

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ELECTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT:

The prominence of social media, particularly in politics has the potential of positively influencing political participation. Investigation on the impact of social media on election in Nigeria was done in Abuja. The study was limited to ten districts of the capital city of Nigeria. Specifically, the study was conducted with the following objective and: to examine the impact of Facebook on election, to investigate the impact of Twitter on election. Based on the formulated objectives, Statistical Package for Social Sciences – SPSS: 20.0 version was used for data analysis. Three hypotheses were tested with various test statistics aided by Regression analysis model and Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. Findings showed that Facebook usage has significant positive impact on election in Nigeria. Findings also showed that Twitter usage has significant positive impact on election in Nigeria. Based on the findings, the study recommends that misleading statements should be avoided while using social to communicate during election process. The study also recommends that social media users should neither use inappropriate language nor offensive, discriminatory or racially motivated statements in order to avoid violence.

Key words. Social media, dimensions , elections

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The arrival of social media has greatly enhanced human communication. The new technology due to the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature has barely made everyone who can use it 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. The emergence of social media is perhaps the most phenomenal among various platforms of communication made available by the advance in Information and

Communication Technologies (ICTs). The possibilities they have created in human communication and interaction are endless and beyond bounds. By just processing a button today, one can stay right in his bedroom and access information, entertainment, events and enjoy full interaction with the world. Writing on this development, Adibe et al. (2021) observe that the new media of communication have in no small measure helped the community to be aware of each other.

Expounding in this, Baran (2019) maintains that as the media shrink the world, people will become increasingly involved in one another's lives, and as people come to know more about others who were hitherto separated from them by distance, they will form new beneficial relationships. Baran's argument is relevant to this scholarly work as it draws attention to what social media is doing in the area of human communication, especially as it concerns the fostering of relations and interaction among people. Social media are interactive, web-based media. They belong to the new genre of media that focus on social networking, allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends, share personal information, as well as publish their own views on the internet. Nations (2020) refers to these media as social instruments of communication which are different from the conventional instrument like newspapers. According to him, "they are channels of communication made possible by social interactions often among heterogeneous persons". These media he believes lay emphasis on dialogue or two-way-communication among senders and receivers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2020) agree with him that social media are media designed to disseminate information through social interaction, using web-based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social dialogues.

In Nigeria and other African countries where social media is in use, it is still mainly an urban affair and use is mostly elitist. Perhaps, the most worrisome of it all is the problem of weak or absence of regulation of the technology as Kidafa, Odoemelam and Elechi (2021) observe that "regulating traditional media in the face of issues like obscenity, copyright, right to privacy, etc., was upheaval, but have become more difficult with the emergence of social media".

According to the Nigerian blogger, commentator on socio-economic and political matters, environmental consultants, and social Media expert- Ogunlesi (2021) asserts that social media is Nigeria's new battleground. As social media allows candidates to communicate directly with citizens, keeping control of the content, distribution and timing of their messages, as well as reducing their dependence on traditional intermediaries. It also provides a way for politicians to monitor what is happening in the public sphere during an election campaign.

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- i. examine the impact of Facebook on election in Nigeria.
- ii. investigate the impact of Twitter on election in Nigeria.
- iii. assess the impact of YouTube on election in Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Arguably, the use of social media in politics is widespread and shows no sign of abating. Furthermore, there is ample research to show the importance of social media in political movements. What is less studied is the use of social media in electioneering and democratic sustenance using the swot analytical strategy. Nigeria, the largest democracy in Africa, is secular and capitalist country. Here, election of representatives of people involves management one of the mega event in the world. During 2015 general elections (The Nigerian general election of 2015 was the 5th quadrennial election to be held since the end of military rule in 1999), there were around 150,000 polling stations across the country. The electoral roll is a list of all people in the constituency who are registered to vote. Only those people with their names on the voting list are allowed to vote. The general elections ushered in new leadership in the two tiers of government in the country. Apart from the other sources of information like the newspapers, magazines, radio and television, the social media were used as one of the viable medium which is interactive in nature. The social media offered some politicians an important platform in reaching many targeted electorates, especially the youths. The use of the biometric card readers adunks the idea that electronically coordinated voting is possible and improvable.

It is a statement of fact that social networking has become a very important tool for political mobilisation globally. It is gradually becoming a dependable tool in changing the opinions and influences of the public. Realising the efficacy of this medium, some Nigerian politicians quickly embraced it and exploited it extensively for their political campaigns in the 2015 general elections. This study therefore investigates the role social media played in 2015 electioneering process and the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.

Despite the increased adoption of Facebook by the key players during the 2019 elections for campaigning and civic advocacy, there is little evidence on how this has impacted on the election in terms of youth participation. The 2019 presidential election took a similar pattern with other previous elections since 1999 where two dominant political parties contend for the much coveted seat. Although the electoral umpire, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) cleared 91 political parties to contest for the position, only 73 of these political parties fielded in candidates for the position. Also, 2019 election saw the emergence of younger candidates for the top job as a result of the passage of the “Not Too Young To Run” bill. This kept the social media agog with political contents as these young candidates used the platform to access their audience mostly the youth. Candidates such as Chike Ukaegbu (35 years old) of the Advanced Allied Party (AAP), Shipi Godia (39 years old) of the All Blending Party (ABP), Obinna Ikeagwuonu (38 years old) of the Action Peoples Party (APP), Felix Nicholas (37 years old) of the People’s Coalition Party (PCP), and Emmanuel Etim (38 years old) of the Change Nigeria Party (CNP) among others, were new

entrants to the 2019 presidential race. This, however, did not reflect on voter turnout considering that the Nigerian youth account for over 40% of the 203 million estimated population as at 2018 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018).

Even though the advent of social media in the political arena has drastically impacted the politicians and voters alike; the use of social media for political participation has its drawbacks. Misinformation, political harassment, rumours, fake news, propaganda and trolling are some of the problems of using social media for political participation. Besides, the topic of bots affecting the outcome of elections has recently become a mainstream topic during elections. Bots are used to leak fake news stories, spread dissension and create fake profiles on social media platforms that sow divide between people and political parties. Usage of social media for political participation also exacerbates the problem of echo chambers, with everyone feeling the need to be on one side or the other. People only see contents and viewpoints they agree with when they scroll down their news feed, which makes it unlikely that voters will ever have to sincerely defend their political stance unless they actively seek people and media outlets with opposing political views. In addition, the use of social media for political participation also allows for foreign interference in elections.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media

According to Dominick (2021), 'the origin of social media on the web can be found in the mid-1990's when personal web pages became popular'. Social media could be defined as "a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content". (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020). These applications that make up social media are social networking sites (like Facebook, Twitter, My Space, Linked in, Hi5), video sharing web sites (You Tube, Vimeo, Photo Bucket, Meta Cafe) and web logs (Blogs) which are like personal web pages.

The Associated Press (AP) Stylebook (2018) defines Social media as "online tools that people use to connect with one another including social networks. Adibe, Odoemelum and Orji (2021) describe social media as "online content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies to disseminate information across geographical boundaries, providing interaction among people". Carr and Hayes (2019) define social media as "internet – based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences to derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others". Communication Expert Thornley (2018) defines social media as "online communications in which individuals shift fluidly and flexibly between the role of

audience and author. To do this, they use social software that enables anyone without knowledge of coding, to post comment on, share or mash up content and to form communities around shared interests”. Simply put, social media is an umbrella term used to describe the various types of internet based applications that lend themselves to content creation sharing, exchange, collaboration and social networking within a website.

Kaplan & Haenlein (2020) highlighted the various forms of social media as collaborative projects (eg wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (eg Twitter), content communities (eg YouTube, Picasso), social networking sites (eg Facebook, MySpace), virtual game worlds (eg world of warcraft) and virtual social worlds (eg second life). The AP stylebook (2018) has a slightly different categorization of social media as: blogs, social networking sites, microblogging sites, wikis, content sharing sites, online forums, check-in services and all sorts of other sites. Irrespective of the categorizations, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, MySpace, LinkedIn, Vine have really become quite popular especially among the youth who utilize them to socialise, network, mobilize, for entertainment purposes amongst other uses.

Although social media platforms can be accessed via the web (eg desktop computers, laptops) they are mainly accessed via mobile devices like cellphones, tablets, ipods. According to Facebook’s 3rd quarter (2018) report, over 70% percent of total Facebook active users access it through mobile devices. The numbers are growing for Facebook and it’s from mobile. To bring it home, the same Facebook report reveal that 15 million Nigerians access the website via mobile devices monthly.

Dimensions of Social Media

Although there are several dimensions of social media, this study focuses on Facebook, Twitter.

Facebook

Facebook is a social networking site that was created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 while he was still a student at Harvard University. It was initially restricted to Harvard students only but was later extended to include other Universities/Colleges and then later high schools in the U.S. (www.wikipedia/en/history_of_Facebook).

The popularity of Facebook became worldwide and it was eventually opened up to anyone with an email address to join and create a profile. Facebook has grown at an astronomical rate from its humble beginning as a Harvard campus networking site to a global internet giant boasting of a whooping over 1.5 billion active users, making it the biggest social networking site in the world. To put it in other words, if Facebook were a country it would be the most populous country in the world (www.statista.com/264810).

Facebook can be accessed through www.facebook.com and all a prospective user needs' to open an account and create a profile is a valid email address or cell phone number. He or she provides some basic information about himself /herself such as name, sex, date of birth, and town of residence. A picture of the user is optional but encouraged by Facebook. A profile page is created for each user that registers and it contains all the information about the user as provided by the user. Some of the functionalities of Facebook available to users according to Fountaine (2021), are Walls (where information can be posted for friends to see), Messages (for private emails), Status (to post any kind of information for the public to view), Pictures & Videos uploading links, groups of political, social, religious or whatever leaning can be created for followers to join.

Twitter

Twitter is a free micro-blogging, social messaging service that allows people to communicate brief message (140 words) called "tweets" in real time. (Dominick, 2021). When you sign up with twitter on www.twitter.com you can use the service to post and receive messages to a network of contacts. Instead of sending a dozen emails or text messages, you send one message to your twitter account, and the service distributes it to all friends or "followers". Members use twitter to organize impromptu gatherings, carry on a group conversation or just send a quick update to let people know what's going on. (Strickland, 2021) Twitter was founded in 2006 by the trio of Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams and Biz Stone who were all programmers that were interested in creating a micro- blogging social network that could be updated via short message service (SMS).

Despite the fact that a "tweet" is limited to a maximum of 140 words, Twitter has grown at an astronomical rate since its inception. Exact numbers are hard to pin down but according to Picard (2019) there are between 200-250 million users on twitter while over 460,000 new accounts are opened daily, with about 140 million tweets sent daily.

Some of the reasons why Twitter has become a huge hit among internet users is because of its simplicity and easy- to- use format. Twitter is also accessible both from laptops with internet connection and mobile devices like mobile phones, PDA's, smart phones, ipad , etc Twitter has really proven to be the mobile social media. Many well known personalities have Twitter accounts that they use for political, social, informational, educational, mobilizing, canvassing purposes. Upon opening an account on Twitter, a user will be allotted a profile page which will contain basic information like names of the user, the city or country where he/she is based; users are also encouraged to upload at least one of their pictures as a profile picture. Favourite quotes or sayings can also be included in the profile page. The next step' after setting up a profile page is to invite or search for friends/contacts (called "followers") to "follow". To do this there is an inbuilt 'search' application which is used to search for followers on Twitter. Those not on twitter already can also be invited to join via emails.

There is no limit to the number of followers a 'tweeter' can follow and some prominent personalities like President Barack Obama are known to have over 9 million followers. (www.twitaholic.com).

The 'Timeline' is similar to the Wall application on Facebook, where Tweets (messages) from all of one's followers are displayed to be read. These tweets from followers can also be "Retweeted" by an individual so that the tweet is seen by other tweeters on the individual's network of followers. Even though twitter is meant to be a micro-blogging site it nonetheless can be used to upload and post picture and also links to videos or pod casts (Picard, 2019). Many tweeters tweet and back such tweets with pictures to lend credence to it. There is also a section called Trends where the top ten most tweeted issues on Twitter are listed. Usually, current events taking place in the world dominate this list. Some other times it may be about natural disasters happening somewhere, while at other times celebrities in the news make the trending list. Twitter can be used to keep up with news by 'following' any of the several media houses that now tweet most of their stories - usually the Headlines and Leads.

There is a popular statement which says that: "Information is power." This statement isn't far from the truth because, the fastest means of disseminating information is through the social media and the traditional media such as radio, newspapers, magazines and television. The use of social media which is the virtual means of exchanging information has been on the increase especially in this 21st century. It has also been used as a strong weapon for the transmission of political activities in Nigeria and the world at large.

According to google (2022), "Nigeria registered approximately 109 million active internet users, which corresponds to about half of the total population." This simply tells you that social media could be a great weapon for achieving power and influence in Nigeria, if properly used. The active users of the social media platforms are the youths. So, the youths being the active consumers have power in the upcoming 2023 general elections. And they can change, manipulate and play with peoples perspectives and beliefs.

Twitter is very accessible and easy to use and these attributes are contributing to its success (Middlebrook, 2019). Between February 2008 and February 2009, Twitter experienced extensive growth in its number of unique web site visitors, with more than half of it occurring between December 2008 and February 2009 (Compete, 2019). As of December 2008, great number of people are using Twitter or similar services to share and read updates of others (Lenhart et al., 2020). The new trend of the way people are connecting and interacting with each other on the internet is typified by Twitter's growth and popularity. Internet users are giving up the use of emails in favor of social networking sites and blogs (Nielsen, 2019).

Twitter is now playing important roles that are often referred to as the "migration process" where there is millennial active participation on the site with a focus on political activities

(Waller, 2018). There has been an increasing trend of the millennial using Twitter to effect social and political change (Chan & Guo, 2018) and thus, promoting new forms of political participation (Dhaha & Igale, 2018). These findings are raising questions such as: What has changed the attitude of the millennial on political participation? How is twitter influencing the young people to participate in politics? In a bid to provide answers for these questions, it is important to examine certain factors including Twitter's features such as its usage patterns, its network structure of friend and its interaction with political actors (Tang & Lee, 2018). Unlike the traditional media with its cumbersome nature and outrageous political advertisements, Twitter is open, participatory and interactive. Millennials find convenient use new participatory skills provided by this medium to interact with candidates and their political parties. Such interactions with politicians increase political awareness and therefore lead to an increase in political participation (Tang & Lee, 2018).

2.2 Election

Kwarkye (2019) argues that elections in Nigeria present a battleground for the control of power and the nation's resources. He also posits that this is the foundation for electoral and crisis before, during and after the election process. Usually, the presidential race features more than 70 candidates but the competition is between the two major parties; the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the opposition, People's Democratic Party (PDP). Again, a repetition of the pre and post-election violence resulting in fatalities as seen in those of 2011, 2015 and 2019 are normal occurrences in Nigeria. The foundation for election violence is usually built on the foundation of inflammatory comments by politicians, allegations of intimidation, partisanship by members of the security forces, as well as favoritism on the part of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), illegal voting and results rigging. This has formed the template for any opposition party, especially those that are more likely to be defeated.

Candidates of political parties just before elections are held and a commitment to peace by the political actors, followers as well as their thugs often sign peace accords, especially building up to election. Politicians have used their political thugs who develop disparaging strategies to disrupt the process once it appears that it does not favor their candidate. In 2011, approximately 800 cases of fatalities were recorded resulting from post-election attacks across the country. In 2015, not less than 100 cases of fatalities were recorded. While the commitment for peace through peace accords is important, the foundation for violence are set for use, and guided by political parties, their agents, and individuals (International Republican Institute, 2015). One of the main reasons for the desperate act is the perception that the office provides easy access to the accumulation of wealth, which the control of state resources and the domination productive resources provides for office holders and their cronies. Since the federal government solely administers the revenue from oil, the political

class indirectly controls most of the country's economic activities while private sector players are made to survive on political patronage. Government contracts and procurements, at all levels form the major bulk of business and employment in Nigeria. These are funded with oil money, so the ability to win government contracts depends almost entirely on political influences. For most political candidates, politics is the only means they know to improve their lifestyle and personal prestige. As such, those seeking economic gains from these political offices see winning elections as the only option and are willing to do anything to win at all cost even if it means fueling violence to achieve it.

Kwarkye (2019) further argues that political candidates and their financiers invest in elections and hope to make huge economic gains when they win. The stakes are usually high so even when peace accords are signed by all the parties to reduce the heat, such accords are often not enough to prevent violence before, during and after the elections. Certain primordial sentiments as well as the religious and ethno-regional tensions, which have been established over time, add to the heat to make elections in Nigeria a battleground for the control of resources. This battle for political supremacy and resource control among Nigeria's intricate ethnic groupings has always served as a recipe for violence and disaster. The frequent usage of inflammatory rhetoric as a campaign by candidates to cause division between different ethnic groups and religious organizations fuels violence during elections. The safety of the citizenry is dicey as the security and law enforcement institutions are viewed as being influenced by political control. Since the inspector general of police, service chiefs and other heads of law enforcement agencies are appointed by the president and can be removed at will, their loyalty in providing safety or insecurity, depending on how it serves the interest of the incumbent political party is guaranteed. This puts citizens on edge and creates fear among those who intend to vote legitimately as security and law enforcement personnel are viewed as being loyal to the present administration and they can therefore be used for the intimidation of opponents.

In light of this, Kwarkye (2019) and Obasi (2018) both argue that during the campaign season, politicians from different parties always air their distrust of the military and law enforcement agencies, as they are accused of being partisan. This growing distrust heightens tension as opposing sides resort to recruiting political thugs to perpetrate violence and intimidate opponents.

Elections and Voter Apathy

Democracy has become the most accepted system of government globally. It is characterized by citizens' involvement and participation in civic duties and political matters such as campaigning and voting for suitable candidates to fill political offices at different levels. Akinyemi (2019) argues that citizen's involvement in governance is an instrument used to sustain a democracy, although Nigeria is far from achieving this in her political scene.

Since the return of democracy from years of military rule in 1999, Nigeria's election process has been branded by voter apathy. Because of this, rather than voting candidates by the majority of the citizens eligible to vote, candidates are voted from the majority of the few that participate in voting. Of the 200 million populations in Nigeria, 82.3 million registered as voters in 2019. Out of this number of registered voters, 28.6 million, representing 35% of the registered voters actually voted (Independent National

Electoral Commission, 2019). This indicates that between the time of registration and the time of voting, 53.7 million registered voters declined from participating in the elections.

The turnout of voters in the 2019 election, compared to that of 2015 indicates that voter apathy had set in. Because of the corruption, reckless spending and level of insecurity prior to, and at the time of the 2015 elections, citizens were frustrated with the government of Goodluck Jonathan. Most citizens believed that time that change was eminent. The social and economic atmosphere in the country at that time provided the ingredients for voter apathy, and the result was a massive turnout of voter to ensure that the corrupt government of Goodluck Jonathan was voted out. Although the usual political gimmicks of corruption, rigging and truancy existed during the election, the volume of voters against the regime was too large for election malpractice to overshadow. In this case, one can say that voter apathy positively affected the expected result of that election (Owen, 2021).

As the new government became more and more unpopular, voter turnout during elections diminished. After the very poor performance of the Buhari administration in his first term, which ended in 2019, voter turnout further diminished, and the presidential elections recorded the lowest voter turnout since 1999. With only 35.66% of registered voters turning out for elections, the result of the presidential election was determined, meaning that those that failed to vote indirectly transferred their voting rights to the few that voted, thereby empowering them to make elective decisions on their behalf (Akinyemi, 2019).

Akinyemi (2019) posited that voter apathy in Nigeria is attributed to several factors that include bad governance, religious affiliations, political violence by candidates and their thugs and lack of trust for the government organization responsible for elections. This has led to the government being labeled as deceitful, and being unable to fulfill promises mostly made to the citizens by politicians, during their campaign in preparation for election into political offices. Akinyemi (2019) stresses that this has led to a lack of trust in elected officials who fail to perform their responsibilities due to high levels of corruption. Religious affiliations have led to voters tilting towards candidates of the same religious beliefs with them, believing this may bring some form of benefits or religious freedom.

Political violence on the other hand discourages voter turnout at elections because political thugs create unsafe environments for citizens who genuinely come out to vote. Deaths occur,

and severe injuries from stampedes that occur during snatching and burning of ballot boxes. For youths that intend to vote, this usually, is a huge hindrance, as parents would always prevent their wards and children from going to unsafe voting centers. The worst of them, according to Akinyemi (2019) is rigging, as he stresses that this act insults the citizens of a country who go under stressful and harsh conditions with risks to their lives, for voting. After going through these tough conditions, results are carefully and easily rigged, and the candidate who wins the rigging game is elected into office. This has made citizens ask themselves the reason for going out to vote, and would rather sit indoors to accept whatever result is generated at the end of the elections. Since the conduct of electoral processes and governance in Nigeria do not provide confidence, most citizens are discouraged and kept away from elections. This low turnout of voters reflects a general lack of enthusiasm and trust for the system as well as for the candidates, as some Nigerians are also concerned voter apathy is reflecting a growing disillusionment with democracy.

The Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS)

The Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) and INEC Election Result Viewing Portal (IReV) are two technological innovations celebrated for enhancing the transparency of election results and boosting public trust in electoral outcomes in recent elections. INEC asserts that these technologies are addressing the ten most pervasive weaknesses in Nigeria's election result management process which include falsification of votes at polling units, falsification of number of accredited voters, collation of false results, mutilation of results and computational errors, swapping of results sheets, forging of results sheets, snatching and destruction of results sheets, obtaining declaration and return involuntarily, making declaration and return while result collation is still in progress and poor recordkeeping. Both tools perform mutually reinforcing and critical functions in elections. The BVAS is a technological device used to identify and accredit voters' fingerprints and facial recognition before voting. The device is also used for capturing images of the polling unit result sheet (Form EC8A) and uploading the image of the result sheet online. IReV is an online portal where polling unit level results are uploaded directly from the polling unit, transmitted, and published for the public. At the front end of the online portal, members of the public can create personal accounts with which they can gain access to all uploaded results stored as PDF files. This accessibility of polling unit level results increases transparency and public trust in the process (Yakubu, 2022).

Despite improving public confidence in electoral outcomes, the introduction of BVAS and IReV is anathema to political actors determined to subvert the people's will at all costs. It is, therefore, not surprising to learn of alleged attempts to torpedo INEC plans to safeguard the integrity of the election using the BVAS and IReV. A case in point is the litigation instituted in the Imo State High court seeking a restraining order against INEC to suspend the

deployment of the BVAS for the general election. Across the world, the introduction of electoral technologies has attracted contestations and controversies driven mainly by its propensity to enhance election credibility and undermine public trust in elections at the same especially when electoral technologies are compromised. Most importantly, electoral technologies ensure efficiency in election administration and limit human interference with the electoral process. As these technologies evolve, attempts to compromise them heighten. Elections can be stolen, and voter choices upturned by compromised election officials with a click of a button. Tech tools may also be subjected to disruptive cyber-attacks. These issues amplify the essence of greater transparency by election management bodies to increase public trust and confidence in electoral technologies (Yakubu, 2022).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting Theory

The Agenda-setting theory propounded by Maxwell Mc Combs and Donald Shaw states that the media sets the agenda for public discourse by determining which events/issues are put in the front burner at any given time. The media determine which issues are regarded as important or not for the populace. As Cohen (2019) once stated "The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about". It is no coincidence that most times, issues/topics being discussed in offices, markets, schools and other public places are news headlines, commentaries, editorials and other editorial matters carried by the mass media that morning. This study shall .examine if the social media Facebook and Twitter are veritable tools that can be used to set agenda for Nigerian youths, especially as regards awakening their political consciousness for them to participate in the electoral process.

Agenda setting theory suggests that the media has the ability to shape public opinion by determining what issues are given the most attention, and has been widely studied and applied to various forms of media. Agenda-setting describes the way media attempts to influence viewers, and establish a hierarchy of news prevalence (McCombs and Reynolds, 2020). Nations judged to be endowed with more political power receive higher media exposure. The agenda-setting by media is driven by the media's bias on things such as politics, economy and culture, etc. The evolution of agenda-setting and laissez-faire components of communication research encouraged a fast pace growth and expansion of these perspectives. Agenda-setting has phases that need to be in a specific order in order for it to succeed (Aruguete, 2021). Agenda-setting theory describes the capacity of news media to influence and guide public discourse. That is, if a news item is covered frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more important.

To provide a structure for this current study, the researcher locates this study within the Agenda and Uses and gratification theory. Evidence from a survey has shown that during electioneering campaigns, different social media outlets are utilized by politicians and electorate to propagate their views and opinions (Apuke, 2021). Agenda setting depicts an intense impact of the media; the capacities disclose to us what issues are notable. It is “the process whereby the media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various public issues” (Zhu and Blood, 2019). This means that the media is geared towards influencing people’s perception of what is necessary, acceptable and worthy. The media influence peoples to turn towards certain issues in the society neglecting another aspect; thus, striking issues are raised keeping in mind the end goal to impact the general population to think towards it. Additionally, Folarin (2019) observes that “agenda setting suggests that the media predetermines what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society”. Relating this theory to the current subject field, it could be deduced that agenda setting explicates the role or functions of the media (social media) in ascertaining public agenda before, during and after elections. It further delineates the influence of social media in moulding and shaping the notion of the public towards some topical issues, of which election is paramount. Research has shown that political leaders have adopted social communication platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to propagate their agenda building campaigns (Chadwick, 2021) which in turn mould and shape the notion of the public towards their agenda and opinion.

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratification theory was propounded by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in 1974. The theory advocates that people use certain media base on the gratification derived from it. Specifically, the uses and gratification theory directly place power in the hands of the users. Additionally, studies have described it as the gratifications or benefits that attract and hold audiences to diverse types of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological demands (Apuke, 2022). Underpinning the concept of this theory to the current work, it could be deduced that politicians and their supporters use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to reach out to electorates in order to influence and induce voting behaviors.

Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. UGT is an audience-centered approach to understanding mass communication (Baran, 2019). Diverging from other media effect theories that question "what does media do to people?", UGT focuses on "what do people do with media? It postulates that media is a highly available product and the audiences are the consumers of the same product. This communication theory is positivistic in its approach, based in the socio-psychological communication

tradition, and focuses on communication at the mass media scale (Menon and Meghana, 2021) The driving question of UGT is: *Why* do people use media and what do they use them for? UGT discusses how users deliberately choose media that will satisfy given needs and allow one to enhance knowledge, relaxation, social interactions/companionship, diversion, or escape.

UGT assumes that audience members are not passive consumers of media. Rather, the audience has power over their media consumption and assumes an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. Unlike other theoretical perspectives, UGT holds that audiences are responsible for choosing media to meet their desires and needs to achieve gratification. This theory would then imply that the media compete against other information sources for viewers' gratification.

2.4 Empirical Review

A myriad of studies have been conducted on the impact of social media on some of which are as follows:

Bond et al. (2021) carried out an experiment titled “61 – million person experiment in social influence and political mobilization” and concluded that social media messages do influence people. They estimated that tens of thousands of votes eventually cast (during U.S Congressional election) were generated by a single Facebook message. Gromark and Schliesmann (2021) in their study of “The effects of politicians social media activities on voting behaviour” submitted that “there is evidence that the total social media activity has a positive effect on voter turnout”. The result for effect of social media messages on voter’s preferences was not conclusive.

Akpoveta (2021) in his study “Assessment of the impact of social media on the 2015 electioneering in Asaba, Delta State” reached the same conclusions as that of Gromark and Schliesmann by stating that “social media increased the turnout of voters by increasing information exchange and participation of the electorates”. A similar study was carried out in Anambra State by Edegoh and Anunike (2019) and they also concluded that “social media platforms present unique opportunities for mobilization of youths for political participation”.

In their own study carried out in Ondo State Okioya, Talabi and Ogundeji (2021) concluded that “social media actually stimulated voters” to participate in the electoral process in Akure metropolis. Similarly, Onyike, Ekwenchi and Chiaha (2021) in their study set in Enugu state reveal that a substantial number of respondents were influenced to a large extent by exposure to social media in the way they participated in the 2015 general elections”.

The verdict of Okoro and Nwafor (2018) in their study titled “social media and political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 General elections: the lapses and lessons” was that

whereas many used the technology (social media) to make vital input in the political discourse, others used it to spread hate and inciting messages. Okoro and Santas (2021) further appraise the utilisation of social media for political communication in the 2011 Nigerian presidential election to determine whether voters' choice of presidential candidates was influenced by their social media use. The results reveal that the majority of the respondents' choices of presidential candidates was influenced by the use of social media. Similarly, the respondents were of the opinion that the two selected presidential candidates were popular because they used social media in their political campaign. Acholonu, Onyebuchi & Obayi (2021) in their study of the influence of social media on the political knowledge and participation of electorates in 2015 electioneering campaigns in Nigeria concluded that "there are low knowledge levels on the use of social media for political learning and use of social media has different levels of influence on electorates political participation

Ekwueme and Folarin (2021) examine the role of social media in the Nigerian 2015 presidential electioneering processes. Findings show that social media played a major role in mobilising people, creating awareness, as well as participation and circulation of information about candidates.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study employ a survey design. The design is believed to be most suitable since there are no real experiments carried out with human beings who are the study subjects in this case. The design suitability is also seen based on the fact that it involves taking a sample of elements from a population of interest which is measured at a single point in time. The survey instruments such as questionnaire will be designed in a way that meaningful results could be achieved. Data for this study was generated from primary sources. Data was collected through the administration of questionnaire, observation and holding of personal interview which are instrument of the survey method of research.

The research instrument used for this study is a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was formulated considering the research questions and hypotheses. The designed questionnaire has two sections – A and B. All the questions in section A are drawn and aimed at providing some general information from the respondents while the remaining questions in section B are meant to directly address the research questions. In the design of the questionnaire, four-point Likert scale format was used.

Model Specification

The model shall be designed using the variables considered in the study. The model is illustrated as shown below:

$$SM = \beta_0 + \beta_1FB + \beta_0 + \beta_2T \dots\dots\dots (i)$$

$$E = \beta_0 + \beta_1FB + \beta_0 + \beta_2T(\alpha - U) \dots\dots\dots (ii)$$

Where;

- β = Constant term
- SM = Social Media
- FB = Facebook
- E = Election
- T = Twitter
- U = Error Term; and
- α = Intercept

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

The Statistical Software Package named SPSS 2.0 was used as software for the analysis. According to the problem/requirement, statistical techniques such as Pearson Moment Product Correlation Coefficient and Regression analysis were used to test the hypotheses. The frequencies were converted to percentages (%), to enables the researcher compare the responses meaningfully. Translating frequency counts into percentages shows the number per hundred compared, using a common base of “100” for comparison.

Regression analysis is used to determine if there is a relationship between survey results related to each independent variable and the dependent variable. The F-test shows the overall significance of the model. When the alpha is greater than the significant F, the null hypothesis is rejected and the overall model is significant. The F value shows the explained variations and how likely the model is the result of a random outcome. The Adjusted R Square determines the variance that is explained by the regression model; the more variance that can be explained by the regression model, the more dependable the model.

4.1 Test of Hypotheses

Test of Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Facebook usage does not have significant impact on election in Nigeria.

H₂: Facebook usage has significant impact on election in Nigeria.

Table 4.12 Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Facebook usage	1.7766	.51738	300
Election	3.4727	.85386	300

Table 4.13 Correlations

		Facebook usage	Election
Pearson Correlation	Facebook usage	1.000	.682
	Election	.682	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Facebook usage	.	.000
	Election	.000	.
N	Facebook usage	300	300
	Election	300	300

Table 4.14 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.682 ^a	.465	.463	.37899	.064

a. Predictors: (Constant), Facebook usage

b. Dependent Variable: Election

Table 4.15 Coefficients^a

Model		Sum of Squares
1	Regression	47.778
	Residual	55.012
	Total	102.790

R = 0.682
 R^2 = 0.465
 F = 332.632
 DW = .064

Interpretation:

The regression sum of squares (47.778) is less than the residual sum of squares (55.012), which indicates that more of the variation in the dependent variable is not explained by the

model. The significance value of the F statistics (0.000) is less than 0.05, which means that the variation explained by the model is not due to chance.

R, the correlation coefficient which has a value of 0.682, indicates that there is a positive relationship between the Facebook usage and election in Nigeria. R square, the coefficient of determination, shows that 46.5% of the variation in the growth is explained by the model. With the linear regression model, the error of estimate is high, with a value of about 0.37899. The Durbin Watson statistics of .064, which is not tend to 2 indicates there no is autocorrelation.

Facebook usage coefficient of 0.682 indicates a positive significance between Facebook usage and election in Nigeria, which is statistically significant (with $t = 14.223$). Therefore, the null hypothesis should be rejected and the alternative hypothesis accordingly accepted resulting that Facebook usage has positive impact on election in Nigeria.

Test of Hypothesis Two

H0₂: Twitter usage does not have significant impact on election in Nigeria.

H₂: Twitter usage has significant impact on election in Nigeria.

Table 4.16 Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Twitter usage	2.8253	1.27682	300
Election	3.1613	1.37593	300

Source: SPSS version 20.00

Table 4.17 Correlations

		Strategic debt	Election
Twitter usage	Pearson Correlation	1	.716(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	300	300
Election	Pearson Correlation	.716(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	300	300

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS version 20.00

Table (4.16) shows the descriptive statistics of the Twitter usage via, election with a mean response of 2.8253 and std. deviation of 1.27682 for Twitter usage and a mean response of 3.1613 and std. deviation of 1.37593 for election and number of respondents (300). By careful observation of standard deviation values, there is not much difference in terms of the standard deviation scores. This implies that there is about the same variability of data points between the dependent and independent variables.

Table (4.17) is the Pearson correlation coefficient for Twitter usage and election. The correlation coefficient shows 0.716. This value indicates that correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2tailed) and implies that there is a significant positive relationship between Twitter usage and election ($r = .716$). The computed correlations coefficient is greater than the table value of $r = .195$ with 383 degrees of freedom ($df = n-2$) at alpha level for a two-tailed test ($r = .716, p < .05$). However, since the computed $r = .716$, is greater than the table value of $.195$ we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that Twitter usage has significant effect on elections in Nigeria ($r = .716, P < .05$).

4.2 Discussion of Results

Hypothesis one was tested using simple linear regression to examine if Facebook usage has positive impact on election in Nigeria with a computed result ($r = 0.682$; $F = 332.632$; $t = 14.223$; $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis was rejected and alternate hypothesis was accepted resulting in the conclusion that Facebook usage has positive impact on election in Nigeria.

Hypothesis two was tested with Pearson's product moment correlation in order to examine if Twitter usage has significant impact on election in Nigeria, with a computed result ($r = 0.716$; $p < 0.05$), the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted resulting in the conclusion that Twitter usage has significant effect on election in Nigeria.

5.0 CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The prominence of social media, particularly in politics has the potential of positively influencing political participation. Certainly, the advent of social media has brought around a different type of political process and campaigns referred to as political digital campaigns which requires political candidates getting acquainted with social media strategy to connect with electorates so as to influence them and the society at large. Therefore, there is good evidence that social media is now being used in political campaigns to circularize diverse campaign messages to various constituents who have an interest in the political career and aspirations of a candidate. Indeed, there is a relationship between social media and politics and through social media political mobilization and supports is attainable.

The study investigated the impact of social media on election in Nigeria using Abuja as case study. Two hypotheses postulated were tested with various test statistics aided by computer applied Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS: 20.00s version) of Microsoft environment. The outcome of the result showed that social media has significant positive impact on election in Nigeria.

5.2 Recommendations

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

- i. Misleading statements should be avoided while using social to communicate during election process.
- ii. There should be implementation of policy which prevent the use of inappropriate language, offensive, discriminatory or racially motivated statements.

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