS

Using the survey approach, the study used a descriptive research design. Youths from the three senatorial districts of Delta State made up the study population. 250 youths was used as sample size for the study. The study needed answers about the impact of social media on Nigeria political development with a focus on the Nigeria 2023 presidential election, hence the purposive sampling technique was employed to choose the survey respondents. The structured questionnaire was employed as the data gathering tool. The four-point likert scale was scored as follows: 4 for strongly agreed, 3 for agree, 2 for strongly disagree and 1 for disagree. Descriptive statistics like frequency counts were used to analyze the collected data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the two hundred and fifty surveys, only two hundred and thirty were found. This suggests that the instruments twenty copies were misplaced. This is sufficient for data analysis since it shows that 92% of the surveys were returned and 8% were lost. Thus, the 230 collected surveys serve as the foundation for the data analysis.

Table 1: Social media and Nigeria political development

S/N	Items	SA		A		SD		D	
		F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1	Social media has positive influence on Nigeria political development	104	45.2	84	36.5	24	10.4	18	7.8
2	Politicians used social media to garner votes in the 2023 presidential election	86	37.4	112	48.7	18	7.8	14	6.1
3	Social media pattern voting sentiment in the 2023 presidential election	68	29.6	86	37.4	40	17.4	36	15.7
4	The use of social media for campaign has become very strong in Nigeria	72	31.3	90	39.1	36	15.7	32	13.9
5	The Nigeria 2023 presidential election was won on social media	54	23.5	60	26.1	64	27.8	52	22.6
6	Social media contributed to Tinubu victory in 2023 presidential election	68	29.6	52	22.6	60	26.1	50	21.7

Source: Field work, 2024

Table 1 display the distribution of data analysis on social media and political development with a focus on the Nigeria 2023 presidential election. According to the data, Social media has positive influence on Nigeria political development by 45.2% and 36.5% of respondents, respectively, while 10.4% and 7.8% strongly disagree and disagree. Politicians used social media to garner votes in the 2023 presidential election, according to 37.4% and 48.7% of respondents who strongly agree and agree respectively whereas 7.8% and 6.1% strongly disagree and disagree. Social media pattern voting sentiment in the 2023 presidential election by 29.6% and 37.4% highly agree and agree respectively, while, 17.4% and 15.7% strongly disagree and disagree. 31.3% and 39.1% strongly agree and agree that the use of social media for campaign has become very strong in Nigeria, while, 15.7% and 13.9% of the respondents strongly disagree and disagree. The Nigeria 2023 presidential election was won on social media, according to 23.5% and 26.1% of respondents respectively, while 27.8% and 22.6% strongly disagree and disagree. Last but not least, 29.6% and 22.6% of the respondents strongly agree and agree that Social media contributed to Tinubu victory in 2023 presidential election, while 26.1% and 21.7% strongly disagree and disagree that Social media contributed to Tinubu victory in 2023 presidential election. The information on the table

shows that social media have positively impacted on Nigeria political development which contributed to high level of participation in the Nigeria 2023 presidential election.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian presidential election of 2023 brought to light how social media has revolutionized the political scene of the nation. Social media platforms gave residents a place to engage in politics, educate voters, and share information, which allowed them to take an active role in the electoral process compared to past elections.

Unprecedented levels of political involvement among Nigerians, especially the youth, were made possible by social media. Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp are just a few of the platforms that helped spread the word about political concerns, encourage voters, and support politicians. Voters were greatly assisted by social media in learning about the election process, the programs of the candidates, and the significance of casting a ballot. This made voters more educated, but it also brought attention to problems with disinformation spreading. Social media contributed to the democratization of political discourse by making political candidates and disadvantaged groups more accessible to a wider audience. It served as a check on the power of traditional media, which frequently benefits well-established political elites.

As the Nigerian presidential election of 2023 shown, social media is becoming an increasingly significant factor in determining political results, researchers Sumera et al. (2020) and others concur that social media is a useful instrument for political advancement. Future elections will face both possibilities and problems as social media plays a bigger role as the nation's democratic institutions continue to grow.

RECOMMENDATION

1. The findings of this study recommend that national efforts should be launched to raise digital literacy levels among Nigerians. One way to lessen the impact of misinformation and manipulation is to teach individuals how to critically analyze material they come across online. Programs that enhance civic education through social media, especially for young people, have to be supported, advertised, and put into action. This may contribute to the development of a better knowledgeable electorate that recognizes the significance of voting and the democratic process.
2. This study also suggests that the Nigerian government should support and encourage the use of social media as a tool for political involvement and participation. These forums should be used by political parties and candidates to interact with the public, present their plans, and directly address issues. Transparency and faith in the democratic process may rise as a result.

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