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Social Media and Politics in Nigeria: A Review

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between social media and politics in Nigeria through a review of existing empirical and conceptual literature. The study explores how social media platforms have transformed political communication, political participation, voter mobilization, democratic engagement, and electoral processes in Nigeria. The paper specifically investigates the positive and negative impacts of social media on political awareness, political campaigns, voter behavior, and democratic accountability. The study adopts a qualitative review methodology based on secondary data. Relevant information was gathered from books, journal articles, conference papers, and online scholarly materials relating to social media and political activities in Nigeria and other democratic societies. Data collected from the literature were subjected to data reduction, interpretation, and thematic analysis to identify major trends and patterns regarding the influence of social media on politics. Findings from the review reveal that social media has become a significant instrument for political communication, civic engagement, voter education, political mobilization, and election monitoring in Nigeria. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and WhatsApp, have enhanced citizens' access to political information and strengthened interaction between political actors and the electorate. The study also finds that social media contributes to transparency and accountability during elections by enabling real-time reporting of electoral activities. However, the review further shows that the misuse of social media through misinformation, fake news, propaganda, political polarization, and hate speech poses serious challenges to democratic stability and electoral integrity. The study concludes that although social media has significantly improved democratic participation and political engagement in Nigeria, its unregulated nature creates opportunities for manipulation and social conflict. The paper therefore recommends aggressive digital literacy campaigns,

stronger fact-checking mechanisms, and appropriate regulatory frameworks to promote responsible use of social media and protect democratic processes in Nigeria.

Keywords: Social Media; Politics; Political Participation; Democracy; Electoral Process; Nigeria; Political Communication.

Introduction

Social media has emerged as one of the most influential communication tools in contemporary society, transforming the way individuals, organizations, and governments interact. Beyond personal communication, social media now plays significant roles in commerce, education, diplomacy, governance, activism, and politics. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp and Instagram have become major channels for information dissemination, political mobilization, public engagement, and opinion formation. According to Kapoor et al. (2017), social media touches virtually every aspect of human personal and professional life. The rapid expansion of mobile technology and internet accessibility has further increased the use of social media as a primary source of information and interaction among citizens (Cabalza, 2022).

In democratic societies, politics revolves around communication, influence, participation, and public opinion, all of which are strongly affected by social media. Political actors increasingly rely on social media platforms to campaign, mobilize supporters, shape political narratives, and engage directly with citizens. Social media has therefore become an important instrument for political participation, voter education, political awareness, and electoral engagement. In Nigeria, the relevance of social media in politics has grown remarkably, particularly during recent electoral processes where citizens, political parties, candidates, civil society organizations, and electoral observers actively utilized digital platforms to exchange information and monitor political activities.

Despite these advantages, the growing influence of social media in Nigerian politics has also generated serious concerns. The spread of fake news, misinformation, propaganda, hate speech, political manipulation, and online polarization has raised questions about the overall impact of social media on democratic stability and electoral integrity. While some studies argue that social media enhances transparency, accountability, and civic participation, others contend that it contributes to political tension, misinformation, voter manipulation, and social conflict. Consequently, there remains no universal consensus regarding the overall implications of social media on politics, especially within developing democracies such as Nigeria.

Although several empirical studies have examined different dimensions of social media and politics, many of these studies focus on specific elections, regions, or isolated political events. There is therefore a need for a comprehensive review that synthesizes existing literature and provides a broader understanding of how social media

influences political processes in Nigeria. This gap forms the central problem of this study.

The aim of this study is to critically examine the relationship between social media and politics in Nigeria through a review of existing literature. Specifically, the study seeks to explore the role of social media in political communication, political participation, voter mobilization, democratic engagement, and electoral processes, while also identifying the challenges associated with its use in Nigerian politics. By reviewing and synthesizing existing scholarly works, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the opportunities and threats social media presents to democratic governance in Nigeria.

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Materials and Methodology

Data was collected through the review of existing empirical studies and conceptual exploration of literature. In essence, secondary data was engaged and interrogated for this research. Books were sourced mainly from libraries and the internet, thoroughly reviewed for relevant information. Information extracted went through data reduction, interpretation and conclusion. At the initial phase of data reduction, information was gathered and compiled from various literature sources. Subsequently, the collected data is filtered and analyzed to identify information relevant to the research. This process aims to simplify data complexity and emphasize crucial elements. The subsequent stage involves the systematic and clear presentation of the identified and reduced data. This information can be organized in the form of a narrative summary tailored to the research requirements, ensuring comprehensive understanding by the reader. The final stage entails drawing conclusions, wherein the researcher synthesizes findings based on the conducted data analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The impact of social media on politics can be understood through several theoretical lenses. The Agenda-Setting Theory explains how media platforms influence which political issues gain prominence (McCombs *et al.,* 1972), while the Uses and Gratifications Theory highlights that individuals engage with social media for purposes such as information and interaction (Katz *et al.,* 1973). Furthermore, Social Influence Theory emphasizes the role of communication in shaping voter opinions (Katz *et al.,* 1955). Selective Exposure Theory suggests that users tend to consume information that aligns with their beliefs, thereby reinforcing existing views (Stroud, 2008). In addition, the Two-Step Flow Theory explains how opinion leaders and influencers mediate political messages to the public (Katz *et al.,* 1955). Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how social media affects politics.

Conceptualizing Social Media

Social media is an amalgam of internet-based platforms and channels that enable communication among people. Social Media comprises of websites which allow profile creation and visibility of relationships between users (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). They are web-based applications which provide functionality for sharing, relationships, group, conversation and profiles (Kietzmann *et al.,* 2011). It is a set of information technologies which facilitate

interactions and networking (Kapoor et al., 2017; Oestreicher-Singer and Zalmanson, 2013). Social media, such as Facebook, X formerly known as Twitter, and LinkedIn, provide people with a pervasive network connectivity (Asur and Huberman, 2010). At the core of social media are internet, mobility, transparency, sharing and integration (Maxim, Sims and Yang, 2012). Kietzmann et al. (2011) identified certain foundations upon which social media operates which they refer to as the seven functional building blocks of Social Media which are present to greater or lesser extent in any social media application and which can be substituted and enhanced through integration of several applications. They include identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, groups and reputation.

Identity here refers to the representation of the user in the virtual world which could be as descriptive and personal or could be as vague as an imaginary pseudonym. Conversations allow users to interact with each other in a broadcast or dialogue manner synchronously in real time or asynchronously with time lapse between statements. Sharing refers to activities through which existing content is spread and or possibly enhanced through the social graph. Hereby the social connections might not be necessary be made explicit, for example publicly sharing on Facebook or posting on Twitter does not rely on existing connections: on the contrary in the example of Twitter "sharing" often precedes connections expressed through "following". Presence allows users to know where other community members are whether on/off-line and actual/virtual location. Relationships allows community members to visualize their networks in many ways ranging from "likes" and "followers-followed" to virtual representation of real-life relationships. These social-graph abstractions can be uni- and bi-directional and allow strong and weak ties. For example, "following" on Twitter is not necessarily reciprocal, whereas a connection on LinkedIn requires both parties to accept the connection and both to indicate the nature of their relationship (e.g. colleagues). Groups refers both to membership groups where users can articulate their affiliations with, or interest in, a specific subject and groups utilized by users to manage their relationships. Reputation allows users to qualify the content provided by another user and establish trust-levels between community members. These trust-levels can be made explicit, for example through a scoring or ranking system (LinkedIn "influencer" status, StackOverflow points system), or remain implicit (X number of followers).

Many of the platforms provide users with the ability to integrate other applications. Through the integration of two or more platforms the building blocks, the affordances of one system can be greatly enhanced, but also jeopardised. For example, by enabling the integration of X and Facebook whereby a "tweet" also appears in the personal thread in Facebook, the "identity" of a (fairly anonymous) X-account becomes much more personal on Facebook. Vice versa, a Facebook post, visible inside that platform only, could reach much wider (unintended) audiences when simultaneously (and automatically) posted on X.

Boyd and Ellison (2008) posits "social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". Kane et al. (2014) extend

this definition by adding that users should also be able to create and access digital content. Kaplan and Haenlein, (2010) categorised social media into Blogs, Social Networking Sites, Collaboration Projects, Content Communities, Virtual Social Worlds, and Virtual Game Worlds.

It is through social media platforms and the reality of their functionalities that the politics is revealed. Through social media handles, reputation building and shielding, credibility projection and the enterprise of image management is displayed and deployed. For its convenience and widespread, social media has increasingly become attractive for communication in political campaign, activism, advocacy, policy legitimation and power projection.

Social Media and Democratic System

At the core of politics is influence. The functionality of social media has positioned it as a tool of influence in the theatre of politics. Political campaigns in the digital age increasingly rely on social media platforms to communicate with voters and shape public opinion. Social media provides candidates with opportunities to directly engage with citizens, mobilize supporters, and influence political discourse (Egbulefu and Nwaoboli, 2023). It also enhances political participation by allowing citizens to access information and interacts within the political space (Dungse *et al.,* 2018).

Social media has become a dominant tool for political campaigns, enabling political parties to disseminate information and engage with voters effectively (Abdillah *et al.,* 2014). It facilitates interaction between candidates and supporters and enhances political communication in contemporary society (Ghani *et al.,* 2020). Furthermore, social media contributes to political participation by providing platforms for discussion, engagement, and public accountability (Adamu and Abdullahi, 2021). Ahmad et al. (2019) also note that social media has become an important medium for political discussions and participation, reinforcing its relevance in modern democratic processes.

According to Zeng, et al. (2010) social media represents the ideal vehicle and information base to gauge public opinion on policies and political positions as well as to build community support for candidates running for public offices. The study by Carlos et al (2021) shows a number of connections between the use of social media and politics. According to Carlos et al social media provides information and serve as an efficient platform and voice for open discussion on issues produced by and surrounding politics. Carlos et al found that the use of social media is an important factor why a significant number of the people were encouraged to register and vote as new voters, though an effective tool for propaganda because of its spread if misused. Research by Sianturi (2023) and Abidin et al.,(2018) reveal social media enhances political engagement by providing fast access to information, creating spaces for debate and discussion, allow expression of opinions, and supports campaigns, activism, and community participation and foster direct interaction between candidates and voters, strengthening engagement and building closer relationships.

The use of social media also enables political campaigns to leverage data and analytics to identify key voter concerns, enabling more effective targeting of campaign messages and provide creative outlet for conveying candidates' political messages through videos, images, or engaging content. The use of social media is latent with polarization, misinformation, and social conflict (Carlos *et al.,* 2021; Neubam *et al.,* 2016) thereby confuse voters, influence their perceptions of political issues, undermine the democratization process and has the potential to trigger social conflict resulting from rude comments, insults, or threats that occur online and escalate tension and conflict in the real world. Sensitive political issues can quickly trigger confrontations between groups of people with different views, especially when fake news or provocations are spread (Susanto, 2017). However, the study by Guess Et al. (2023) found no significant effects of social media use on political polarization, political knowledge and voting behaviour. But switching to chronological feeds reduced time spent on platforms and user engagement and changed the type of content users saw, including more political and untrustworthy content. Algorithm changes affected exposure to political, uncivil, and diverse content but did not drastically reshape users' overall information environment. This challenges the assumption that algorithms strongly influence political attitudes, suggesting their effects are more limited than widely believed. Social media algorithms shape content exposure and engagement but have minimal impact on core political attitudes and real-world political behaviour.

Social media provides a platform where individuals with the same political views can be trapped in an echo chamber, exposed only to opinions and information that confirm their own views (Dwiyanti *et al.,* 2023). This can reinforce divisions in society and hinder healthy dialogue between different political views. According to Syafii et al., (2023) social media has emerged as a platform where people express concerns, organize themselves, and actively participate in dialogues of significance. Through political involvement and activism in the virtual realm, a substantial impact is observed in the political policy making process. Similar research by Polii et al. (2020) found that social media influences millennials and gen z, especially in recognizing the profiles of political candidates. The study by Mustika (2019) found social media use has increased political awareness within Indonesian society. The research by Hajad (2018) reveal that social media has enabled certain political initiatives, and effect significant political changes.

The study by Nsikak, Anietie, and Umoh (2023) found that social media significantly influences political campaigns by enhancing visibility and engagement between candidates and voters. It highlights that social media contributes to political support and voter mobilization, suggesting a link between digital campaign strategies and electoral outcomes. The study by Odon, (2024) highlights five areas connecting social media and politics. The first has to do with the use of social media to influence on voter behaviour. Odon asserts, social media plays a crucial role in shaping voter behavior by influencing perceptions and decision-making processes (Bimber, 2014). The study by Bond et al. (2012) also showed peer influence within social networks significantly affects voting decisions, as individuals are often influenced by friends and online communities. Research by Vergeer et al. (2013) reveals social

media enhances political participation, particularly among younger voters who actively engage in online discussions and activism. Digital activism empowers citizens to influence political outcomes (Bennett & Segerberg 2013). Second relates social media with political communication. Odon (2024) cited Adewunmi, (2019) who posit that social media has become an essential tool for political communication in Nigeria, enabling candidates and parties to bypass traditional media channels and communicate directly with voters. At the same time, citizens actively participate in political discourse by sharing opinions and accessing election-related information. Ogundipe et al. (2020) observe that political actors increasingly rely on these platforms to enhance their visibility and connect with a broader audience during elections.

The third has to do with social media as part of broader campaign strategies and mobilization. Odun (2024) asserts modern political campaigns in Nigeria heavily depend on social media for mobilization and outreach. According to Ogundipe et al. (2020), campaigns use targeted advertising and online engagement strategies to influence specific voter groups. Adewunmi (2019) further explains that the interactive nature of social media allows campaigns to gather real-time data and refine their messaging. This strategic use of digital tools has revolutionized how political actors mobilize support and persuade undecided voters

The fourth social media, voter engagement and participation. Social media according to Odun (2024) enhances voter engagement by providing access to information about candidates, electoral processes, and voting procedures. Similarly, Akande (2018) notes that these platforms facilitate civic education, voter registration, and election monitoring initiatives. Furthermore, they empower citizens to express their opinions, mobilize protests, and hold leaders accountable. This interactive environment fosters a sense of political inclusion and participation among Nigerian voters.

The fifth point is social media and disinformation and or misinformation. Notwithstanding the positive contributions of social media to democratic politics, if not properly handled, it could pose serious challenges due to the spread of false information. Idowu & Lawal, (2021) emphasize that fake news and propaganda can distort public perception and influence voter decisions. Tucker et al. (2018) warn that the spread of misinformation can distort voter opinions and increase political polarization. These issues threaten the integrity of elections, making it necessary for stakeholders to promote digital literacy and fact-checking mechanisms. Addressing misinformation is therefore critical to maintaining trust in the electoral process.

Social Media in Nigerian Politics

Loads of research shows that social media affects in one way or another the Nigerian political landscape. The study by Eze, Eze, Obasi and Onwo (2025) found the use of social media played an important role in Nigerian political awareness and participation in the 2023 governorship elections and the coverage of Nigeria's election through social media curtailed election rigging and fraud by exposing irregularities and promoting accountability. This is supported by the research conducted by Igbinedion et al. (2023) which shows that social media

served as a major source of political information and engagement, with high levels of interaction during the 2023 general elections. Eze, Eze, Obasi and Onwo (2025) also found that social media significantly enhances voter engagement, contributes to reducing election rigging and fraud and that platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook were identified as particularly effective tools for monitoring elections and sharing information. According to Igbinedion et al. (2023) increased exposure to political content influenced voter attitudes and preferences, especially among young voters (Akinmoju, 2023). It also improved political awareness and participation by enabling real-time updates and direct communication with institutions (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). However, the spread of misinformation and propaganda negatively affected public perception and posed risks to electoral integrity (Fenton & Barassi, 2011).

Ayobolu (2025) noted seven very important functions of social media in the electoral process base on its easy access and virality. (1) Surveillance and Reporting. This means social media platforms serve as channels for real-time surveillance and reporting of electoral events (Bello and Kolawole-Ismail, 2017). (2) Interpretation and Analysis. In essence, through user-generated content and discussions, social media users contribute diverse perspectives and interpretations of political events, enriching public discourse and understanding. This function promotes critical engagement with electoral issues and encourages informed decision-making among voters. (3) Engagement and Socialisation. By facilitating interactions between political actors and the electorate, social media platforms foster civic participation and community building promoting inclusivity and accessibility in the electoral process by providing avenues for diverse voices to be heard and represented. (4) Information Dissemination. Social media platforms function as key channels for the dissemination of electoral information, including candidate profiles, campaign updates, and voter guides. Through targeted messaging and content sharing, social media users can access relevant information about electoral processes and candidates, empowering them to make informed choices (Michael, Clement and Ajibola, 2021). (5) Message Clarification. Through factchecking initiatives and interactive discussions, social media users can critically evaluate campaign messages and policies, promoting transparency and accountability in electoral communication (Feezell, Ziegler, and Osborn, 2009). This function strengthens public understanding of electoral issues and fosters trust in the political process. (6) Voter Education and Empowerment. Through informational campaigns, live Questions & Answers sessions, and educational content, social media users can acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to participate effectively in the electoral process (Feezell et al., 2009). This function promotes inclusivity and equity in electoral participation by empowering marginalized and underserved communities. (7) Mobilisation and Advocacy. Through grassroots campaigns, online petitions, and viral hashtags, social media users can mobilise support for specific candidates or causes, driving collective action and social change (Knoll, et al, 2020). This function enhances the responsiveness and accountability of political institutions by amplifying citizen voices and priorities.

The research by Idris (2020) identified social media as both enhancing and undermining to the electoral process. According to Idris, the Nigerian electoral environment demonstrates

increasing reliance on social media for political communication and election monitoring. Idris (2023) notes that citizens use these platforms to share updates, report irregularities, and engage in political discussions. At the same time, political actors exploit the same channels to push partisan narratives, sometimes including misleading or false content. Though social media contributes to electoral integrity by enabling real-time observation of election processes. Idris (2023) highlights that citizens can document events as they happen, thereby increasing transparency and accountability. In addition, broader research supports the idea that digital platforms enhance civic engagement and participation, as users actively share information and mobilise others (Tufekci, 2017). Research by Abdillah et al. (2014) found that social media is an effective tool for reaching voters and supporting political campaigns. Similarly, Solarin et al. (2017) reported that social media serves as a major source of political information and mobilization. In Nigeria, Omotayo and Folorunso (2020) observed that social media is widely used by youths for political participation, enabling activities such as political discussions and monitoring electoral processes. Anyanwu and Orji (2020) further found that exposure to social media positively influences political participation, while Erubami (2020) noted that social media enhances political awareness and information flow.

Despite these benefits, social media poses serious risks. Misinformation spreads rapidly due to the speed and reach of digital networks. This aligns with findings by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), who show that false information online can significantly influence public perception and political outcomes. Such dynamics can create confusion, deepen political divisions, and reduce trust in electoral institutions. While some users provided accurate updates that improved accountability, others circulated unverified claims that heightened tensions and uncertainty. Of note is that while it strengthens participation and transparency, its largely unregulated nature allows misinformation to thrive. This reflects a broader tension identified in digital communication studies, where increased openness also increases vulnerability to manipulation. And for the amoral politicians, whose strategy is the end justifies the means, if propaganda does not guarantee election victory at the polls, let it cause discontent and disbelief in electoral outcomes announced if not favourable to them.

According to Okolie and Orji (2024) during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, several civil society organizations used campaigns, advocacy, and sensitization programmes to promote voter participation and reduce electoral apathy (Kujenga, 2023). Despite the widespread use of social media campaigns and political hashtags, concerns remained about whether these efforts significantly influenced voting behaviour.

Conclusion

It is obvious from the discourse above that social media affects politics in several spheres and ramifications. Social media platforms serve as easier, broader and faster access point for political campaign and mobilization, policy discussion, political education and engagement among several other imports compared to traditional media. Social media creates a more open discussion space for people to talk, debate, and share views on relevant political issues, hence cross fertilization of ideas for deeper and enriched understanding. However, its algorithmic

structuring may reinforce confirmation bias and studies show it has equally been misused to misinform the populace which could lead to tension and spiral to conflict.

Recommendation

To effectively manage the role of social media in politics, digital literacy campaigns must be aggressively promoted to help citizens identify credible information and avoid misinformation (Akande, 2018). Idowu et al. (2021) also recommend implementing regulations to curb fake news and ensure electoral integrity. A system must be developed that ensures political actors and institutions should use social media to promote transparency, accountability, and public trust in democratic processes.

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