

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, POLITICAL COMMUNICATION, AND PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRACIES: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

That social media play enormous role in modern democracies with regards to political communication and participation is not in doubt. With the emergence of social media and its various platforms, the sole reliance on the traditional or conventional media for communication seems to have dwindle. However, this paper explores the role of social media political communication and participation in Nigerian democracy. Source credibility theory and information society theory were used as the theoretical framework. The paper employed desk or library research methodology to gather qualitative and secondary data. Findings of the study underscored that despite the fact that social media political communication has been very effective in mobilising electorate for political participation, factors that hinder social media political communication and participation abound. The study also reveals that Nigerian politicians use social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to disseminate information, share their vision and manifestoes. However, the study concludes that in the face of all its benefits and usefulness in modern democracies, social media platforms for political communication cannot be completely exonerated from shortcomings such as their usage to spread fake news, misinformation and propaganda during electioneering campaign. The paper recommends inter-alia that in employing social media political communication for political participation, electoral management bodies should regulate social media use by establishing guidelines and regulations for social media during elections to prevent fake news cum misinformation, hate speech and other forms of manipulations intended by the politicians.

Keywords: Social Media, Advocacy, Political Participation, Democracy, Political Communication

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INTRODUCTION

With the birth of information communication technologies and social media, the world has been taken by a storm, leading to nothing less than a revolution. Apart from providing platforms for social interactions and business transactions, social media plays important roles in every country's socio-political development. In Nigeria, social media has increasingly become popular with platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp gaining widespread acceptance. According to a report by Hootsuite (2020), Nigeria has over 30 million active social media users with 22% of the population using social media to access news and information. Invariably, this has significant implications for political communication and participation in Nigeria, as various social media platforms are used during electioneering campaign.

With this, Oloyede and Adeleye (2019), note that social media use was positively correlated with voter turnout in 2019 Nigerian presidential election. Globally, majority of youth and adults with the aid of smart phones now have access to the social media platform. The youth to a great extent, remains the most prominent users of these social media platforms. They use them for various reasons or purposes and political communication is not an exemption (Akinola, 2019). With regards to the use of social media in political communication to enhance political participation, Maduueke, Chibuzo & Anumadu (2017), note that the use of social media in politics has continued to grow in recent times. Since Barack Obama broke the world record in the history of social media use for political purpose during the 2008 US presidential election. With this, many nations and politicians across the globe

have continued to embrace the platforms to mobilize their citizens and candidates towards active participation in the political process.

As modern platforms of communication, social media are considered as useful for effective education, entertainment and socialisation. During electioneering, social media can either be used positively or negatively. As an emerging tool for political communication, social media according to Kaur and Verma (2017) has been used in presidential as well as in general elections in different countries from time to time. Citing Boudilianne (2015), Kaur and Verma (2017) note that there is positive association between social media usage and political participation both in civic and political life. Political participation can take many forms, including voting, campaigning, protesting as well as to contact elected officials (Daley & Parovic, 2018). According to Fowler and Ridley (2019), voting is often considered the most fundamental form of political participation as it provides citizens with a direct say in the selection of their leaders and the direction of public policy. However, other forms of participation such as activism and advocacy can also play a crucial role in shaping policy debates and influencing decision-making (Bimber, 2017).

Be that as it may, the effectiveness of social media in political communication and participation is a topic of growing interest among electorate and politicians. Social media has become an instrument of political campaigns and its impact on democratic processes in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. With regards to the impact of social media on voting behaviour, Akinola and Isola (2020), averred that social media has a significant impact on voting behaviour in Nigeria, particularly among young people. They explained that social media influences voting behaviour by shaping public opinion, providing information about candidates and mobilising support for political parties. However, social media and other online platforms have been very useful in playing advocacy roles in socio-political development in any given democracy. Though, politicians have been accused of taking advantage of social media by using its various platforms to spread misinformation and propaganda that can have serious effect for democracy (Kasperson, 2019). Adeyeye & Adeyemi (2018), note that the youth in Nigeria are highly active on social media and they use these platforms to engage in various forms of participation including online activism, mobilisation and campaigning. They emphasised that young Nigerians use social media to discuss politics, share information and mobilise support for their preferred candidates.

Statement of the Problem

That the emergence of social media has impacted and changed the way politicians communicate with the electorate and engage in political communication and participation in Nigeria is not in

doubt. However, despite the increasing popularity of social media in Nigerian politics, political communication and participation, there are concerns about social media impact on the democratic process in the country. With this, some scholars have raised concerns about the use of social media by Nigerian politicians to manipulate the electorate (Bennett & Manhelm, 2018; Boler, 2008; Igwe, 2018; Onuoha, 2018). According to Bennett and Manhelm (2018), social media provide politicians with vast amount of data about individual users, which can be used to create targeted advertisements. This allows politicians to tailor their messages to specific demographics, interests and behaviours, potentially manipulating voters' opinions. Boler (2008) note that politicians can use social media to create emotional content such as fear-mongering or nostalgia, to sway voters. As observed by Igwe (2020), Nigerian politicians use social media to spread misinformation and propaganda to influence voting behaviour and this can undermine the integrity of the electoral process. Corroborating, Onuoha (2018), note that the use of social media to disseminate hate speech and incite violence during electioneering has been a challenge in Nigerian politics and has also raised issues about the integrity of online information.

In view of the above, the question is, how credible are information disseminated by Nigerian politicians via political communication during electioneering in Nigeria? And how has social media political communication and participation contributed to Nigerian democracy? These and more are the focus of this paper.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study include:

1. To ascertain the effectiveness of social media political communication and participation in Nigerian democracy.
2. To find out the extent to which Nigerian politicians employed social media political communication to influence the electorates to vote for them in an election.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. How effective is social media political communication and participation in Nigerian democracy?
2. To what extent has Nigerian politicians employed social media political communication to influence the electorates to vote for them in an election?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Social Media

In communication literature, social media has various definitions from different scholars. Citing Carr (2010), Afam (2015) describes social media as member-based internet communities that allow users to post profile information, such as a user name and photograph and to communicate with others in innovative ways such as sending public or private online messages or sharing photos online. Here, social media users are involving in chatting with friends, posting pictures, disseminating information and advertising businesses. Social media political communication refers to the use of social media platforms to convey, disseminate and exchange political information, ideas and messages between politicians, citizens and other stakeholders (Aguiler and Velez, 2018). This form of communication has become essential tools for politicians to reach and discuss with their constituents (Gibson and Willig, 2019). Generally, Political communication is a specialized and applied form of communication which aims at influencing the politics and decisions making processes of a Society. When applied, political communication seeks to motivate, stimulate and mobilize people to take a particular action which at the end benefits message sender or originator. In other words, it exist either to seek vote from the electorate or to get public legitimization for government policies and programmes (Asadu and Chime, 2010).

With regards to political participation, Alalaimat (2018) note that political participation is voluntary or civic activities, in which the individual participates in the selection of rulers and formulates public policies, directly or indirectly. According to Kaur and Verma (2017), political participation is the making of opinion and belief about political processes by citizens of a democratic country. i.e, it starts from socialisation, imbibing the culture and willingness to participate in the political process. In politics, participation can either be active or passive. Activeness comes with full participation like being a registered member of a political party, partaking in electioneering and election proper, as well as attending political meetings. Participatory democracy is a system that enables citizens to participate actively in the decision-making process, either directly or through representative institutions (Pateman, 1970, cited in Fung, 2004). Akande (2000) cited in Ochonogor (2008) says that democracy is a political process that allows the plurality of political parties to ensure popular participation in political decision making. Citing Oyovbarie (1987), Ochonogor (2008) explains that democracy is more than political procedure, but is a political framework from which public policies emerge and are administered for society.

A general and a popular definition of democracy

see it “as government of the people by the people and for the people.” The Laswellian paradigm defines democracy as who? Gets what? How? When? And with what effect. Invariably, these definitions and descriptions point to the fact that democracy is a representative type of government in which the people have the ultimate power to choose those who represent them, and to whom public office holders are accountable. Obviously, democracy prescribes that the people have the power to elect their representatives and also the power to withdraw their mandate from an elected officer whose activities are not in the interest of the electorate.

Social Media, Political Communication and Participation in Nigerian Democracy

Political communication and participation are vital tools to democratic governance. They enable citizens to express their opinions, hold elected officials accountable and influence public policy (Gilens and Page, 2014). In view of this notion, Galadima (2015) note that social media have traverses all boundaries of politics, economy and have been completely embraced by many people in all part of the world. Citing Sukuk (2014), Galadima (2015) explains that during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, Facebook and (X formerly Twitter) accounts were used by civil society groups in providing information and getting feedback on the electioneering activities and programmes of politicians and their candidates. Corroborating, Weeks, Ardevol-Abreeu and Gil de Zuniga (2015) note that social media give politicians the opportunity to largely persuade electorates due to high number of people who are on the platform. They explained that the more people use social media, the more influential they believe they are, and this always make them to think and believe that they are politically persuasive. Adeleke (2018), note that Nigerian politicians now use social media platforms to disseminate information, share their policies and interact with their constituents. Social media has increased the reach and accessibility of political information in Nigeria. It has enabled politicians to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and communicate directly with their constituents. This has enhanced the ability of citizens to access information and interact with politicians (Eze & Chikere, 2018).

In Nigeria, the use of social media in political communication and participation was first employed in 2015 presidential election between President Goodluck Jonathan and President Muhammadu Buhari. Goodluck Jonathan was first Nigerian president to join Facebook. As chronicled by Tolu Ogunlesi quoted by Egbunike (2015), this lead to the “faddification” of Facebook in Nigerian politics. He notes:

President Jonathan took the shine off the IBB [Ibrahim Babangida] presidential

declaration in Abuja by choosing that morning to announce his own bid on Facebook. Ibrahim Babangida launched a YouTube campaign videos and had an aide boast that he had become an avid Facebooker.

Though, it is apparent that both President Goodluck Jonathan and IBB only got this strategy from President Barack Obama as he was the first to have successfully used the social media specifically the Facebook politically and emerge victorious in 2008, in American presidential election (Egbunike, 2015). During former Nigerian president administration, President Muhammadu Buhari, had over 3.5 million followers on X (formerly Twitter), which he used to communicate with Nigerians and share updates on his administration's policies (Twitter, 2022). With the emergence of social media, the way political communication and media advocacy is done, has changed and made easier. Kriess (2016) observes that with the way more information communication technology compliant citizens are coming into the voting population, social media have become important platforms on which politicians establish themselves and engage with the electorates. With this, it is apparent that doing effective political campaign and participation, requires the employment of social media platforms. Citing Scott and Maryman (2016), Edurbirdie (2021) explains that social media serves as an innovative and a viable tool for educating and mobilising the community psychological principles to encourage individuals contribute to social issues and change effort.

Sequel to the build up to the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, a purported youthful social media advocacy in support of Peter Obi has been on, but not without pockets of dissenting voices from some quarters of the Nigerian diverse and multiple groups. While some says it was a mere social media noise making, others said it was not in our country's political culture cum history for a candidate from a party without a structure to emerge as a winner in a presidential election. In this regard, Okoro et al. (2023) note that social media has increased the level of political communication and participation among Nigerian citizens, particularly among the youth. In the same vein, Oloyode et al., (2025) explained that social media has enabled citizens to participate in the political process by expressing their opinions, sharing their views and mobilising support for their preferred candidates. Weeks, Ardevol-Abreeu and Gil de Zuniga (2015) note that social media give politicians the opportunity to largely persuade electorates due to high number of people who are on the platform. They explained that the more people use social media, the more influential they believe they are, and this always make them to think and believe that they are politically

persuasive.

Social Media Platforms used in Political Communication

In doing effective social media political communication, platforms that are employed abound. They include the following:

Facebook: Facebook is one of the most used social media platforms for interaction b individuals especially the youth. It is also a viable platform for social media political communication.

Twitter: Presently referred to as X, it is a social networking site that was founded in 2006. It is a viable platform for advocacy and communication as those with twitter account are always with so many followers who can subscribe to their opinion and toll users point of view.

WhatsApp: This platform is also very viable for campaign and political communication. These days, so many people use the whatsapp for campaign and advocacies during electioneering.

You Tube: Users of YouTube can post videos of any programme or development which they want to support or advocate on their Youtube handle and get effective results.

Instagram: The instangram employ both photos and videos for political communication and advocacy. It has also proven to be a viable media of political communication that can aid effective and massive political participation.

Social Media and Political Communication in Democracies: An Overview

The use of social media in doing effective political communication cannot be over emphasized in modern democracies. In Nigeria and the world in general, social media and social networking sites have aided political gladiators and stake holders in winning elections. During electioneering, politicians and electorates employ social media platforms such as Facebook, whatsapp, twitter, Instagram and even YouTube to create awareness, campaign, canvass for votes. In this regard, Abdulrauf (2016) observed cognitive engagement on social media political awareness and activism among Nigeria and Malaysia and found out that political awareness and needs increase political participation in youth.

Political communication has become an important tool for propagating new political values, ideology and enhancing political socialisation and orientation. However, the dissemination of political socialization and orientation information geared towards political participation remains the essence of political communication. In other words, political communication exposes a candidate's qualities and political ideology to voters scattered in space and time (Asadu & Chime, 2010). In the 21st century, electioneering and effective political communication

has gone beyond mere face to face campaign as social media has taken over active political participation by a storm leading to nothing less than a revolution. Corroborating, Kalsness (2016) discussed Facebook as an outstanding medium for political interaction between political parties, political stakeholders and electorates; the study alongside his observation provides best practices to create a melting pot between politicians and voters for political engagement. With this, Lovell and Lovell (2016) assert that:

Political campaigns in today's era are not limited to rallies, speeches and to deal with crowds and masses. Rather, social media is an emerging tool to share information, influence and engage people for political participation. Political leaders and officials are realising the importance of social media as it has become a powerful tool to spread political information as well as contacting citizens. Influence of social media has been proven from its successful implementation in the US presidential election in 2008.

In the same vein, Mahamud and Amin (2017) examined the usage of online media in political activities among university students. The findings of the study underscore the relationship of online and offline political activism and participation. Their findings can be said to be somewhat accurate due to the Osun State gubernatorial election in July 2022 where old men and women who don't participate in online political electioneering were seen struggling to cast their votes for their preferred candidates. Despite the fact that they don't even have Facebook account, they were still very active by effectively participating in the poll. It is apparent that the youth in Nigeria especially the educated ones, have unlimited access to social media platforms. They utilise all sort of social networking sites for various reasons which political issues are not exempted. Nonetheless, the truth is that Nigeria's social media ecosystem has undergone an amazing transformation over the years. Whether or not it evolves into a platform that propels or hinders change is a story for another day. What is obvious is that henceforth, no Nigerian politician can afford to run for a national election without sharpening his social media presence and/ or engagement (Egbunike, 2015).

Factors Militating Against Effective Political Participation

In Nigeria, digital divide is a factor that affects women's social media political communication and participation in various ways (Adebayo, 2017; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Coleman, 2005). Women who are not online or have limited access to digital technologies may not have access to accurate and timely information about political events, candidates and policies which can limit their ability to policies which can limit their

ability to make informed decisions. Kaplan and Haenlein, (2010) note that women who are not confident in their digital literacy skills may be less likely to engage in online political discussions, which can limit their ability to express their opinions and participate in the democratic process. Also, women who are not online may be excluded from online civic activities such as online petitions, campaigns and mobilisations which can limit their ability to participate in the democratic process.

Generally, these factors militate against effective political participation in Nigeria:

Gender: Difference in gender affects so many democratic processes. This is true because a lot of women hardly participate in politics even as electorate, aspirants or even as mere members of political parties based on the notion that the political terrain is patriarchal in nature. Hence, the number of men and women occupying political offices seems incommensurate.

Age: Age is one of the major factors that affect political participation in both developed and developing countries of the world. In developing countries like Nigeria, to vote during election seems very tedious especially if accreditation and voting are not done at the same time. With this, it will be difficult for the aged and old in the country to actively participate in politics.

Political Culture: This has to do with the political belief and way of political life of a particular country, region or tribe. In some tribe in Nigeria, it is a belief or culture that women are not supposed to participate actively in politics. Especially when it comes to speaking in public, some culture outrightly forbid women to speak in public as such it becomes needless for them to participate in politics.

Political Orientation: political orientation is a child of political culture and political socialisation. In new democracies where elections are characterised with vote buying, rigging, etc, it is always believe that votes doesn't count, as such it is needless voting. With this, the fittest who must vote, will have the belief that, they must wait at the polling units till collation, counting and announcement of results are done.

Diversity/ Regional Affiliation: Diversity in culture and region always bring about political apathy to a great extent. In Nigeria for example, so many people from Eastern part of the country don't always participate in the nation's politics based on the fact that they are always seen as second fiddles. But in the Northern part of the country, there is a massive political participation because, they have the belief that they are born to rule.

However, older Nigerians also face some challenges in accessing and using digital technologies, including social media. According to a report by the Nigerian National Population Commission, in 2020, only 12% of Nigerians aged 60-69 used the internet,

compared to 35% of those aged 29-29 (NPC, 2020). This disparity according to Hargittal (2002) is attributed to various factors including limited digital literacy skills, lack of access to digital technologies and age related issues. Be that as it may, political socialization and reorientation remains the only panacea to foster a positive change in the level at which people will actively participate in politics even in the face of social media political communication (Anyaele, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

This paper is theoretically framed on source credibility theory and information society theory. Propounded by Carl Hovland, Irving Janis and Harold Kelley in 1953, the source credibility theory is a widely accepted concept in the field of communication and persuasion. The theory posits that the credibility of a source significantly influences an individual's attitude change and persuasion (Hovaland et al., 1953). The theory also suggests that when a source is perceived as credible, the message is most likely to be accepted and believed, leading to a more significant attitude change (Kelman, 1958). The source credibility theory comprises several components that include, expertise, trustworthiness, likability and dynamism (Berlo et al., 1960; White & Eseryel, 1966; Kelman, 1958; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1993). Asemah (2011) state that the credibility of the originator determines how the receiver of the message will react to the message. That is, attitude of the message receivers when they receive a message depends to a great extent on how they see the source and how they perceive the source to be. The source credibility theory exists between attitude change and the source of a message. When the right source is used to transmit a message, it boosts the chances of having an affective message.

On the other hand, information society theory thrives on the belief that information production and flow increases because of the society's continuous connectivity. One of the first scholars to develop the concept of information society is Fritz Machlup who was an economist. He began studying the effect of parents on research in 1933. His work culminated in the study of the production and distribution of knowledge in the United States in 1962. According to Hilbert (2015), the main drivers of information society are information and communication technologies, which have resulted in rapid information growth in variety and are somehow changing all aspects of social organisation, including democracy.

Citing McQuail (2010), Galadima (2015) note that the theory postulates that as the society increasingly become thirsty for information, time and space for acquiring such information reduces. He explains:

The society is driven by the desire to be

informed, and the more society yearns for information, the more we have the proliferation of blogs and social media use. Today we have 'network society' where everybody is connected to somebody and nobody exist in isolation of anybody anywhere in the world

By and large, the import of these theories to this paper is that while the source credibility theory hinges on the fact that the acceptance of any message in communication is dependent on the communicator's positive characteristics. That is, the credibility of the messenger serve as a major determinant of what the recipient will do to the message. On the other hand, information system theory lend credence to the fact that information production and flow increases because of the society we live has turned into a global village because of connectivity aided by globalisation and information communication technology.

METHODOLOGY

This paper employed the desk research method. Also known as secondary research, the methodology involves gathering and analysing existing data from various sources such as literature reviews, academic journals, books, conference proceedings, government reports and online databases (Cresswell, 2014; Neuman, 2014). This approach allow researchers to synthesize and critically evaluate existing knowledge on a particular topic without collecting primary data through surveys, experiments and other related methods.

According to Bryman (2015), desk research is an important aspect of research process that enables researchers to have a clear understanding of the research topic and its context, identify gaps in existing researches, develop a framework for further researches and inform the development of research questions and hypotheses. The methodology involves a systematic and transparent search, appraisal and synthesis of existing literature (Hart, 2010). It requires researchers to critically evaluate the quality and relevance of sources and to synthesis findings in a way that contribute to the research questions or objectives (Cooper, 2010).

FINDINGS

Research Question One: How effective is social media political communication and participation in Nigerian democracy?

Social media has become an integral part of modern campaigns and it has been very effective in political communication and participation in Nigerian democracy. As observed by Oloyede and Oloyede (2018), social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp have provided a new avenue for Nigerians to participate in political discussions,

express their opinions and mobilise support for political candidates. It has also increased political awareness and participation among Nigerians, particularly the youth. With this, it is apparent that social media political communication has democratised access to information by allowing Nigerians to access a wide range of sources and perspective on political discourse. It has also aided in bridging the information gap, promote informed decision-making as well as building an informed political citizenry. According to Bennett and Segerberg (2013), social media can lead to online activism and mobilisation that can lead to participation. This underscores the fact that social media has helped in amplifying marginalised voices, as it has provided a platform for marginalised groups such as women and minority ethnic groups to express their opinions and participate in the political process. Adeyeye and Adeyemi (2018), observed that Nigerian politicians have also used social media to make ethnic and religious appeals to voters, and this can be an effective strategy in a country with a large and diverse population.

Moreover, social media has also been credited with increasing political participation in Nigeria, particularly the young people (Akinola, 2019). However, some scholars, have argue that social media has not necessarily translated into offline political participation in Nigeria (Adebayo & Adeyeye; Bimber et al., 2012). As observed by Adebayo and Adeyeye (2019), while social media has increased online political communication and participation, it has not necessarily led to increased voters turnout or offline civic participation. Bimber,et al (2012), note that social media use can actually create a sense of complacency among individuals, leading them to substitute online activism for offline participation. Be that as it may, the relationship between social media use and offline political participation has been a topic of interest among scholars, while social media has been touted as a potential tool for mobilising citizens and increasing political participation, research has shown that the translation of online activism into offline participation is limited (Gladwell, 2010; Gerber et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2016). One of the primary reasons for this disconnect is the concept of “slacktivism”, which refers to the phenomenon of individual's participation in low-cost, low-risk online activities (such as liking and sharing a post) without translating these actions into more substantial offline commitments (Gladwell, 2010). This can create a false sense of accomplishment among individuals, leading them to believe that they are contributing to a cause without actually taking meaningful action.

However, it is apparent that social media has had a positive impact on political communication in Nigeria democracy. While it has enhanced the ability of

politicians to communicate with citizens and increased online participation, it has also created new challenges such as the spread of fake news and misinformation. In view of this, Eze (2020), note that the proliferation of fake news and misinformation on social media has raised concerns about online political discourse. Corroborating, Oluwatola et al., (2020) aver that fake news on social media can have a negative impact on public opinion and voting behaviour in Nigeria. Despite these pockets of limitations, social media still play a role in facilitating effective political participation when effectively used in political communication.

Research Question Two: To what extent has Nigerian politicians employed social media political communication to influence the electorate to vote for them in elections?

The use of social media by Nigerian politicians to influence the electorate has become a significant aspect of political communication in the country. Scholars have conducted researches that underscored the fact that Nigerian politicians have extensively employed social media platforms to communicate with the electorate and influence their voting behaviour. This notion is in line with the findings of a study carried out by Eze and Okoro (2017) to ascertain the extent to which Nigerian politicians employed the social media during electioneering. They found that Nigerian politicians use social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to disseminate information, share their vision and manifestoes. The study also revealed that politicians use social media to create a personal connection with the electorate, which can influence voting behaviour. In terms of the extent to which social media has influenced electoral outcomes in Nigeria, Ogbu and Eze (2020) found in a study they conducted that social media used by politicians during electioneering were important predictor of electoral success. The study also revealed that politicians who effectively used social media were more likely to win elections. With these findings and revelations, it is obvious that the use of social media by politicians correlates with their performance in elections.

During the 2015 Nigerian presidential election, former President Muhammadu Buhari used X (formerly Twitter) to engage with voters, share his campaign promises and mobilise support (Oloyede & Okoli, 2016). Politicians in Nigeria have also used social media influencers to promote their campaigns and endorse their candidature. Okoro and Okoro (2020) observed that during the 2019 Nigerian presidential election, some social media influencers endorsed President Buhari's re-election bid, citing his achievement in office. These apparently underscore the fact that Nigerian politicians can employ social media political communication to influence electorate to vote in their favour. A report by the International Institute for

Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (2019) also noted that social media has become an essential tool for Nigerian politicians to reach out to voters, particularly the youth. The report stated social media platforms were used by politicians to bypass traditional media and communicate directly with their followers. This report underscores the efficacy of the usage of social media platforms by politicians to influence the electorate to vote for them. With regards to the usage of social media by politicians to influence electorates to vote for them in 2019 general elections, Oloyede and Okunlola (2020) conducted a study to explore the impact of social media on voters' behaviour in Nigeria. The study found that social media influence voters' decisions, with 64.1% of respondents indicating that social media had influenced their voting decisions in 2019 general elections. From the available evidence, it is apparent that Nigerian politicians have extensively employed social media political communication to influence the electorates to vote for them in elections. With this, social media platforms are essential tools for politicians to reach out to voters, mobilise support and engage with their followers.

Conclusion

In today's democracies, political communication and participation are vital to effective politicking. With this, the need or relevance of political communication in any democratic society cannot be undermined. It serves as a tool or vehicle for conveying political information and it aids political education, socialisation and participation. However, there is no doubt that social media has transformed political communication and participation in Nigerian democracy. Its usage for electioneering has increased the reach and accessibility of political information, facilitated mobilisation and activism as well as voters turnout. In the face of all its benefits and usefulness in modern democracies, social media platforms for political communication cannot be completely exonerated from shortcomings such as their usage to spread fake news, misinformation and propaganda that are associated with them in course of using them during electioneering campaign. With this, one can infer that social media political communication has its pros and cons in Nigerian democracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. In employing social media political communication for political participation, both politicians and electorate should ensure that various social media platforms are genuinely used rather than to manipulate the citizenry or cause violence. This can be achieved by being critical of online information. In doing this,

electorate should verify information before sharing or believing and there should need to be cautious of fake news and propaganda.

2. Electoral management bodies should regulate social media use by establishing guidelines and regulations for social media during elections to prevent misinformation, hate speech and other forms of manipulations intended by the politicians. More so, education of citizens on how to critically evaluate online information, identify fake news and use social media responsibly is also required.

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