

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTION CAMPAIGNS IN NIGERIAN POLITICS (2014-2023)

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ABSTRACT

Social media is playing a key role in electioneering campaigns in Nigerian democracy. It is widely used to mobilize support for political parties and candidates during electioneering processes. The researchers are motivated to carry out this research because of the role which social media plays in Nigeria's politics. The problem which this paper addressed is that although social media usage is playing significant role in Nigeria's politics, yet some people feel that it does not make considerable impact. Such positions make people overlook the opportunities which social media brings in Nigeria's democratic processes. However, social media usage has made politicians and political parties to reach out to potential voters more easily through their supporters on different social media platforms. The aim of this paper is to examine the significance of social media usage during election campaigns in Nigerian politics. The specific objectives include the following: to examine social media usage during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria from 2014-2023, and to find out the significance of social media usage during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria. This research employed the use of qualitative method with a focus on qualitative content data on X and Facebook and oral interview. The researcher chose qualitative method where content data were collected on X and Facebook as well as oral and phone call interviews conducted. The researcher collected qualitative content data on X, and Facebook and conducted oral and phone call interviews of 56 people who are familiar with social media and election campaign in Nigerian politics. The findings of this research reveal that there is a high level of social media usage during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria from 2014 to 2023. Similarly, responsible social media usage is significant for electioneering campaigns in Nigeria. In view of the above findings, the researchers recommend that Nigerian politicians and electorates should use social media in responsible ways in order to promote healthy democratic campaigns.

Keywords: Social Media, Election Campaign, Political communication, Nigerian Election, Digital Politics

Introduction

Electioneering campaign constitutes a central component of democratic electoral processes. Political contestants usually deploy a range of strategies to reach voters and communicate their messages in order to get their support. They rely on traditional media, new media, public events, written materials, and other communication channels to gain voters' trust and secure electoral victory (Open Election Data Initiative, section 3). The emergence of social media in recent time has made many Nigerian politicians to leverage on the various opportunities it provides for campaign purposes. Although social media usage during electioneering processes has made campaign to gradually go online, yet there are instances where some people felt that it does not make significant impact on Nigeria's politics. Such view undermines the significant role of social media in promoting healthy democracy. The researchers are of the view that underrating the role of social media in this digital age is not helpful for Nigerian politics. For the emergence of social media has made campaign to be easier and less costly. Social media has enabled politicians to easily convey their campaign messages to potential voters across geographical, cultural and religious boundaries without organizing political rallies.

It was against this backdrop that the researchers conduct this study. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine the significance of social media usage during election campaigns in Nigerian politics. The specific objectives are: to examine social media usage during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria from 2014-2023, and to find out the significance of social media usage during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria. The main question which this study sought to answer is: What are the significances of social media usage on Nigerian politics?

Conceptual Review

There is no universal agreement on the definition of social media because of the continually evolving nature and role which social media plays in enabling people to communicate across dimensions, platforms, and geographical regions (Luttrell and Adrienne 21; Langmia et al par. 1). According to Muswede "The concept of digital media is a 21st-century phrase used to define all forms of digital communication related to the internet as it describes the interplay between technology, text, images, and sound in the context of information production and consumption (quoted Lindgren 41). Social media also refer to "those internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute and search for information online" (Madu 3003). Similarly, it was defined as web-based media platforms that offer citizens the opportunity and place to connect, share opinions, experiences, views, knowledge, contact, expertise, and other things like job and career tips (Madu 3003).

Furthermore, social media is said to be "A group of internet-based applications that build on ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allows the creation and exchange of user-generated contents" (Priyowidodo and Sari 129). Web 2.0 refers to "the state of web from 2004 till date, a period when interactive websites emerged as opposed to 'web 1.0' which describes the state of the web prior to 2004" (John and Ibe 25). Examples of Web 2.0 includes web-based communities, social networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, and blogs.

Langmia et al defines "Social media are sites which allow potentially large groups of people, who are not bound by time and geography, (a platform) to express thoughts, ideology, creativity and professional goals within networks of individuals that might not otherwise have even known each other" (par. 5). The concept of social media was summed up by Madu as "online communities where people can interact with friends, family, coworkers, acquaintances, and others with similar interests" (3004). Essentially, 'New Media' (another name for social media) should be understood as series of platforms which encompasses a vast field of digital activity including web logs (blogs), micro-blogging (such as Twitter), Social Media (like Facebook), video-sharing (as on YouTube), online reporting (by both institutions and

individuals) and Really Simple Syndication feeds (RSS) which helps people to avoid the conventional methods of obtaining news and information (Democratic Progress Institute 12). It was further noted that new Media is synonymous with digital mass media which provides peer-to-peer communication as it involves the usage of mobile devices from cell phones and smartphones to computers and laptops (Democratic Progress Institute 12).

Theoretical Framework

The researchers used Media System Dependency Theory is the theory which this research used to help explain the main thrust of the thesis. This theory was first introduced in Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach's 1974 article titled "Information Perspective." Media system dependency theory (MSD) (also known as Media Dependency Theory) was developed as a social theory which helps to explain the power of mass media (Kim quoted Ball-Rokeach 1). MSD explains the origins of mass media power and its implications on the society and individuals. This was rightly put by Kim when he says "In short, MSD was developed as a social theory of mass media that put the media in relation to other larger social transformations, contextual changes, and in dynamic relationships with other systems and individual users" (3). Media Dependency Theory is said to be "a systematic approach to the study of the effects of mass media on audiences and of the interactions between media, audiences, and social systems" (Lin par. 1). This theory shows that the extent of the media's influence is proportional to the degree of dependence of individuals and social systems on the media.

There are many historical backgrounds that has influenced the development of Media System dependency theory. For instance, the sociological attention that was given to the impacts of mass media to the postwar period was the first reason for the development of this theory. It was noted that the theory was develop when "individuals needed to have access to mass media to understand their social, political, and economic environments and act effectively and meaningfully in society where levels of complexity and differentiation had increased with urbanization, industrialization, and modernization" (Kim 2). Although this theory did not argue about how social media can transform electioneering process, however, it helps in connecting major transformational changes that are happening in Nigeria democracy as a result of the impact of social media usage during electioneering campaign. In fact, the platforms for political discourse and exchange of ideas provided by social media are well explained by Media System Dependency theory (MSD). The use of this theory helps in explaining how social media plays significant roles in shaping people's attitudes, beliefs and values during electioneering processes in Nigeria.

Methodology

The researchers used qualitative method to conduct this research. The researchers chose qualitative content analysis and oral interview as design because the research is multidimensional; hence, it requires multiple data to help answer the research questions and achieve the overall aim. The population of a study is the total number of individuals or items which the research is expected to cover in a study (Abdurahman 70). Going by this, the target population of this research work comprises politicians and electorates in Nigeria. The number of data to be collected for academic research varies from the type of research. In view of this, the interviewed 56 people as sample as well as moderate data on X and Facebook. The sampling procedure that was used in the qualitative content data collection and oral interview data collection is purposeful sampling. The researchers conducted purposeful sampling of the qualitative content data on X and Facebook handles, and interviewed politicians, and electorates who are well informed on the subject matter in the periods under study. The researcher collected qualitative content data on X, and Facebook, through the use of defined multiple keywords, the use of phrases that capture the items on the aim and objectives of the research. They also interviewed politicians and electorates on the Plateau. The data collected

were sorted out and harmonized according relevant themes that are in line with the objectives of the study.

Literatures on Social Media Usage During Electioneering Campaigns

There is a gradual paradigm shift in the use of media in electioneering campaigns in our world today. Although traditional medias like Newspaper, radio, magazines, and television have been instrumental in political campaigns, however, at the turn of 21st Century attention has been turned to social media platforms because of the impacts it has in transforming political systems. It was observed that social media is considered as “The common source of information about election campaign in democracies and societies in transition around the world” (John and Ibe quoted Macnamava 23). Although the above literature has shown that social media usage has brought about gradual shift because of the development we have experienced in this digital age, yet many people do not acknowledge this development in Nigeria’s politics. It is interesting to see that social media has made political campaigns in advanced countries to rely “heavily on online communication platforms to gain support in campaigns” (Guse 7). It was observed that social media has become “a formidable medium for mobilizing political campaigns” this is because social media sites have become effective way for politicians to reach out to the electorates (John and Ibe 23; Vonderschmitt 2). The above literatures agree with the current study because they have shown that social media usage for campaign purposes is a significant development. Nevertheless, they differ with this study because while the work by Guse focused on US Presidential election, the current work is focusing on Nigerian elections. Similarly, the work by Vonderschmitt was written to show how to use Facebook, X and YouTube for campaign purposes.

Furthermore, Shastri noted that the increasing social media usage, and growing internet penetration due to increased usage of smart-phones on the one hand and saturation of traditional mediums on the other, has made social media to offer the perfect platform for political parties to reach audiences worldwide (50). As a result of that “Digital media is changing the way political parties interact with voters bridging the gap like never before” (Shastri 50). This has made communication via social media to bring politicians and parties closer to their potential voters, thereby allowing politicians to communicate faster and reach citizens in a more targeted manner that can influence voters’ choice (Shastri 50). The work by shastri shows that social media has brought about obvious change in communicating campaign messages and electioneering processes. Although this study was carried out to highlight the role of social media in political campaign in India, nevertheless, it can also help in providing literary context for the current study because it shows how social media is playing significant role during electioneering campaigns.

For instance, Barack Obama in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election, used social media to reach out millions of voters, engage with them to vote for him. Although his campaign was not the first to use the social media to engage with voters, but it was said that he was “the first to do so with that level of success, and it is clear their work transferred into actual votes” (Vonderschmitt 2). Another reason why campaign is gradually going online on the social media which the above literatures did not discuss is that access to political information is less costly. Even before the advent of social media it was noted that “The ‘unpaid’ media tends to attract substantially more attention than paid advertising, especially among those watching, reading or listening ‘often’” (Forrest and Marks 101).

Social media use in electioneering campaigns is gradually becoming a subject of interest to scholars as Adeiza rightly observes “The use of social media in electioneering campaigns by political candidates as well as political parties in our world today is gradually becoming a subject of extensive research by many scholars” (9). It was observed that the better social connections which people have through the use of different social media platforms “have made scholars to research into the ‘transformational effects they may have on how politicians

disseminate information, engage citizens, and mobilize support” (Adeiza 9). Guse observed that over the last decade:

Political campaigns have increasingly used social media to help shape the public’s perceptions of candidates. They have resorted to making use of the social media platforms in electioneering campaigns because the platforms allow the public to produce original content through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, to mention a few (4).

The easy access to political discussion on social media is gradually making social media to change voters’ perceptions of on issues that determine the political candidates to vote.

The work by Adeiza is relevant to this work because conducted to find out the role of digital media on campaign in Nigeria. however, since the study was conducted in 2016, it is possible that the power of social media in electioneering processes have considerably changed in the subsequent years, hence, the research has covered more scope than the one conducted by Adeiza.

The 2012 US Presidential election is widely considered as “The first election cycle to heavily incorporate and rely on the use of social media in a strategic political marketing” (Guse 9). It was opined that “Barack Obama in his 2008 and 2012 election campaigns- relied heavily on the use of online interfacing platforms to converse with the electorate and his supporters fondly referred to as ‘friends of Obama’” (Akinyetun, Odeyemi and Alausa 177). A popular narrative holds that “Twitter played a decisive role in American presidential elections” (Fujiwara, Müller and Schwartz 1496). Obama was said to be “The first to dive into the world of social media campaigning, with profiles on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, Google+, and Youtube” (Guse 9). It is interesting to note that Obama did not only use his social media profiles to relay his political ideology to voters, but “he used it to interact with those following, gaining response and interest through online communication” (Guse 9). Many people have seen the decisive role which social media played in American elections as “part of social media’s broader influence in polarization and re-emergence of populist politicians in many countries” (Fujiwara, Müller and Schwartz 1496).

Nigeria and other African countries are said to experience increasing number of people, political parties, and political analysts who have accounts in one or more social media platforms. This was made possible through the increasing availability and penetration of internet connectivity, and access to smart phones (Adeiza 9). It was noted that “Although social media dates back to the early 1990s, it was not only until the mid-2000s that it gained popularity in Africa. Today, Africa is the second continent with rapid social media growth (Amenyeawu 5). Report has shown that as of 2023, “mobile phone subscribers have risen to from just over 366,000 in 2001 to over 150 million active lines as of July 2015. During the same period, internet users rose from 200,000 to 93 million” (NCC as quoted by Adeiza 9). The internet technologies have now provided access to major social connectors and have given rise to active platforms for electioneering campaigns processes.

In view of the above, the advent of social media has made political office-seekers and political parties to utilize the vast opportunities it provided to carry out electioneering campaigns and scouting for vote. In fact, Friedman as quoted by John and Ibe noted that “The political theatre for most successful electioneering campaigns in today’s world is located in the social media and most electoral battles nowadays are fought and won through social media” (24). In view of this Amenyewu says “Politics like other disciplines have in recent times been influenced by social media too. Television, radio, and print media continue to contribute to political campaign communication however, social media plays a significant role in today’s political campaign communication” (6). It is important to state here that failure to acknowledge the significant role of social media in this world of digital communication could be regarded as unseriousness. Amenyewu has argued in her paper that Ghana has set the pace for other

African countries by actively using social media in its political campaigns over the past ten years.

Research has shown that Goodluck Jonathan is the first Nigerian president to apply social media strategy for electioneering campaign. President Goodluck Jonathan was said to have “embraced an online information management strategy in his 2011 presidential election campaigns through his web page; www.goodluckjonathanfor2011.com, and subsequently declared his interest to vie for the number one office in the country. President Jonathan, obviously aware of the remarkable impact of social media, chose to build his electoral popularity around the digital interface” (Akinyetun, Odeyemi and Alausa 177). Stating the role of social media in electioneering processes, Ikem as quoted by Akinyetun, Odeyemi and Alausa argues that “Social media is a useful political tool used to mobilized political support, rally political support, and induce political conversation” (178). This clearly shows that social media is a powerful tool in electioneering campaigns

The current work is similar to the reviewed literatures because they have shown that social media usage is a reality that cannot be avoided in politics in this digital age. However, they differ with the current work because this study employs the use content data on X and Facebook as well as interview to justify the claim of the research. Similarly, while some of the works were conducted to address similar things happening in other countries, this study is addressing Nigerian context.

Data Presentation on Social Media Usage During Electioneering Campaigns in Nigeria from 2014 to 2023

This section presents data from the interview as well as X and Facebook on social media usage during electioneering campaigns. The data from the interview shows that 56(100%) of the people interviewed said Facebook was used during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria from 2014 to 2023, 50(89.29%) said Facebook as well as X were used, 45(80.36%) said Facebook, X and WhatsApp were used for electioneering campaigns, 40(71.43%) said Facebook, X, WhatsApp as well as You Tube were used. This is followed by 35(62.5%) who said Facebook, X, WhatsApp, You Tube as well as Instagram were used, and 33(58.93%) said Facebook, X, WhatsApp, You Tube, Instagram as well as TikTok. What could be deduce from the above data is that electioneering campaigns have got wider publicity and coverage in the period under review because of the different social media platforms that were used. More so, social media has made it easier for political parties/ candidates to reach out to the electorates with their campaign messages and manifestos than the traditional way of campaign rally.

Similarly, there are data from X and Facebook which shows social media usage in Nigerian election. The use of social media during electioneering campaigns is a reality in Nigeria politics. There are arguments on social media platforms which clearly show that Nigerian politicians have taken campaign to online communities through the use of different social media platforms. It was noted by Chlorpheniramine @VictorIsrael that “For the first time in the history of elections in Nigeria, nobody has the monopoly to campaign manipulation. We don’t have to listen to a particular person before we will know who to vote because all of us now na (are) INFLUENCERS”. A social media user named Follow The Money Int’l @4lowthe money posted on his X handle what Reuters wrote about how social media eased Buhari’s pathway to power. He said “Buhari used social media to rebrand image. A good deal of that rebranding happened online, where campaigning from smartphones can build momentum at low cost”.

In addition, Ayò-Bánkólé Akintújoyè @AyoBankole said that “Pres. Buhari and the APC government are the biggest beneficiaries of social media advocacy in Nigeria. They masterminded toxic campaigns targeted against the person of a more accommodating GEJ. They won, and now want to take away the weapon from the citizens”. Similarly, Aku N’esi Obi Ike (I) in his reply to @Orji_Okosisi1 said that APC hired over 200 social media

influencers to campaign for their party. In addition, Doyin @doyinokupe in his reply to @firstladyship agreed with him that online presence and campaign have electoral value in reducing voter's apathy in 2023 general election when he says "Yes sir. They think online presence and campaign hv (have) no electoral value. Lies. Wt (with) present zeal and commitment of 30m online users, Nigeria is about to witness the influx of a massive, highly enlightened and committed patriots in the electoral space. Major political upset on d (the) way (sic)" Cyprian, Is Nyakundi @C_NyakundiH elaborate on this that "A few years ago, they used to dismiss social media as just a passing cloud but now we are seeing defeated status quo old fellas lament about social media... With social media, we can reach everyone, even our grandparents instantly. A simple WhatsApp status, an X post, or a TikTok video can spread far and wide, crossing different groups and platforms through cross-pollination".

More so, Osaretin Victor Asemota @asemota commenting on the usage of social media during 2023 Nigeria general election that "When I wrote this long ago, people mocked it here on twitter. Now, they are not mocking Peter Obi's movement anymore, they are scared of them. All largely organized online. The future of election campaign is digital." In addition, A Field Marshal of the Han Dynasty @G... says "During the election, they gaslighted you with, "real voters are not on social media," blab bla bla, but they forgot that it was those on the social media that took the campaign to the streets, organized voter education and PVC collection drives!". Similarly, SERAP @SERAPNigeria says "THEN: President Buhari's inauguration speech on May 29, 2015: "I thank those who tirelessly carried and supported our campaign on the social media." Furthermore, X handler A Field Marshal of the Han Dynasty @G... said "They want you to believe that social media is irrelevant in the election but everything we know about Atiku, Tinubu, Kwankaso, their spokespersons and campaigns, we learned on social media."

In view of the above, the researchers examined two social media platforms namely X, and Facebook, using four dominant political parties to find out social media usage during electioneering campaigns from 2014 to 2023. The political parties that were used include: All Progressive Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP), New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The researcher chose the above political parties because they were the dominant political parties in the period under review. The results from this study are presented below:

All the political parties that have been chosen in this survey have X accounts that been dedicated for campaign besides their official handles. For instances, North West Presidential Campaign @ApcAmbassadors, APC Surulere Campaign Council @surulere4TGSEE, NIGERIA FOOTBALL FANS FOR APC CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION @ONEFOOTBALLONE1, APC Campaign Arena @apc_campaign, APC – Gida – Gida @APCGIDAGIDATOUR, Nigeria Football Fans APC Campaign Org @NFFC_org, APC Campaign Network Osun @osun_network. Furthermore, PDP have the following X accounts for campaign purposes: PDP Campaign Organization @CampaignPdp, DOORSTEP CAMPAIGN – PDP NORTH WEST @Doorsteppdp, state chapters PDP campaign X platforms, PDP Campaign Ambassadors Group @CampaignAmbass1, pdp campaign group @okowa5gov2015, PDP CAMPAIGN ANTHEM @pdpcamAnthem. Labour Party and NNPP on the other hand have the following X handles for campaign purposes: LABOUR PARTY CAMPAIGN TEAM @Labourpartynig2, NNPP 1 Vote Nationwide Campaign @nnpp1vote.

The above political parties also have active Facebook accounts for their political mobilization and campaigns purposes. For instance, APC have the following accounts on Facebook: A.P.C Groups Nigeria, All Progressive Congress- APC, APC Nigeria, APC Youth Wing- Anambra State Chapter, APC Southwest, APC 2015, APCUK, London Branch, APC Youth Supporters network, APC REBIRTH, APC Forum, APC-USA Chapters, APC Facebook accounts at regional and state levels etc. PDP also have the following Facebook accounts for

political mobilization: PDP Political Platform Worldwide, PDP News Page, PDP Campaign Networks, PDP Grassroots Movement Worldwide. The Party also has PDP Mobilizers at states and local governments levels, PDP Youth Mobilization at states and local government levels etc.

Labour Party also have active Facebook accounts like Labour Party – LP Nigeria, Labour Party Nigeria (Labour Party), LABOUR PARTY, Obedient Movement, Nigeria Obidient Movement (PETER OBI) 2023, The Obidient Youth Movement of Nigeria, OBI-dient Youth Movement, Obidient Movement (Digital creator), OBIdient Movement (News Personality). Furthermore, NNPP have the following Facebook accounts for its political mobilization and campaigns: NEW NIGERIA PEOPLE’S PARTY NNPP, Kwansiyya Nigeria Online Group, KWANKWASIYYA NIGERIA ONLINE NETWORK, New Nigeria People’s Party Facebook handles for states and local governments, ABBA GIDA GIDA MEDIA GROUP KANO, ABBA GIDA GIDA KWANKWASIYYA MEDIA FORUM, Abba Gida Gida Governor House, Abba Gida-Gida, ABBA GIDA GIDA 2023 insha Allah, ABBA Gida-Gida. It is interesting to find out that there are about 45 Facebook groups campaigners handles for Abba Gida Gida of Kano State.

Significance of Social Media on Nigerian Politics

The data from the interview, X and Facebook reveals that although social media has its negative impacts on Nigeria democracy, yet it is a good initiative that plays significant role during electioneering campaign. Although 8.93% (5) out of the 56 people interviewed said social media did not make any significant impact during electioneering campaigns, nevertheless, 91.07% (51) of the people interviewed said that social media has played significant role during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria in the period under review. The data shows that although we cannot rule out negative impact of social media on Nigerian election, however, it has played the significant roles during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria. For instance, Reynolds, while speaking about the usage of social media during electioneering campaigns said “Take Peter Obi for instance. He came in as a latecomer, but through the use of social media, he was able to garner support more than all his other fellow competitors. So, social media is a strong tool that can be used for political election year and campaigns (Interview).

The above confirm what Oladimeji Bolarinwa MSc, MBA @AKak... said on X that “Elections, democracy, education and news media will be determined by social media in the next few years.” Similarly, Koniyinsola noted that although social media did not make much impact in the previous elections, its significant impacts started from 2015, and it started making more impact from 2018 to 2023, especially on the young people (Interview). This agrees with the position of Macnamava as quoted by John and Ibe who saw social media as “The common source of information about election campaign in democracies and societies in transition around the world” (John and Ibe 23).

The question now is: in which ways did social media played significant roles during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria from 2014 to 2023? Williams said that social media platforms have played a significant role in Nigerian election in the period under review; it has played the role of mobilizing voters, especially the youth. It has also contributed to spreading campaign messages faster than even traditional media (Interview). Similarly, Chagwa is of the view that social media usage has played significant role during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria through voters’ mobilization. He said “Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have been used to mobilize voters, share campaign messages, and promote candidates” (Interview). In fact, Agyeno noted that the Obedient Movement began on the social media with four people, and it gained attraction mostly through social media (Interview). It is important to note that social media does not only provide political mobilization but it also creates real time political debates and amplified positive political engagements. Interestingly,

social media has become a major tool for political influence which helps in shaping public opinions on politics. The use of social media has indeed foster communication during campaign processes and it was effectively used to sensitize voters on the right candidate to choose.

The significant role which social media usage plays during electioneering cannot be over emphasized. This is the reason why Guse said political campaigns rely “heavily on online communication platforms to gain support in campaigns” (Guse 7). It was also observed that social media has become “a formidable medium for mobilizing political campaigns” this is because social media sites have become effective ways for politicians to reach out to the electorates (John and Ibe 23; Vonderschmitt 2). Although Guse’s work addressed the role of social media in presidential election cycles in America, and that of John and Ibe looked at the role of social media in preparing electorates for 2019 election in Cross Rivers, and Vonderschmitt work was on how to use social media for effective political campaign, yet those works have agreed with the findings of this research on the usage of social media for political campaigns in Nigeria.

Similarly, Yusuf Garba and Ali Ibrahim respectively said “Social media played a significant role in promoting candidates” and “It has created awareness and platforms to know which candidate is more competent than the other” (Interview). This is true because the use of social media has increased the popularity of many political candidates in Nigeria, especially in 2023 general election. one of the ways in which social media promotes political candidates is through advertising their manifestos and good records. Manomi spoke extensively on the significance of social media during electioneering campaigns when he said

Social media usage is a reality in Nigerian politics and it has played significant role as it has provided an alternative campaign platform for many political candidates. Lots of debates among voters do take place on social media concerning which candidate is better and why. The fact that many politicians have social media representatives who post their activities regularly show that they understand the power of social media. Therefore, those who ran coordinated and vigorous social media campaign gain significant popularity beyond what they could have otherwise gotten, thereby increasing their political prospects (Interview).

Shekarau outlined the significant role which social media played as follows: It creates constant public awareness about electoral processes and activities, it encourages citizens’ participation in politics, it discourages voter apathy, it makes the conduct and misconduct of INEC more visible, and it facilitates election campaign (Interview). Similarly, James Garba said social media plays significant role during electioneering campaigns by “helping political parties organized their members ahead of election during those election years” (Interview). While Amir Umar Abubakar said “It helped in giving the electorates a firsthand information regarding the manifestos of the aspirants”, while Shitu said “social media has played significant role because of the voter education it provides” (Interview). It is obvious from the above that social media has made political processes to get wider publicity and provide voter education to the citizens. This has gone a long way in encouraging citizens to participate actively in voting.

More so, Luka noted that social media has, indeed, played a very significant role in Nigeria electioneering campaigns from 2014 to 2023. He said “During this period, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and later TikTok became major channels for political communication. They allowed politicians to reach millions of Nigerians quickly, especially the youth, without relying only on traditional media such as television or newspaper. Social media made it easier to share their ideas, manifestos, and campaign messages directly with the public without needing frequent rallies” (Interview).

The above discuss shows the significance of social media usage during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria. The data have revealed that social media has made mobilization of voters

to be easier. Before the emergence of social media politicians used the traditional media outlets like radio and television stations, newspaper, posters, campaign rallies, door to door campaign to mobilize voters. These processes are costly and time consuming, and sometimes ineffective, but the emergence of social media made things easy. A social media post, tagging and reposting can mobilize great number of supporters for political parties and candidates. It is easier to mobilize supporters on social media because Chlorpheniramine @VictorIsrael noted on his X handle that everybody has become social media influencer during electioneering processes. Shastri who carried out a study in order to highlight the role of social media in political campaign in India, noted that the increasing social media usage, and growing internet penetration due to increased usage of smart-phones on the one hand and saturation of traditional mediums on the other, has made social media to offer the perfect platform for political parties to reach audiences worldwide (50).

The significant roles which social media plays during electioneering processes in Nigeria made many politicians to employ the services of social media influencers/ celebrities to campaign for them. There are data from social media which shows that political parties in Nigeria employed the services of social media influencers to campaign for them. For instance, Aku N’esi Obi Ike (I) in his reply to @Orji_Okosisi1 said that APC hired over 200 social media influencers to campaign for their party. Similarly, Chagwa in an interview noted that there are instances where politicians and political parties employed the services of social media influencers/ celebrities for campaign purposes during Nigerian general elections from 2014 to 2023 (Interview). In addition, Manomi also noted that “Many celebrities and social media influencers participated actively in the election by posting their favorite candidates on their platforms with large following, thereby increasing the popularity of their candidates” (Interview).

Conclusion

This paper aimed at examining the significance of social media usage during election campaigns in Nigerian politics. The findings of the research revealed that there is high level of social media usage during electioneering campaigns in Nigeria from 2014 to 2023. Similarly, responsible social media usage is significant for electioneering campaigns in Nigeria. As a result of this social media is gradually becoming a major and active platform for political mobilization, campaigns and awareness on political processes. It has become a platform for spreading campaign messages, a tool for exercising political influence and shaping public opinions on political matters. In view of the significance of social media usage in Nigerian elections, the researchers recommends that Nigerian politicians and electorates should use social in responsible ways in order to promote healthy democratic campaign, National Orientation Agency, religious leaders, and civil society organizations should be pro-active in creating awareness on the use of social media to promote issue-based campaigns, respectful political discourses, inclusive campaign messages, promotion of shared values and national identity, and dissemination of unbiased information during electioneering campaigns.

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