SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS IN VOTER MOBILIZATION AND EDUCATION: A STUDY OF *FACEBOOK* AND *TWITTER* USE DURING THE 2023 GENERAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: **This paper examined the effectiveness of *Facebook* and *Twitter* in voter mobilization and education during the 2023 general election. The study objectives are to ascertain the extent to which Nigerian electorates, especially the youths, were politically educated and mobilized to vote during the 2023 general election on account of the information provided to them via *Facebook* and *Twitter;* and to find out whether the messages relayed by the presidential candidates through these social media platforms influenced the voting behaviour of the electorates. The study relied on technological determinism theory propounded by an American economist and sociologist, Thorstein Veblen, as its framework of analysis; and it used survey method as the research design. Hence, a total of 372 sampled respondents, purposefully drawn from Anambra State were surveyed, using structured questionnaire administered through *WhatsApp* platform. Upon the analysis of the research data, the researchers found out, amongst other things, that all the presidential candidates used *Facebook* and *Twitter* to educate and mobilize voters, that even though the respondents believed the messages provided to them through these social media platforms, they were not enough to educate them about the personality and programmes of the candidates, and that the voting behaviour of most of the sampled respondents were not influenced by the social media messages. In view of the forgoing findings, the study recommends, amongst other things, more robust social media used for political communication as a way of shoring up the dwindling youths turn figures that characterize elections in the country.**

Key words: **Social media, Voter education, Voter mobilization, Election, Democracy, Voting Behaviour.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The advent of the new media has resulted in wholesome transformation of the conventional media of communication – radio, television, film, newspaper, magazine, and book. New inventions in communication infrastructure, especially internet technology and the ancillary social media platforms, have given rise to new ways of communicating in real time. For instance, the Internet, has boosted globalization and interconnection of people beyond national boundaries. This has increased the rapidity as well as the effectiveness of communication between people throughout the world because of their unique characteristics.

According to Friedman and Friedman (2008) cited in Obiorah (2021), computer-mediated communication and collaboration platforms, such as e-mail, chat room, instant message, discussion forum, teleconferencing, avatar-based virtual worlds, voice over Internet protocol (VOIP), mobile telephony, Skype, blogs, wikis etc. have changed our lives in profound ways.

Hence, we are witnessing the evolution of a universally interconnected network of audio, video and electronic text communications that blurs the distinction between interpersonal communication and mass communication, and between public and private communication.

In other words, the new media have altered the meaning of geographic distance, allowed for a huge increase in the volume of communication, provided the possibility of increasing the speed of communication, provided opportunities for interactive communication and allowed forms of communication that were hitherto separate to overlap (converge) and interconnect. As a result, many people especially the youth population have come to embrace the social media for communication, interaction, socialization, entertainment and escape.

Given their towering popularity, social media uses have become multifarious and widespread. They are used in education, in communication simpliciter, in commerce, advertising and in politics to communicate policies, sensitize the public, sell a programme and mobilize support. The latter use of the social media is the focus of this study.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

As one the fastest means of disseminating information to a widely dispersed audience, social media platforms, such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*, are being leveraged on by politicians to communicate with the voters. Their use in electioneering process, especially in political advertising, voter sensitization and mobilization has grown exponentially since the year 2008 when the former American President, Barack Obama, in the run up to the United States presidential election, utilized the *Facebook* to woo young American voters who eventually saw him to victory.

Because social media technology is participatory, interactive and cost-effective, it has, according to Okoro and Adibe (2013), become the medium of the moment as far as political communication is concerned. Social media uses are not limited to the education and mobilization of prospective voters, but are also used to shore up participation and shape voting behaviour.

The 2011 general elections in Nigeria arguably marked a significant milestone in the use of social media for political communication in the country. This was because Nigerian politicians realized their huge import as a potent channel of reaching out to the voters, especially the young ones, who are usually apathetic to elections and voting. That trend has continued to grow to the extent that in the 2023 general election, virtually all the presidential candidates utilized different online platforms to engage with the voters. However, what is yet to be ascertained is the effectiveness of their use during the election for voter education and mobilization. In view of the foregoing gap, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent were Nigerian electorates, especially the youths, politically educated and mobilized to vote during the 2023 general election on account of the information provided to them via *Facebook* and *Twitter* by the presidential candidates?

2. Was the voting behaviour of the social media users influenced by the messages relayed by the presidential candidates through *Twitter* and *Facebook*?

III. CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE

Social media is a sub-concept of the new media, which is a catch-all term used to define all that is related to the Internet and interplay between technology, images and sounds (Socha & Eber-Schmid, 2014). It is, according to Dewing (2012), a term that refers to a wide-range of internet-based and mobile services that allows users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-generated contents or join online community.

Social media encompass digital platforms that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication and involve some form of computing. It is a term we use to describe contents made available to the audience, using different forms of electronic communication, made possible through the use of digital technology. It actually refers to a wide range of changes in media production, distribution and use.

As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) aptly noted, "the term social media refers to the wide range of Internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities". They include all interactive technologies that are used for sharing and receiving messages, unhindered by distance, time

and location. Hence, Newson, Houghhton and Patten (2008, p.3) called them "online tools and utilities that allow communication of information online and participation and collaboration".

Bala (2014) offered one of the most accepted definitions of social media. He defined the social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p.61). This definition implies that social media are vital communication tool, capable of sharing information, moulding opinion, connecting individuals and communities, and encouraging active participation in governance, especially in election.

The key terms in discourses about the social media are digital, interactivity, hypertextuality, dispersal and virtuality. Other features, according to McQuail (2005), include their interconnectedness, their accessibility to individual users as senders and receivers, their multiplicity of use, their open-ended character and their ubiquity. Obiorah (2021, pp. 53-55) identified the following characteristics of the social media:

a) *Digital media:* Social media essentially involve the adoption of digital technology in the creation, production, storage, and distribution of contents, such as texts, audio and audio-visual materials, images, etc.

b) *Interactivity:* Social media users interact real time and share messages via the Internet. They are non-restrictive in the sense that they allow the users to express themselves, and receive instant feedbacks.

c) *Communication:* By and large, social media are concerned with communication in one form or another. They are means of communication and are used in sharing of information.

d) *Collaboration:* Social media promote collaboration in various areas of human endeavours and by so doing foster a sense of community and communitarian living among like-minded folks who might be disconnected in terms of geography or time zone, but can meet synchronously or asynchronously with the aid of Internet connectivity.

e) *Creativity:* Unlike conventional media audience, social media users do not simply read, listen, view, or play contents. They are no longer the passive receivers of whatever messages the media chose to throw at them. They also create and share contents otherwise known as user-generated contents. Today's audience members create and edit videos, post to blogs, post product reviews, and contribute contents in a host of ways. This is due to the digitization of media, which makes editing easy.

The advantages of social media, in comparison to mainstream media, are summarized by Merril, Latham, Santalesa and Navetta (2011). Unlike the traditional media, which offer a one-way experience (in which media outlets disseminate information for public consumption), social media offers a two-way interactive experience. Social media users, unlike their traditional media counterparts, can interact instantly and directly with either the originators or the authors of the proffered information. They can interact with each other too. The interaction and cross-communication that social media makes possible is precisely what makes social media so world changing. In fact, Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, and Seymour (2011) observed that social media differ from the traditional media in that they allow users to actively engage in a communication process not only as information receivers, but also as message creators because the online applications are designed to facilitate information sharing, knowledge distribution and opinion exchanges.

IV. METHODS OF THE STUDY

This study is delimited in scope to the presidential candidates and to youths who reside in Anambra State, who use *Twitter* (X) and *Facebook*, and who voted in the 2023 general election. The researchers used descriptive survey research design because it enabled them to study the sampled respondents and ascertain, describe, analyze and interpret their attitudes and opinions regarding the issues captured in the two research questions. The advantage of this design of research, according to Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2006, p.76), is that "we collect the same information about all the cases in a sample" because the respondents are asked the same questions.

Since the population of youths who voted during the 2023 general elections is unknown, the researchers used samples of 384 respondents from the population of young voters in Anambra State. The sample size was determined, using the sample size determination table worked out by Meyer (1973). Meanwhile, purposive/judgmental sampling method was used to

draw the sampled respondents. This method ensured that only people who feat the characteristics highlighted earlier by the researchers were included in the samples.

The instrument for data collection used in the study is structured questionnaire. It enabled the researchers to gather "state-of-being data, state-of-mind data, state-of-behaviour data; and state-of-intention data" (Hair Jr., Bush & Ortinau, 2000, pp. 376-378) from the sampled respondents on the issues captured in the research questions.

Part one of the instrument featured one demographic item on sex of the respondents, while the second part contained four-point Likert scale statements with the options, Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD), which are rated 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The instrument was pre-tested prior to use. Those who partook in the pilot study were excluded from the survey.

Apropos of the subject matter of this research, technology was deployed in administering the instrument to the respondents. The researchers created WhatsApp platform for all the sampled respondents and administered the questionnaire through the platform. By so doing, the stress of interpersonal administration of instrument was obviated without undermining the rate of instrument return.

The method of data analysis used in this study was descriptive statistics (i.e. charts, frequency counts, and mean ratings). Responses to the demographic question were presented and analyzed with a simple bar chart, while the Likert scale items were analysed, using mean rating. To do that, the mean values of the responses to each of the Likert scale item that are the same or above the mean cut-off point of 2.5 were deemed agreed or accepted, while those below it were deemed disagreed or rejected.

The cluster means of all the responses to the statements designed for each of the two research questions were compared with the cut off mean of 2.5 in order to draw conclusions, accepting or rejecting each of the two research questions. Ali (2006) defined descriptive statistics as a means of describing and explaining observed events in their natural settings without any experimental treatment and control manipulations.

V. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Out of the 384 samples drawn for this study, only 372 persons, representing 96.88 percent participated in the survey. This represent a higher rate of instrument return, since a study conducted by Baruch (1984) found a median response rate of between 40 percent and 80 percent as appropriate.

FIGURE I: Distribution of the Respondents by Sex

	MALE	FEMALE
■Series1	251	121
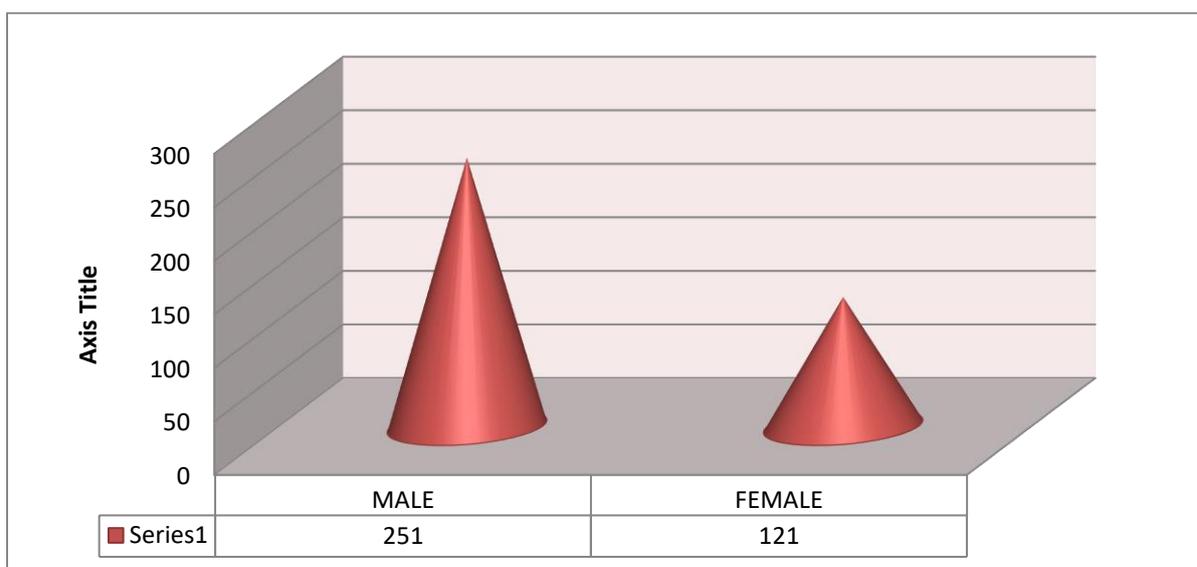
As shown in Figure 1, out of the 372 persons who responded to the questionnaire, 251 representing 67.47 percent are males, while 121 respondents or 32.53 percent are females.

Presentation and Analysis of Data on Research Question One

Research Question One: To what extent were Nigerian electorates, especially the youths, politically educated and motivated to vote during the 2023 general election on account of the information provided to them via *Facebook* and *Twitter* by the presidential candidates?

TABLE I: Mean Ratings of Respondents' Level of Agreement/Disagreement that they were Politically Educated and Mobilized to Vote during the 2023 General Election through the Information Provided to them via *Facebook* and *Twitter* by the Presidential Candidates

S/N	ITEMS/STATEMENTS	Responses						Remark
		SA	A	D	SD	$\overline{X}$	STD	
1.	Social media are important tool for political advertising.	140	91	96	45	2.88	1.05	Agreed
2.	Social media, especially *Twitter* and *Facebook,* can be effectively used for political education and awareness creation.	169	122	4	77	2.7	1.1	Agreed
3.	Presidential candidates used *Twitter* and *Facebook* to communicate with voters before and during the 2023 general elections.	138	99	67	68	2.83	1.12	Agreed
4.	The presidential candidates used *Twitter* and *Facebook* to educate the voters about the electoral process.	151	87	86	48	2.92	1.07	Agreed
5.	The presidential candidates used *Twitter* and *Facebook* to mobilize the voters to support their candidature.	161	138	40	33	3.15	0.93	Agreed
	Cluster Total					14.48	5.27	
	Cluster Mean					2.9	1.05	

Source: Field Data, 2023

Table I.I above shows the mean ratings of the responses of the sampled respondents to the five items that focused on the first research question. The frequencies pooled by each of the response categories are shown while the remark, "Agree", in columns 9 is based on the mean ratings of the responses to each item. As pointed out earlier, an item is deemed "Agreed" or "Accepted" if the mean value is 2.5 or above. Otherwise, it is "Disagreed" or "Rejected".

The mean ratings of all the responses to items 1 to 5 on the research instrument are all greater than the mean cut-off point of 2.5. These indicate that the respondents agreed/accepted the assertions contained in those five (5) items. For instance, the respondents agreed that social media are important tool for political advertising, that social media, especially *Twitter* and *Facebook,* can be effectively used for political education and awareness creation, that presidential candidates used *Twitter* and *Facebook* to communicate with them before and during the 2023 general elections, that the presidential candidates used *Twitter* and *Facebook* to educate them about the electoral process, and that the presidential candidates used *Twitter* and *Facebook* to mobilize them to support their candidature.

The cluster mean value of 2.9 pooled by the respondent voters in all the five (5) items is greater than the cut-off mean value of 2.5. This means that the first research question was answered in the affirmative. Hence, Nigerian electorates, especially the youths, were politically educated and mobilized to vote during the 2023 general election going by the information provided to them via *Facebook* and *Twitter* by the presidential candidates.

Presentation and Analysis of Data on Research Question Two

Research Question Two: Was the voting behaviour of the social media users influenced by the messages relayed by the candidates through *Twitter* and *Facebook*?

Table 2 below shows the mean ratings of the responses of the sampled respondents to item numbers 6 to 10 that focused on the second research question. Again, the remarks, "Agree" and "Disagree", in columns 9 are based on the mean ratings of the responses to each item. Item that pooled the mean value of 2.5 or is above it is deemed "Agreed" or "Accepted", while those below it are "Disagreed" or "Rejected".

Table II: Mean Ratings of Respondents' Level of Agreement/Disagreement that their Voting Behaviour was Influenced by the Messages Relayed by The Candidates through *Twitter* and *Facebook*

S/N	ITEMS/STATEMENTS	Responses						Remark
		SA	A	D	SD	$\overline{X}$	STD	
6.	The use of *Twitter* and *Facebook* for political education and mobilization during the 2023 general election was effective.	37	52	170	113	2.03	0.92	Disagreed
7.	Messages conveyed through *Twitter* and *Facebook* provided the electorates with sufficient information about the personality of the contestants.	52	60	146	114	2.15	1	Disagreed
8.	*Twitter* and *Facebook* messages provided the electorate sufficient details about the manifesto of the presidential candidates.	21	45	103	162	1.58	0.89	Disagreed
9.	The electorates believed the messages conveyed by the contestants through *Twitter* and *Facebook*.	161	138	40	33	3.15	0.93	Agreed
10.	Messages shared by the presidential candidates through *Twitter* and *Facebook* influenced the voting behaviour of the electorate during the election of 2023.	23	61	210	78	2.08	0.79	Disagreed
	Cluster Total					**10.99**	**4.53**	
	Cluster Mean					**2.2**	**0.91**	

Source: Field Data, 2023

Unlike Table 1, it is shown in Table 2 that the sampled respondents agreed with only one out of the five (5) items that that focused on research question two, which sought to ascertain whether the voting behaviour of the sampled social media users was influenced by the messages relayed by the presidential candidates through *Twitter* and *Facebook*. The respondents believed the messages conveyed by the presidential candidates through *Twitter* and *Facebook*, but disagreed with the assertions that the use of *Twitter* and *Facebook* for political education and mobilization during the 2023 general election was effective, that messages conveyed through *Twitter* and *Facebook* provided them sufficient information about the personality of the contestants and the manifesto of the presidential candidates. They also rejected the assertion that messages shared by the presidential candidates through *Twitter* and *Facebook* influenced their voting behaviour during the election of 2023

The fact that the cluster mean value of 2.2 is below the cut-off mean of 2.5 at 0.91 standard deviation furnished a strong premise to conclude that there was no nexus between the messages provided by the candidates through the social media and the voting behaviour of the sampled respondents.

VI. FINDINGS

The findings of this research work are presented in relation to each of the two research questions framed by the researchers. Regarding research question one which sought to find out the extent to which Nigerian electorates, especially the youths, were politically educated and mobilized to vote during the 2023 general election through the social media (*Facebook* and *Twitter*) by the presidential candidates, the following findings were made:

1. That all the presidential candidates in the 2023 general election considered the social media as an important tools for political advertising, and therefore used them (*Twitter* and *Facebook*) to communicate with voters;

2. That social media, especially *Twitter* and *Facebook,* were used by the presidential candidates to educate the voters and create awareness about their manifestoes and candidature; and

3. That the presidential candidates used *Twitter* and *Facebook* to educate the voters about the electoral process and to mobilize them to support their candidature.

In relation to research question two, the study, however, found out as follows:

1. That although the voters believed the messages relayed to them via *Twitter* and *Facebook*, they considered them ineffective; and

2. That messages conveyed through *Twitter* and *Facebook* did not provide the sampled voters sufficient information about the personality of the presidential candidates. They also failed to provide details about the manifesto of the presidential candidates, and as such, did not influence the voting behaviour of the sampled voters during the election.

VII. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The popularity of the social media has grown exponentially because of the varied uses to which they are put. In the areas of politics and governance, social media potentials are being leveraged upon by candidates in elections to "sell" their programme and curry voters support. They are also used in social and political mobilization by governments.

In Nigeria, during the 2023 general election, political parties and contestants used the social media to communicate with their supporters and the general public. However, given the findings of this study, the expected results of such engagements were not realized because the messaging fell short of the expected design, especially in term of contents. That explains why Nigerian electorates, especially the youths, were not influenced by information provided to them via *Facebook* and *Twitter* by the presidential candidates.

Against the backdrop of the foregoing, the researchers recommend as follows:

1. A more robust social media political communication that should be detailed, truthful, believable and convincing. This is because one of the most important attributes of the source in persuasive communication is his/her credibility. Once the receivers believe the source of a message, they can easily be swayed by it; and

2. A sustained engagement with the voters through social media platforms so as to provide them sufficient information necessary for making voting decision.

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