

Assessing the Impact of Social Media during the 2023 Presidential Election in Enugu Metropolis

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of the social media during the 2023 Nigeria's presidential election in Enugu metropolis. The objectives were to ascertain the frequency of the use of smart phones and social media platforms to get information about the 2023 presidential election, verify the social media platforms often used by the Enugu residents for such information, determine the extent in which the Enugu residents believed in the information and find out if the information in the social influenced their voting pattern. Public Sphere and Uses and Gratification theories formed the theoretical framework. The study adopted survey research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to administer copies of questionnaire on equal basis to the respondents who were social media literate in each layout. Wimmer and Dominick Online sample size calculator helped us to get the sample size of 384 from the population of 993,663. We used 375 copies for the fifteen layouts while nine copies were not useful for the analysis. The researchers used multistage sampling technique to administer the copies of questionnaire. Only 38.67% of the Enugu metropolis residents got information from the social media platforms regularly about the election. The residents most often use Facebook and WhatsApp on a daily basis than others. Social media platform information influenced 61.60% of the residents in political participation. In conclusion, social media platforms are desirable for political mobilisation in urban cities. Government, organisations and associations should encourage the use social media platforms to sensitise electorates before and during elections in addition to interpersonal communication.

Keywords: Social Media, Public Sphere, Political Participation, Governance

Introduction

Governance relates to the controlling of people in an environment in order to achieve the best result through effective participation of the people. In such democracy from the grassroot, the electorates have the power to elect or remove their representatives. As there are electoral malpractices, insecurity and partiality in appointment, Coker and George-Genyi (2014) as cited by Abah and Ibeogu (2018, pp. 22, 23) stated that "the perception of the present leadership in Nigeria entails a direct contrast of good governance and olden day's governance where every public office holder and their agent were seen to be credible, and the public had faith in their political activity." In one of the occasion held in Nigeria during the speech of Patrice Lumumba of Kenya, Lumumba lashed most of the African and Nigerian leaders as calling themselves "honourable members when they are horrible members." This implies that there is a high rate of dishonesty and corruption in governance now unlike in the First and Second Nigerian Republics from 1960 to 1966 and 1979 to 1983.

The social media is the best method of reaching many layouts in Enugu metropolis than the print and the broadcast media as face-to-face communication is no longer feasible for Enugu residents who are not from the same cultural background and state. During the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, the use of social media became popular through the Labour Party Presidential Candidate-Mr Peter Obi. The social media can instigate or quell crisis, state the affairs of the government and political parties with regard to political participation and good governance. The aspiring and the sit-tight legislators, administrators, electoral umpire and business people have used the social media in many form hence Aronson (2005, p. 636) submitted that "new communications and information technologies are beginning to enable advances in e-government, e-democracy and e-participation." Igbashangev, Abdullahi, Azua and Gbasha (2023) added that "before now, the most popular form of sending and receiving

information using the internet was the e-mail but now, there has been an upsurge in communication platforms in addition to e-mail.’’

The social media can mobilise people in urban cities to participate in governance. Government, most often, insist that all people from 18years and above should have their voters cards and show the evidence of having voted in any election if ever one has to benefit from government. Moreover, there should be an ideal representation of the people in each ward. Such representatives should show compassion to their subjects than being selfish. It is the same idea that Hoffman and Graham (2009, p. 118) stated that “in fact, increasing political participation is necessary for democracy and the argument for compulsory voting in elections should be taken seriously. It is misleading to argue that democracy involves either direct participation or representation. It involves both.”

Social media platforms are in vogue today for different organisations, ministries, financial institutions and associations for interaction, marketing, political meetings and messages through LinkedIn for professionals and Facebook used more by young people. Others are Twitter by politicians and professionals, Google for information and research as well as Instagram for advertisement and crowd pooling of the young ones. We have Flickr that is used to show illustrations such as charts, maps, pictures, statistics, line drawings, photographs, diagrams, images and other visual elements. In spite of the social media to achieve quick goals, terrorists, bandits, kidnappers and insurgents use the social media to show fearful and wicked pictures of their exploits. The study is justifiable because of killing of some of the political opponents and security agents during elections which the social media platforms show immediately the nefarious activities. It is also justifiable because the Enugu metropolis is a combination of people with different cultural background and states of origin. The audience are living in different layouts coupled with different housing/flat system. It is even noted that people living in the same compound do not know the name of each other except during compound meetings. In some densely populated areas, people also mind their businesses. Therefore, the social media platforms rank highest in mobilising the residents during any form of elections than the face-to-face communication. There are different platforms in the social media than the radio and the television news stories that are ephemeral and stationary unlike the smart phones with social media websites. Again, where to buy copies of the print media is not near in each of the street in each layout of Enugu metropolis.

Statement of the Research Problem

Nigeria election had been associated with violence, thuggery, ballot boxes snatching, re-writing of election results and arson. Lateef (2009) in Idowu (2011, p.115) further upheld that “in covering the election, the media reported the drawbacks – ballot snatching, physical attacks, brutalisation of opponents, intimidation of election monitors and journalists.” This later ends at the Supreme Court level with accusations against the judiciary. Ijere (2014, p. 49) therefore, lamented that “bad governance (political, economic and social governance) constitutes the major challenges to socio-economic development in Nigeria.” Some of the honest one do not like to participate in governance as they have branded it as “a dirty game.” That was why Hoffman and Graham (2009, pp.107, 108) upheld that “the model of elitist democracy, as it has, sometimes, been called, argued the case for a democracy with low participation. It could be argued, however, that low participation undermines democracy.” All electoral malpractices are exposed to the citizens within seconds of the incidents than with the print and the broadcast media. Citizens will reply through Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp Messenger, Spotify, Instagram and YouTube. Other political participants without smart phones with social media platforms rely on face-to-face communication. Social media are not easy to define rather it can be stated that there are some websites and platforms that are linked to it. This has eased human interactions, job schedules and business strategies of many active users. Olley and Ekharefor (2013) affirmed that “social media have become the engine of social movements in the world today. In many countries, citizens are being mobilised through their platforms...” However, Nwanne (2015, pp. 184-185) posited that “many have found deep agony through exposure to the social media. Many have even lost their lives in the process.” As a result, the above scenario prompted the researchers to assess the impact of social media during the 2023 Nigeria’s presidential election from the Enugu urban residents.

Objectives of the Study

The study was:

1. To ascertain the frequency of the use of smart phones and social media platforms during the 2023 presidential elections by Enugu residents.
2. To verify the social media platforms often used by the Enugu residents during the 2023 Nigeria's presidential election.
3. To determine the believability of the social media platforms information of the 2023 Nigeria's presidential election by the Enugu residents.
4. To find out whether the information got from various social media platforms influenced their voting pattern.

Research Questions

The following research questions were asked to guide this study.

1. To what extent is the frequency of the use of smart phones and social media platforms during the 2023 presidential elections by the Enugu residents?
2. What particular social media platforms were used by the Enugu metropolis residents during the 2023 Nigeria's presidential election?
3. Did the Enugu residents believe in the social media platform information for the 2023 Nigeria's presidential election?
4. Did the information got from the various social media platforms influence their voting pattern during the election?

Literature Review

Political Participation and Governance

Meaningful political participation and governance cannot be achieved in the present digital age by mere rallies, opinion leaders, political godfatherism and friends without social media which is popular among the youths from 18-40 years. The operators of the smart phones with social media platforms supply information with speed coupled with the scene pictures and illustrations as well as secret information that the print and the broadcast media may be avoiding to prevent prosecution. It was due to the above phenomena that Muhamud (2022) submitted that:

Political activism in the social media inspires people to model similar political behaviours, which in turn increases offline political participation. It may also generate interest and lay the foundation for offline political participation including organising, campaigning and voting in elections. However, it is clear that just being politically engaged online will not lead to democratic change and reform.

Some of the elements of good governance according to Onichakwe (2016, pp. 177-178) are "political accountability, regular elections...., participation by ... [all people], freedom of information, efficient and effective administrative system, transparency, rule of law, independence of the judiciary, co-operation by government and civil societies and bureaucratic accountability."

Abah & Ibeogu (2018, p.22) added that "good governance plays a crucial role in the development of the state economically and politically." In the same vein, urban city information on governance helps to inform the residents what is happening in each layout of Enugu metropolis. Udeze, Aja & Nwosu (2015, p.231) asserted that "good government observes social justice." Bad governance breeds instability, insecurity and different types of demonstration by various groups which lead to multiple grievances. In each of the grievances, social media is used to galvanise the support of members towards a particular line of action in favour or against government decisions. However, as we are in digital technology age, Aronson (2005, p.636" revealed that "governance issues grow more complicated. At each stage, governments and private firms react to new developments and consequences which in turn alter the dynamics of globalisation."

Citizen Participation or Political Participation

This is the involvement of the people in the services of political events, programmes or activities within their environment. These political activities may be initiated by the people themselves or their political leadership, representation or institution. (Nwodu & Agbanu, 2015, p.282). Political visits and exchange of ideas lead to political socialisation which can be faster attained through social media platforms and followed by other means. Wogu and Egwu (2020, p. 4) added that there is a “situation where people are educated about the politics of their countries. It is the process of internalising the political norms of one’s country.” Hoffman and Graham (2009, p.118) also stated that “in fact, increasing political participation is necessary for democracy and the argument for compulsory voting in elections should be taken seriously. It is misleading to argue that democracy involves either direct participation or representation. It involves both.” Moreover, Norris (2007, p. 630) in Boix (2007) submitted that “political participation focused extensively on forms of civic engagement which emphasise the role of citizens within representative democracy, including the channels influencing elections, governments and parties.” However, Lin and Kant revealed that social media help to “support policies and a high level of social media penetration rate are pre-conditions for more inclusive participation; enhances social inclusion by engaging participants, who may not be able to participate via traditional methods and facilitate interactions and different levels of citizen power, though the government still plays a leading role within top-down-approaches.” In spite of the above findings, there is the need for the combination of both the online and the offline mobilisation of citizens.

Social Media

Dollarhide (2021) emphasised that social media is “a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities.” Nwanne (2015, p.184) affirmed that “the internet has made a triumphant entry on the social media circuit, hence the availability and pervasiveness of the social media including, but not limited to Facebook and others.” The social media are internet-based application for purposes of sharing information Nafada (2012, p.21) stated that “*YouTube* was founded in February 2005 by Steve Chen, Chad Hurley and Jawed Karim. *Twitter* was founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey. Mark Zuckerberg founded *Facebook* in 2004.” Other common social media websites named by Nafada (2012, p.21) are “*MySpace*, *Netlog*, *Linkedin*, *2go*, *Badoo*, *Yahoo Messenger*, *Blogs*, *Blackberry Messenger (BBM)*...” *YouTube* is mainly used in sharing messages and conversations among groups. *Twitter* is a form of micro-blogging site which uses text messages to reach the audience. Facebook is a website used mostly by students, business persons and personalities to persuade their audience in accepting their ideas or seeking for friendship. Hoffman and Graham (2009, p.109) submitted that “... the internet, video conferencing, the digitisation of data, two way computer and television links through cable technology, citizens could remain at home and shape policies rather than rely upon representatives to do so. Clearly, such a technology has tremendous potential to empower citizens.”

The president and the state governors used the social media teleconferencing to resolve the issue of COVID-19 prevention by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). This was also replicated between the state governors and local government chairmen to control their boundaries. De Lacey & Leonard (2002), Radeliffe (2002) Starr (1997) upheld the views of Hoffman & Graham by stating that “scholars of media have long realised that “advances in computing and information technology are changing the way people meet and communicate. People can meet, talk, and work together outside traditional meeting and office spaces.” Hence, Aronson (2005, p.636) revealed that social media can “...also empower NGOs, firms, revolutionaries, terrorists, fundamentalist religious leaders, extremists of all stripes, criminal syndicates, and political subversives as well as well-meaning social movements, reformers and activists. Negatively, Ademosu and Oyeeye (2019, p. 74) revealed that the social media “has led to even more polarised societies and isolated individuals as is evident from the ravaging issues of hate speech and fake news in recent years.”

Citizens Verification of the Social Media Impact for Governance and Participation

Ogunlesi (2013, p.20) held that “the turning point for social media as a tool of political engagement in Nigeria was 2010.” President Goodluck Jonathan used the social media platform to win up to 500,000 fans. Other Nigerian

politicians emulated him.” In Australia, 86% of Australians access the internet, and with a 17,048,864 voting population” (<http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?countrycode+AU>). Wilson and Batta (2009, p.94) upheld that ICTs “...provide access to information and increase communication.” Social media have solved problems of distant communication. However, Hunter (1998) cited by Salawu (2007,p.27) concluded that “contrary to utopian view of an egalitarian online world where information and conversation lead to a new and better democracy, the net is often given to inequality, an overabundance of meaningless information, and vitriolic, irrational discourse.” This means that there are hate speech, fake news and inequality in the use of the social media.

Theoretical Framework

The researchers used the public sphere and the uses and gratification theories.

Public Sphere Theory

Jürgen Habermas’ propounded the theory in his book entitled “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Democracy” in 1962. Kellner (n.d, pp. 18 & 19) further stated that “the rise of Internet expands the realm for democratic participation and debate and creates new public spaces for political intervention.” He further clarified that “broadcast media like radio and television, and now computers, have produced new public sphere and spaces for information debate, and participation that contains both the potential to invigorate democracy..”

This theory is appropriate for the study because the platforms enlist and can as well delist people who are interested to get information about the presidential election. This is cleared when Sam (2017, p. 1) emphasised that “the ethnographic data from rural and urban communities in Sierra Leone, ...showed that mobile phone provides a useful mediated public sphere for the marginalised to negotiate political relation.” Jimada (2019, p. 1) averred that “the new social media has provided a platform for citizens-state interaction in the public sphere. It provides higher levels of participation for younger people and an avenue for women who have not been very active and vocal with a voice to demand for accountability.” Bibu (2016, p. 68) summarised them as “equality of access, diversity of opinion, reciprocity and quality of participation.”

Uses and Gratification Theory

Katz propounded the theory in 1959, improved by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974. Blumler and McQuail used it in 1969 in the general election in Britain.

The main tenets of the theory indicated that people are attracted to a particular media of information because of the ease of access to the media and the satisfaction derived from the specific programme in that type of media. It also involves selective processes of initiatives by the users in whatever level. Some Enugu residents got such information about the presidential election campaigning and date of voting through the social media platforms of their groups, associations and organisations. In Enugu, we have “Gburu Gburu Update,” Nigerian Institute of Public Relations Enugu State Chapter, the patriots for Dr. Peter Mbah, clubs, associations, market groups etc. This choice is based on individual taste. Hence, Hasan (2013, p.165) stressed that the “uses and gratification theory attempts to explain the uses and functions of the media for individuals, groups, and society in general.” Clavio’s (2011, p.312) further upheld that “this theory approaches media use from an active and goal-directed perspective, assuming that users, especially audience based such as sports make choice about which media they select based upon how those media satisfy their needs and desires.”

Defleur (2010, p.183) also agreed that the Uses and Gratification Theory “opines that people tend to use the media for their advantage more often than the media use them. People vigorously search for media content that supplies them with individual satisfaction. Uses and Gratification Theory belongs to the indirect effect theory.” The selective platforms and the demographic as well as the psychographic variables amount to the uses and gratification theory.

Methodology

The researchers used survey research design to elicit the opinions and perceptions of the respondents who are social media literate through the use copies of questionnaire as the measuring instrument. The 2006 National Population Census of the Enugu metropolis which was collectively validated by the National Bureau of Statistics for the fifteen layouts was 993,663.

The researchers used the Wimmer and Dominick Online calculator to get the sample size of 384 based on the margin error of 5% from the population living in Enugu metropolis comprising Iva-valley, Government Residential Areas, New Haven, Asata, Ogbete/Coal Camp, Ogui/Ogui New Layout, Independence, Nike, Emene, Trans-Ekulu, Abakpa, Achara/Idaw River, Uwani/Extension, Maryland and Awkunanaw/Gariki. There is justification for the use of purposive sampling technique, multistage method of research and survey research design for the study hence twenty five copies (25) of questionnaire were administered to the respondents in each layout which totalled to 375. The remaining nine (9) copies were not useful for the analysis. Research assistant is justifiable for each layout/street because of fear of insecurity.

Results

Table 1: Frequency of the use of smartphones by the Enugu metropolis residents to get information about the presidential election

Options	Response	Percentage
Always	145	38.67
Daily	87	23.20
Weekly	28	7.47
Sometimes	115	30.66
Not at all	—	—
Total	375	100.00

Source: Field survey 2021

The data in Table 1 indicated that most of the residents got information about the campaign and election from the social media always.

Table 2: The social media platforms often used by the residents during the 2023 presidential election.

Options	Response	Percentage
Facebook	135	36.00
Twitter	20	5.33
WhatsApp	120	32.00
YouTube	35	9.33
Instagram	10	2.67
Google	20	5.33
Flicker (showing illustrations)	10	2.67
Netflix	10	2.67
Spotify	15	4.00
Total	375	100.00

Source: Field survey 2021

The Table 2 data showed that during the 2023 presidential election, the residents most often used the social media platforms of Facebook and WhatsApp more than others.

Table 3: Determining the believability of the election campaign and voting during the Nigeria’s 2023 presidential election by the residents.

Options	Response	Percentage
Strongly Agree	231	61.60

Agree	72	19.20
Strongly disagree	28	7.46
Disagree	22	5.87
None	22	5.87
TOTAL	375	100.00

Source: Field survey 2021

The Table 3 data revealed that up to 61.60% of the residents strongly agreed and believed about the campaigns and voting of the 2023 presidential election.

Table 4: Assessing if the believability of the presidential election influenced their voting.

Options	Response	Percentage
Strongly Agree	200	53.34
Agree	72	19.20
Strongly disagree	59	15.73
Disagree	30	8.00
None	14	3.73
TOTAL	375	100.00

Table 4 indicated that up to 53.34 % of the Enugu metropolis residents believed in the social media platforms information which indirectly influenced their voting.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: To what is the frequency of the use of smartphones during the 2023 presidential election by the Enugu metropolis residents?

Table 1 data states that they always use their smartphones to check different social media platforms for information about the election. This means that the residents are politically alert to government activities. This is in line with Severin and Tankard (1992, p.278) that “a few studies done so far provide clues concerning the impact of new technology on how people use the media.” The idea also supported the Jürgen Habermas’s public sphere theory that explained the generalisation of public opinion in governance in order to enthrone true democracy without marginalisation.

Research Question Two: What particular social media platforms were used by the Enugu metropolis’ residents during the 2023 Nigeria’s presidential election?

Table 2 data showed that they used more of Facebook and WhatsApp than others. This is linked to the uses and gratification approach which Hasan (2013, p.165) affirmed that “as opposed to the play theory, the uses and gratification theory says that “media serve a variety of needs stemming from the personal and social situations of the individuals.” This is because people in urban cities came from different cultural areas/states and are free to make their choices based on the demographic and psychographic variables.

Research Question Three: Did the Enugu metropolis residents believe in the social media platform information for the 2023 Nigeria’s presidential election?

Table 3 data revealed that up to 61.60% of the Enugu metropolis residents strongly agreed and believed about the campaigns and election in spite of two opposing issues at stake. This is in line with the cognitive dissonance theory propounded by Leon Festinger (1918-1989). Chandler and Munday (2011, p. 52) upheld that cognitive dissonance theory “leads to dissonance reduction (an attempt to reduce the cognitive inconsistencies). Moreover, this is an

eye-opener in line with Aday et al in Nwodu and Agbanu (2015, p. 291) that “the new media played a crucial role in producing new forms of information to mass publics which then mobilised them to act...”

Research Question Four: Could the information from the various social media platforms influenced their voting during the election?

The data in **Table 4** showed that up to 53.34% of the Enugu metropolis residents strongly agreed and were influenced into believing and voting during the 2023 Nigeria’s election. This supported the agenda setting theory based on the social media platform information that it is the time for election of aspirants from different political parties. There is also the issue of the bullet theory which supported the immediate action of some of the residents who were influenced by the social media platforms information to vote.

Conclusion

Some of the literate and semi-literate audience in Enugu metropolis used smartphones with various social media platforms to get political information. The residents varied in their choices of the platforms they subscribed to for gathering of political information. The political information in the various social media platforms is persuasive to them hence it influenced them to vote during the 2023 Nigeria’s presidential election.

Recommendations

1. Government should encourage organisations and urban residents to use smartphones and hook to different platforms of their groups to participate actively in governance.
2. There should be constant variety of information in the social media platforms to influence the urban residents in all sphere of their activities.
3. The information in the social media platforms should be persuasive to move the urban residents to act.

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