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The Role of Social Media in the 2023 Nigerian General Elections: An Analytical Appraisal of Selected Platforms

Etido Aniedi Okon^{1*}, Dan-Ralph Ohewolam Ojedor¹, Babatunde Oriyomi Owolabi²

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ABSTRACT

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria witnessed a surge in political discourse on social media platforms. Analyzing the impact of social media on the voting process can shed light on the potential of digital platforms in bridging these divisions and promoting citizen involvement. Therefore, this study sought to guide evidence-based decision-making, policy development, and the creation of media literacy campaigns to strengthen an inclusive democratic system in Nigeria. The diversity of social media channels used during the general elections for 2023 is compared in this paper. We modified the mass media's framing theory and the agenda-setting theory and chose the survey research approach. The results of this study indicate that social media political campaigns played a significant role in persuading voters in the 2023 general elections. The study also showed that social media political campaigns are quite successful, and Twitter in particular is a main avenue of political and electioneering communication.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Social media has today emerged as a powerful tool that changes the ways in which people interact. Over the past few years, social networks have had a very significant influence on the political systems of various countries. The rise of cartoon journalism in print media, as a preferred medium for expressing individuals' opinions, contributing, correcting, criticizing, or making suggestions on social, political, or socio-economic issues, also contributes to this (Essien, 2024). This paper examines the effects of social media on the Nigerian 2023 general elections section, which concerns social media involvement in the voting process, politics, and democratization. Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, among others, have become crucial tools in political campaigns for urging interaction with voters (Michael, 2023). In Nigeria, the 2023 general elections saw a lot of enlightenment and a serious embrace of social media by the political parties. These platforms had the advantage of creating a new platform to bypass the traditional media, spread campaign messages, and rally the electorate.

Another fascinating aspect of social media is its ability to deconstruct and break down barriers in the electoral process. New media, especially social media in Nigeria, mediated these barriers due to physical separations and a lack of resources that may affect physical political engagement (Chinedu-Okeke & Obi, 2016). Through the technology of smartphones and the internet, those in rural areas were able to participate in political debates, get information, and vote. In addition, social media ensured the flow of information in real-time, ensuring that the voters were abreast of the campaign activities, the stance taken on certain policy issues, and any news related to the elections (Udanor *et al.*, 2016).

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria witnessed a surge in political discourse on social media platforms. Twitter emerged as a significant platform for political conversations, with hashtags related to the elections trending regularly. The use of hashtags allowed citizens to rally around specific issues, express their opinions, and mobilize collective action (Michael, 2023). Moreover, The media is known for its critical evaluation of issues such as: The Twitter ban to help the public understand concepts associated with news events (Essien *et al.*, 2022). Framing of news story in the online newspapers are influenced by different factors arising from news angle that arouse reader's interest, economic motive of the reporter and competitive media debacle and it is commonly used in terms of the frame the news or media place on the information they convey (Adelakun & Hamed, 2016). Nonetheless, social media served as a valuable space for citizens to voice their concerns, engage in political debates, and hold political leaders accountable (Udanor *et al.*, 2016). The influence of social media on the 2023 general elections in Nigeria extended beyond voter engagement and political discourse. It also played a crucial role in election monitoring, transparency, and accountability (Michael, 2023). By sharing information in real-time, social media helped expose instances of voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, and other electoral irregularities. Social media acted as a watchdog, enhancing accountability and ensuring the democratic process remained intact (Abubakar, 2012). Furthermore, the social media outlet became an avenue through which people became informants and sources of news that the regular media houses failed to report. Such reporting influenced public awareness of local concerns, gave voice to the voices of the powerless, and, in general, contributed to the advancement of a more democratic society.

¹ University of Cross River State, Nigeria

² Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Nigeria

* Corresponding author's email: etidookon26@gmail.com

The diversity of the Nigerian audience, the fragmentation of the media market, and issues of availability and diversity are some of its characteristics. Understanding how social media impacted the electoral process would explain if and how the digital platforms closed these gaps and encouraged participation. It would also offer insights into how to deal with problems related to the sharing of fake news and other extremism-related content on social media platforms (Ceron *et al.*, 2014). From a broader viewpoint, we can compare the dynamics of social media during elections to the proactive use of exclusion and regulating elements of power, such as deportations, which western countries commonly employ to demonstrate their governing authority, and various forms of traditional exile within the modern United Nations, as noted by Essien *et al.* (2024). Therefore, the objective of this research was to enhance our understanding of Nigeria's political culture, enabling informed decision-making and the adoption of appropriate policies and media literacy programmes that aim to bolster the country's democratic strengths. Therefore, research on how social media affects the 2023 general elections in Nigeria will aid academic knowledge and offer practical insights on the politics of the digital society, enhancing the political process and people's participation.

Statement of Problem

The 2023 Nigerian General Elections, which were further divided into the presidency and federal chambers as well as the gubernatorial and state chambers, were scheduled to be held in February and March, respectively, and given the influence of social media, the latter was expected to play some level of role in directing opinion and voters. While social media serves as a communication tool to enhance democratic participation and political communication, it also presents challenges and risks, including fake news, hate speech, propaganda, and other forms of speech that disrupt democratic communication (Udanor *et al.*, 2016). The following paper demonstrates that fake news on social networks is dangerous for voters and has a variety of effects on the election.

Social media platforms' algorithms can create social bubbles, displaying only content that users deem valid, leading to a biased assessment of the political situation. In many countries, the spreading of propaganda and other negative content by some personalities on social media, especially during electoral activities, has become a major concern. One major issue in this category is that individuals often carry out such actions without physical contact, and they can easily use a fake ID with fraudulent details. Furthermore, the use of hate speech and biased language during campaigns has exacerbated the situation, creating a sense of segregation in voter access. Based on the problems highlighted in the above sections, the study seeks to conduct an overall assessment of the use of certain chosen social media platforms in the recently conducted Nigerian General Election of 2023.

Aims/Objectives of the Study

This study will be guided by the following objectives;

1. To analyze the impact of social media on the electorate's decision-making during the general elections in 2023.
2. To assess the challenges associated with the social media and its effects on the electorates during the 2023 general elections.
3. To recommend the strategies necessary to be adopted towards a more effective utilization of the social media for elections.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Social Media

The emergence and widespread adoption of social media platforms have revolutionized the way we communicate, share information, and interact with others. Social media refers to online platforms and applications that enable users to create, share, and exchange content in virtual communities or networks. The concept of social media dates back to the early days of the internet, but its evolution gained momentum with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies (Lewis, 2015). Web 2.0 facilitated user-generated content, interactivity, and collaboration, leading to the birth of platforms like Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook. These platforms paved the way for present-day social media networks and applications.

Since then, social networking sites have experienced rapid growth, with the frequent introduction of new sites. Some of the current and popular social media platforms include Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, LinkedIn, and YouTube, among others. Social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook have played the role of rallying people, informing the public on social causes, and enabling them to form a common front. Therefore, hashtags and virality campaigns have become effective tools for advocating for social justice and challenging institutional injustices (Michael, 2023).

Each platform offers unique features and caters to different user needs, resulting in a highly interconnected digital ecosystem (Limsopatham & Collier, 2016). Users of social media platforms can easily share thoughts, ideas, and experiences with a global audience, facilitating collaboration and knowledge exchange on an unprecedented scale (Udanor *et al.*, 2016). Mass media framing evolved as well, focusing attention on certain events and placing them within a field of meaning (Essien *et al.*, 2022).

Social media has become a crucial source of news and information for millions of people worldwide. Traditional media channels are no longer the sole gatekeepers of information. However, the unchecked spread of misinformation and fake news poses challenges, highlighting the need for media literacy and fact-checking mechanisms (Lewis, 2015). The idea behind social media platforms is to revamp the marketing and business promotion structures. As much as deportation and exile are different from each other, the impact of social

media platforms differs from each other on political participation, debate, and democracy (Essien *et al.*, 2024). They provide business people with an opportunity to make cheap appeals to the target market. Therefore, by advertising to specific niche audiences through the internet and recruiting influencers to promote specific brands, firms are able to increase their market base and boost sales (Enli, 2017). Pointing out the positives and negatives of social media is crucial, especially given its current association with potential negative effects on mental health. Research has also proven that the overuse of social media leads to adverse psychological repercussions in the sense of depression, anxiety, and poor self-esteem (Chen & Wang, 2021). The use of many platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, has assisted in organizing the community, providing information on socially relevant issues, and organizing collective actions. Social media activists are now using hashtags and viral campaigns to push for social reforms and check accountability within institutions. (Michael, 2023)

Social Media and Political Campaigns

The interference of social networking sites in the political system has dramatically changed the direction of most campaigns in the majority of countries across the globe, including Nigeria. According to Essien (2024), cartoon journalism and comic journalism as part of information dissemination in the media have received much attention, especially in Nigeria. This also applies to the growing popularity of social media journalism. According to Inyang *et al.* (2021), social media plays a crucial role in political campaigns in Nigeria, where residents use it to express their political activities, including electoral voting. This aligns with the findings of Inyang and Edem (2020), who assert that social media fosters interaction that generates new and evolving ideas, imagery, trends, and distinctiveness, all of which possess potency and are easily mobilized and demobilized. Political parties and candidates have recognised major social networks as valuable assets in recent Nigerian elections. They have used these forums to reach out to the voters, spread campaign information or information about their stands, or even converse on politics (Asemah & Edegoh, 2012). However, its disadvantages include the problem of fake news spreading, cases of misinformation, and hate speeches (Udanor *et al.*, 2016).

There are some strategies that political actors in Nigeria have adopted to improve the outcomes of their leveraged social media campaigns. It entails the use of texts, images, videos, memes, and so on in activities such as parties and candidate campaigns. They also use several strategies, such as live streaming of events, the hosting of Twitter chats, and the use of influencers, to help them reach their target group (Apuke & Tunca, 2018). The effectiveness of the social network campaign in influencing voter turnout is noteworthy. Direct communication between the political actors and the voters is possible through social media platforms, where an immediate response

is made possible (Okoro, 2017). However, social media also enables citizens to express their opinions, thereby fostering political discussions and encouraging active involvement in society.

However, social media campaigns are not without glitches that result from constant and dynamic change. Another issue is fake news, which has adverse effects on the environment since it misinforms the people and is disastrous for democracy (Udanor *et al.*, 2016). Social media filtering, which produces echo chambers and bubbles, only serves to exacerbate political division by providing only certain types of information to individuals with a fixed set of beliefs. Moreover, the role of social media in shaping voters' choices and decisions is ambiguous; therefore, it is challenging to determine how online campaigning corresponds to offline activation, like voting.

The Nigerian Electoral System

Elections that took place between 1999 and 2023 remain an important factor in Nigerian democracy. This period was characterised by political liberalisation, whereby Nigeria adopted democracy after a long period of military rule. (Uzedhe & Okhaifoh, 2016). During this period, Nigeria held general elections that featured a complete multiparty system. Different political parties have emerged at various times and have each fulfilled an ideological and regional need. As we speak today, the most influential parties include the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the Labour Party (LP), and the All-Progressives Congress (APC).

Nigeria is no exception to the worrisome trend of electoral violence and insecurity that reared its ugly head during the 2023 general elections. Various regions of the country experienced unrest due to political rivalry, ethnic tension, and social and economic factors (Udanor *et al.*, 2016). Evidence of violence, including voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, and confrontations between supporters and hoodlums, undermined the credibility and fairness of the electoral processes. Voter suppression and irregularities were another major issue of concern for a majority of the citizens. Some aspects, such as disqualifications to vote, voting more than once, and alteration of results, were causes for concern regarding the electoral system. Some of these were due to the following reasons: the absence of transparency, poor logistics, and generally poor institutional structures (Lawal, 2015).

There is no doubt that money and corruption played roles in the Nigerian elections. Campaign expenses and the allocation of funds to secure political seats generate their own funding. This trend undermines the principles of fair competition and equal representation, limiting the opportunities for citizens to elect leaders based on merit. Despite Nigeria's youthful population, the representation and participation of young people in politics remained relatively low during this period. Limited access to resources, political structures dominated by older

politicians, and a lack of youth-oriented policies and platforms hindered meaningful youth engagement (Animashaun, 2010). However, there were growing calls for greater youth involvement, recognizing their potential as agents of change.

To enhance the credibility of Nigeria's general elections, there is a need to strengthen electoral institutions. Building capable and independent bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is crucial. Adequate funding, professional training, and transparent appointment processes are essential to ensure their effectiveness and impartiality. (Michael, 2023)

Impact of the Social Media on the 2023 Nigerian General Election

The 2023 General Elections in Nigeria marked a significant turning point in the role of social media in political campaigns. With the proliferation of social media platforms, political parties and candidates recognized the power of these digital spaces in influencing public opinion, mobilizing voters, and shaping the political landscape (Nabiebu, 2022). In the 2023 elections in Nigeria, the use of social media helped reach out to the masses and influence the voters. With millions of Nigerians using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, candidates and political parties have consistently utilized these sites to connect with potential voters. It facilitated the direct exchange of campaign messages, current information, and participation in political dialogue. Social media platforms provided a common platform for people to share their ideas, worries, and dreams about their nation, thereby creating the kind of participation and interaction that were associated with citizenship (Adebayo *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, with the use of social media, political actors could address specific groups of voters using such data tools to entice the audience with their messages. Among the campaigns' unique features, it is possible to highlight the involvement of influencers and popular online figures in promoting campaign slogans. The targeted audience's awareness levels increased, thus making opinion leaders with thousands of followers play crucial roles in the campaign, as their support meant a lot to them. This made it possible for the political players to reach a wider population and gain the required trust and approval by pulling personalities from social media platforms (Nwafor *et al.*, 2023).

As a result, social media democracy contributed to the encouragement of political discussion during the 2023 Nigerian general elections. The audience could engage in debates over important socio-political issues, chiefly in real-time. The hashtags were considered crucial for organising discussions within specific topic areas and promoting specific narratives (Kolade *et al.*, 2023). At the same time, it is necessary to emphasise that social media also played a role in the rise of fake news, scandals, and hate speeches. People could spread fake news and rumours with relative ease, which only amplified the

division of political opinions. In a synchronous study, Olabanjo *et al.* (2023) noted that social media was very essential and active during the 2023 Nigerian election but had some drawbacks and limitations.

Moreover, even though the social media influence on the voters' behaviours and decisions is still unclear, the role of social media campaigns in offline activities like voting rates is still questionable (Bello & Kaufhold, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This study amalgamated agenda-setting theory and mass media framing theory.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Specifically, the dynamics of the interaction between social media users contribute to the formation of opinions based on the agenda setting, according to which mass media, including social networks, can orient people to certain topics and indicate what issues should attract attention. During the Nigerian election process, social media has played a crucial role. Politicians have used social media as a tool for dialogue, rallying people to vote, and determining those elections. Initially, social media platforms have offered opportunities for the interaction of politicians and citizens (Kolade *et al.*, 2023). People in Nigeria have accused conventional media of being partial or of concealing important information and opinions from the public sphere. While social media has become a platform for expression, news sharing, and political commentary, citizens have gained the freedom to access information easily. It has given people and small groups a voice through which they can contest political discourse and disrupt dominant media messages (Michael, 2021). Nevertheless, through social media, political campaigns have been able to spread their messages to more people. Additionally, political parties and candidates have embraced social media sites, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, to pass their messages, post their agendas, and address the electorate. (Olabanjo *et al.*, 2023) However, it's important to note that social media's reach may be biased towards urban dwellers and the educated, potentially widening the existing gap in political participation due to socio-economic and educational differences. In Nigeria, fake news and propaganda on social media have led to ethnic clashes and riots, compromising the credibility of the election. This is why media literacy, fact-checking, and online safety campaigns are critical in preventing the spread of fake news and ensuring the proper use of social media during election time. Furthermore, voters have used social media to rally and encourage political action (Kohnert, 2023). Social media has also aided marginalized and oppressed groups, especially youth and women, in voicing their concerns and advocating for their votes. However, it's important to note that not all online participation translates into offline participation, so the changes brought about by online activism and digital mobilization may not necessarily reflect in the actual election outcomes.

Framing Theory

The framing theory posits that media, particularly social media, plays a crucial role in shaping how people perceive and represent events, particularly in relation to their primary features. As a result, social media has played an important role in shaping Nigerians' perceptions of electoral exercises, political campaigns, and election outputs over the years, primarily through the manipulation of political narratives in the nation (Udanor *et al.*, 2016). Unlike traditional newspapers, magazines, or news channels that can only cover a story for a limited time or within a few pages, websites like Twitter or Facebook allow individuals, citizen journalists, and other breaking news sources to express their perspectives and interpretations. This has led to a multiplicity of opinions, allowing citizens to receive more information and reason more deeply about political issues. However, the disadvantage is that social media only shares news items that fit the people's opinions and camps, thus extending polarisation and fortifying partisanship (Ogbu, 2023). Specifically, the reflections show that social media has played a role in the agenda setting and/or issue framing of Nigeria's elections. For instance, political parties, candidates, and interest groups may utilise a social media site to set an agenda through the active sharing of posts or comments that create awareness and frame issues in a certain way (Lewis, 2015). For example, they may focus on anti-corruption, security, or longer-term economic development problems and indicate what the audience and mainstream media should talk about regarding these matters.

Furthermore, Fourchard and Sikiru (2023) found that social media has been quite helpful in the formation and coordination of political activities such as agitation during elections in Nigeria. They would also use slogans, taglines, and other online trends to rally support, raise awareness, and plan political activities. Social media sites include the internet platform, which has enabled easy sharing of information through citizen activism, resource sharing, and advocacy. This has been especially beneficial to the vulnerable groups that may have little to no access to mainstream media outlets and limited opportunities to engage (Michael, 2021). During the Nigerian election, social media was inundated with falsehoods and fake news. Fake news, rumors, and images circulate quickly on social media, potentially shaping voter perceptions (Akindipe, 2023). This poses a significant threat to any election, as it undermines the impartiality of the electoral process and the choices made by citizens.

Regarding the problem of misinformation, one has to acknowledge the need for joint work between social media services, fact-checking agencies, and end-users, inculcating the principles of media literacy, critical thinking skills, and information responsibility.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The survey research method, which involves the administration of questionnaires to selected respondents in Calabar Metropolis, was adopted in this study.

Area of Study

The Calabar metropolis, which is the capital of Cross River State in Nigeria, served as the study area. Originally, it was called Akwa Akpa in the Efik language. The process of globalisation started taking its course around the mid-20th century, and the process really accelerated in the second half of the 20th century. From the Cross River estuaries region, the city is near the Calabar River, Great Kwa River, and Cross River creeks. People generally refer to it as the tourism hub of Nigeria, especially when one considers the judicious measures endorsed by Donald Duke, the governor of Cross River State between 1999 and 2007, to make Calabar the cleanest and most environmentally sustainable city in Nigeria. The Calabar Municipal and Calabar South Local Government Councils comprise the administrative aspect of the city of Calabar. Its area is 406 square kilometres (157 sq mi).

Population of Study

The population is made up of Calabar Metropolis residents. According to Kooffreh *et al.* (2021), the population for the study is roughly 631,000 people living in the Calabar Metropolis based on the 2022 predicted demographic figures.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size for the questionnaire will be obtained using the Taro-Yamane (1967) formula to extract a minimum sample size. The formula states thus;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = sample size

N = Population under study

e = the margin error and is usually 0.10, 0.05 or 0.01

1 = Constant

thus;

$$N = 631,000$$

$$e = 0.005$$

$$n = \frac{631,000}{1 + 631,000(0.005)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{631,000}{1 + 631,000 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{631,000}{1 + 1577.5}$$

$$n = \frac{631,000}{1578.5}$$

$$n = 399.7 \text{ approximately } 400$$

Therefore, the sample size for this study is four hundred (400) respondents.

Convenience sampling and the purposive sampling techniques were used in this study.

Instrument of Data Collection

The instrument of data collection employed was a fifteen (15) item structured questionnaire. The form of questionnaire used was the close ended format and the total numbers of one hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires were administered. The items therein were constituted according to the design of the research questions. The questionnaire comprised of two sections. Section A consist of the respondents personal data such as; Age, gender, occupation, etc while the section B & C consist of the items the respondents were required to respond to.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

To obtain validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to critical analysis, and editing by the supervisor for approval.

To obtain Reliability of the instrument, a few copies of the questionnaire were administered to selected respondents who are not actual respondents in the study.

Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents by disseminating them throughout several locations within the local government region, thereby eliciting the perspectives of the participants. The administration of the questionnaires took a duration of approximately four (4) working days.

Method of Data Analysis

For the study, tables and simple percentage were used analyzing the responses emanating from the questionnaire. The table displayed the number of occurrences of each subject matter statistically, while simple percentage helped to indicate the frequency of each subject matter on the table. The percentage was connoted using the “%”. Balanced enough, the percentage was mathematically calculated or assumed using the ratio of one hundred (100%)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A total number of 400 copies of questionnaire were administered to respondents and a total number of 396 copies were retrieved. The analysis is therefore based on the 396 copies successfully retrieved.

Table 1: Frequency of distribution showing gender of respondents

Gender	Number of respondents	Percentage(%)
Male	224	57
Female	172	43
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the above, 224 respondents representing 57% of the study population comprised of male, while 172 respondents representing 43% of the study population comprised of female. The sample population showed the males were more than females in number.

Table 2: Frequency of distribution showing marital status of respondents

Marital status	Number of respondents	Percentage(%)
Single	242	61
Married	146	37
Separated	8	2
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

The above showed that 61% of respondents were single and 37% of respondents were married. While 2% was separated.

Table 3: Frequency distribution showing religion of respondents

Religion	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Christianity	340	86
Muslim	56	14
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the table, 340 respondents representing 86% were Christians while 56 respondents representing 14% were Muslims.

Table 4: Frequency distribution showing the age of respondents

Age	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
21-30yrs	132	33
31-40yrs	198	50
Above 50yrs	66	17
Total	306	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the above table, 33% of respondents fell within the age of 21-30yeras while 50% of respondents fell within the age of 31-40, also, 17% of respondents fell are above 50 years. However, it indicated that respondents within the age of 31-40 are more in number.

Table 5: Frequency distribution shoeing the educational qualification of respondents

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
FSLC/WASSCE	62	16
HND/BSC	246	62
MSC/PHD	88	22
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the table,16% of respondents have a FSLC/ WASSCE, 62% HND/ BSC, 22% have obtained a MSC/ PHD.

(Section B)

From the table 6, 71% of respondents strongly agree social media played a significant role in influencing their electoral decision during the 2023 general elections, 27% agree and 2% are neutral.

Table 6: Response to whether social media played a significant role in influencing respondents' electoral decision during the 2023 general elections

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	282	71
Agree	106	27
Neutral	8	2
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 7: Response to whether respondents believe politicians effectively utilized social media platforms to persuade voters during the 2023 general elections

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	256	65
Agree	124	31
Neutral	0	0
Disagree	16	4
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the table 7, 65% of respondents strongly agree to believe politicians effectively utilized social media platforms to persuade voters during the 2023 general elections, 31% agree while, 4% disagree.

Table 8: Response to if social media content during the 2023 general elections influenced respondent's perception of political candidates and parties

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	164	41
Agree	98	25
Neutral	32	8
Disagree	86	22
Strongly disagree	16	4
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the above table 8, 41% of the respondents strongly agree social media content during the 2023 general elections influenced their perception of political candidates and parties, 25% agree, 8% neutral, 22% disagree and 4 % strongly disagree.

From the table 9, 45% of respondents strongly disagree to trust the information shared on social media platforms regarding the 2023 general elections, 20% disagree, 10% neutral, 9% agree and 16% strongly agree.

Table 9: Response to whether respondents trust the information shared on social media platforms regarding the 2023 general elections

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	64	16
Agree	36	9
Neutral	40	10
Disagree	78	20
Strongly disagree	178	45
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 10: Response to the persuasion tactics used on social media during the 2023 general elections influenced the voting behavior of the electorates

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	228	58
Agree	84	21
Neutral	32	8
Disagree	52	13
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the table 10, 58% of respondents strongly agree the persuasion tactics used on social media during the 2023 general elections influenced the voting behavior of the electorates, 21% agree, 8% neutral, and 13% disagree.

Table 11: Response to the use of social media during the 2023 general elections strongly influences the opinions and beliefs of the electorates

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	262	66
Agree	98	25
Neutral	0	0
Disagree	36	9
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the table 11, 66 % of respondents strongly agree to the use of social media during the 2023 general elections strongly influences the opinions and beliefs of the electorates, 25% agreed and 9% were neutral.

From the table 12, 20% of respondents strongly disagree that social media platforms provide an accurate representation of the political landscape during the 2023 general elections, 36% disagreed, 14% agreed, 18% strongly agreed, and 12% were neutral.

Table 12: Response to social media platforms provide an accurate representation of the political landscape during the 2023 general elections

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	72	18
Agree	54	14
Neutral	48	12
Disagree	142	36
Strongly disagree	80	20
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 13: Response to the information shared on social media during the 2023 general elections affects the voting decisions of the electorates

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	248	63
Agree	108	27
Neutral	0	0
Disagree	40	10
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the table 13, 63% of respondents strongly agree that the information shared on social media during the 2023 general elections affects the voting decisions of the electorates, 27% agree, and 10% disagree.

Table 14: Response to social media platforms have a significant impact on the dissemination of fake news and misinformation during the 2023 general elections

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	186	47
Agree	114	29
Neutral	20	5
Disagree	76	19
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the table 14, 47 % of the respondents strongly agree that social media platforms have a significant impact on the dissemination of fake news and misinformation during the 2023 general elections, 29% agree, 19% disagree, and 5% were neutral.

From the table 15, 71% of respondents strongly agree that utilizing social media platforms can effectively influence voters' political decisions during elections, 24% agree and 5% were neutral.

Table 15: Response to what extent do respondents believe that utilizing social media platforms can effectively influence voters' political decisions during elections

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	280	71
Agree	96	24
Neutral	20	5
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 16: Response to the imposition of sanction and controls on the creation of social media contents will lead to a more effective utilization of the social media for elections

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	304	77
Agree	92	23
Neutral	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	396	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

From the table 16, 77% of respondents strongly agree that the imposition of sanction and controls on the creation of social media contents will lead to a more effective utilization of the social media for elections and 23%. Agree.

Discussion

Research Question One: What Was the Role Played by the Social Media in the Persuasion of the Electorates During the 2023 General Elections?

Table 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 8 in section B give an explicit answer to the above question. Politics, as one of the fields, was one of those that had to take into account this, the so-called new media. Given that people use social media sites to store political information for decision-making, political parties needed to expand their electoral strategies to these platforms (Broersma and Graham 2012). This decision came to attract new voters by convincing those who seek information online with their philosophies and not to push away potential voters with the adjacency of fake news that emerges during an electoral period (Anstead and O'Loughlin, 2015). Both with and without a clear political orientation, the decision acknowledges that users need and can use this influence to engage in discussions and news exposure in new media (Lee 2016). The literature also identifies social media as the most suitable platform for political influence since its

features encourage individuals to engage in political communication and interaction with other users (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012). Social media is now easier to use for campaigns, and it is most suitable for reaching out to Nigerians, especially youths. Many individuals had a better understanding of the new electoral act even before the election. Each candidate, from the presidential level down, relied on social media. It was also revealed that their followers on social media channels such as Twitter and Instagram increased by a factor of two. Twitter adopted a strategy where politicians use the platform to announce their next course of action before issuing a press release and speaking to the public. During this period, social networks posted various types of information, forming a large community in their own right. It ensured people avoided incorrect attitudes, informed individuals from other regions of each candidate's personality, and fostered major trends that were important for users to follow.

According to Pattie and Johnson (2000) "Those who talk together, vote together". They used this to describe how interpersonal political communication can influence who people vote for. Information about an election will encourage citizens to participate and cast their votes. The influence of communication on voters' choice usually takes place in the form of in-direct effects. For example, agenda setting, framing effects and knowledge gains. A direct and persuasive influence is relatively rare and mostly short-lived. However, this might change as the proportion of undecided voters continue to increase in number in many countries of the world. According to Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944), communication from three sources may likely change political behavior. The characteristics of social media allow for fast reactions, building communities of supporters while forcing their agenda into the national agenda (Kreiss, 2012; Stromer-Galley, 2014). These are critical to the campaigns' communication frameworks.

Research Question Two: What Are the Challenges Associated with the Social Media and its Effects on the Electorates During the 2023 General Elections?

Insight from tables 4, 7, and 9 sheds light on the answer to the above question. Studies have shown that political campaigns use social media with the intention of gaining an advantage and promoting a "manage media" environment that enables conversations that are beneficial to the campaigns but do not truly engage the citizens (Stromer-Galley, 2014).

Through the help of social networking technologies, free agents with similar objectives become interconnected, communicate, exchange ideas, and collaborate online. However, despite the numerous advantages of social media in promoting politics, democracy, and good governance in Nigeria, it also has its demerits. Asemah *et al.* (2023) have proposed the following recommendations to enhance the resilience of democracy in the current turbulent world. As a result, there is a need to address increased privacy, monitoring, and regulation as the

adoption of social media and other online tools continues to rise (Ekwe *et al.*, 2011; Ajayi & Adesote, 2015). For example, scandals such as a vulgar dance video or a sexually provocative photo can quickly spread in a political campaign or career and sentence it to an early death (Nwaoboli *et al.*, 2022). The ability to conceal the identity of sources poses a challenge to strict regulation, monitoring, and prosecution of illicit acts. This makes it a very sensitive tool for sustaining fraudulent practices in the organization. It also promotes piracy. This is partly due to the difficulty in defining and regulating copyright and intellectual property issues online. Additionally, the distortion of photos and voices significantly reduces the likelihood of revealing genuine truth and reality. Social media consumes a lot of time and has a bad influence on work-life balance. With new technologies, users get more than they bargain for because of information overload and social network overload. (Asemah *et al.*, 2023)

Research Question Three: What Are the Strategies Necessary to be Adopted Towards a More Effective Utilization of the Social Media for Elections?

From table 10, 71% of respondents strongly agree that social media platforms can effectively influence voters' political decisions during elections, 24% agree and 5% of respondent's neutral.

In the same vein, table 11, 77% of respondents strongly agree that the imposition of sanction and controls on the creation of social media contents will lead to a more effective utilization of the social media for election, and 23% agree.

Every political party in Nigeria is harnessing social media to campaign and advance plans, messages, and manifestos to supporters, including advertising, mobilising and organising in all the states of the federation, and even fundraising (Nwaoboli, 2023b). Voters use Facebook, YouTube, and especially Twitter to understand each party's or candidate's stance on crucial national issues, from security to power. Therefore, the campaigns for the 2023 elections have leveraged social media to an even greater extent than their use in the 2011, 2015, and 2019 general elections (Nwaoboli & Ajibulu, 2023). It has become sufficient to influence voters' decisions and choices, as some voters who were unsure about who to vote for started to change their minds and consciences about voting for a particular party or candidate based on certain information or ideas they found online about the party or candidate.

CONCLUSION

With the world so engrossed in all things digital, voters are unsure of how to create a platform that encourages genuine human interaction while simultaneously mobilizing the media. Such activities shape voters' perceptions of their fellow voters and the candidates involved in the process. This study assessed the challenges associated with the social media and its effects on the electorates during the 2023 general elections and revealed

that social media political campaign plays a vital role in the persuasion of the electorates during the 2023 general elections. Social media political campaigns are high and the use of social media platforms, especially Twitter, as a major medium for political/electioneering engagements is very effective.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on this knowledge, together with a strong will to guarantee confirmatory evidence on this study, especially in relation to obtaining a higher degree of assurance for probably future generalising needs, the following suggestions were made:

1. For Nigeria's growth, the federal government should improve its policies and invest in information and communication technology (ICT). Since more Nigerian young people are connecting to the internet on a daily basis, it is critical to ensure that the information flow across the internet is consistent, or rather free.
2. Political parties, legislators, government agencies, and ministries should embrace social media in spreading information and passing on knowledge to young people, especially through social media platforms, since it is believed that the majority of youths in Nigeria trust political news on social media platforms and regard it as real.
3. The government should cease its unnecessary meddling in the media, particularly social media.
4. Since many people will take everything they encounter on social media as gospel truth, the National Information and Technology Development Agency's government should regulate what appears online. This is because we cannot reward the effects of false or misleading knowledge.

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