



IMPACT OF FACEBOOK AND TWITTER POLITICAL MESSAGE ON INFLUENCING THE NIGERIA YOUTHS WILLINGNESS TO VOTE: A STUDY OF YOUTHS IN OWERRI MUNICIPAL

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the impact of Facebook and Twitter political message on influencing the Nigeria Youths willingness to vote among Owerri Municipal youths. The rationale was to ascertain why the Nigeria youth have a low interest in voting and how they utilize Facebook and twitter and its influence in their voting behaviour. This study was anchored on the uses and gratification theory. To achieve this study, the mixed-method was adopted using survey method and in-depth interview methods. The population employed in the study was 31,347 and 25 youths in Owerri Municipal. A sample size of 385 was adopted using the Taro Yamane formula. Data was collected through questionnaire and in-depth interview. The questionnaire data was got from 385 youths in Owerri Municipal and interview granted to 25 respondents. Finding revealed that Facebook and Twitter political message have powerful and positive influence on the willingness of Nigeria youths in voting. These social media platforms also influenced youth participation in 2023 general elections. Political parties and candidates made use of Facebook and twitter as a veritable mobilization tool for electioneering and are credible and contribute to powerful awareness. The study concludes that Facebook and Twitter political message have powerful and positive influence on the willingness of Nigeria youths in voting. It was recommended that the federal government and the media should work together to encourage youths of eligible age to participate in the electoral process and vote for candidates of their choice.

Keywords: Facebook, Twitter, influencing, Owerri youths, political message and vote.

Introduction

The term social media refers to a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities. Social media is internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content, such as personal information, documents, videos, and photos (Dollarhide, 2021). Users engage with social media via a computer, tablet, or smartphone via web-based software or applications. While social media is ubiquitous in America and Europe, Asian countries like Indonesia lead the list of social media usage. More than 4.5 billion people use social media around the world and the largest social media network is Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Tik-Tok (We are Social, 2021). As at January, 2023, statistics showed that there are more than 4.76 billion social media users around the world (Data Reportal, 2023; Statista, 2023). The importance of social media in our contemporary system of communication is indispensable. Modern technology in communication no doubt has turned the entire world into a “Global Village” (McLuhan, 1964)

Social media has been considered to be an excellent medium of knowledge sharing (Khan, Ashraf, Seinen, Khan, & Laar, 2021). Social media supports and facilitates the general public in political process. The Presidential election held in Nigeria in 2023, is a perfect example. Wherein political views were debated with the general public via social media. According to Russmann (2022) social media has changed the entire political landscape, as the most useful strategy engaged by politicians to yield their desired result. The Nigerian presidential election of 2023 is a typical example of this, Mr. Peter Obi, Atiku and Tinubu all used the social media as a platform for their campaign and awareness. Social media also influences the youth resulting to a significant boost in youth's voting intentions.

According to the Pew Research Center, social media users tend to be younger. Nearly 90% of people between the ages of 18 and 29 used at least one form of social media. For many teenagers, friendships can start virtually, with 57% of teens meeting a friend online. Further, these users tend to be better educated and relatively wealthy, or earning over \$75,000 per year (Pew Research, 2022). These young social media users use the Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and Snapchat and Facebook as their most used social media platforms (Cassy Bay Area, 2023). However, the most used among these is Facebook, as at the final quarter of 2022, Facebook was reported to have over 3.7 billion monthly core family product users (Statista, 2023).

Since social media has been proven to be very effective for political campaigns, politicians now coin diverse political messages which they post and relay on their various social media platforms just to get the people's attention. These political messages are used for political reasonings that has concern for the electorate or target audience. Political messages posted in the social media space is used to shape community outreach, understanding the electorate and current affairs within a demographic/ audience segment (Liaw, Moiden, & Yacob, 2022). Using the right message is of utmost importance because it affects the public's response towards the political candidate. Effective campaigning goes hand in hand with a coherent, persistent and consistent message which must be deployed across all political campaign tools and methods of campaign distribution. Most politicians in their messages state a problem and then propose a solution, this shows their supposed public that they are problem solvers and not just going to rest on their laurels. Campaign messages are developed and packaged with a sense of collaboration in response to voter input. A lack of consistency in political messaging can dissuade your electorate and change the public's response to your campaign (Sprout Social, 2022; Premium Times Nigeria, 2022).

Any politician vying for an office or political appointment tries to create a testable message which can soothe the various publics in different demographics and locations. These political messages are posted through polling and online, this helps to gauge the reactions of the crowd towards their message as well as help them re-strategize for better messages that will arouse the good desire of the crowd towards the candidate.

Elections are all about turnout which, in turn, is all about voter contact, engagement and 'Get Out the Vote' (GOTV) strategy. This means different things for different demographics. Among older voters, more traditional campaign tactics are key (Master Class, 2021). This tactic is used among minority voters, churches and unions as an important messaging channel (Brookings Institution, 2019). Another area that needs much publicity during political campaigns include the use of billboard advertisement so as to reach a sizeable target audience. For example, the need for billboards at strategic bus-stops advocating for what the candidate wishes to do. For example, if the candidate advocates for road improvements at a particularly bad junction, the candidate's billboard should be made at that area so that people stuck in traffic might start to take notice of what the candidate is campaigning for (Numero AI, 2020). We cannot overstate the need for early and strategic campaign messaging as a very effective tool to get the mind of the people. These messages are employed strategically for a long-term basis around are flexible to adapt by and improve on over time depending on the people's reception of the candidate (Stromer-Galley, 2021).

Nigerian youth account for a sizable portion of the population as well as eligible voters. Dr. Mrs Ngozi Okonjo Iwela, the former Nigerian Minister of Finance and Director General of the World Trade

Organization (WTO), stated at a conference in Lagos in 2010 that 70 percent of Nigeria's 150 million people are under the age of 30. She went on to say that the young population (those aged 12 to 24) was anticipated to reach 30 million (Oyeyemi, Oyeyemi, Omotara, Lawan, Akinroye, Adedoyin, & Ramírez, 2018). This is a significant population that cannot be overlooked by any politician or political party. A lot of factors have contributed to youths' media transition from traditional to internet-based applications such as social media. One of the factors is the country's growing internet penetration. Statistics analysis by Kepois shows that Nigeria has 2.9 million internet users between 2022 and 2023 (Data Reportal, 2023), this figure equates to around 61.4 per cent of the total population.

With the rise in technological device use, statistics show that youths are the main users of computer gadgets for their social media us (Stat Counter, 2023). Many Nigerian youths now have laptops and other mobile devices such as notepads, Androids, iPhones, and other smart phones, which they use to access social media sites and information on the internet; such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Palm chat, LinkedIn, and so on. The purpose of this study is to look into the impact of Facebook and twitter political message on influencing the Nigeria Youths willingness to vote in Owerri municipal.

Statement of the Problem

Statistics show the rise Youth Nigeria population, getting higher than 150 million youths population who are under 30 years (Oyeyemi, Oyeyemi, Omotara, Lawan, Akinroye, Adedoyin, & Ramírez, 2018). This makes the Nigerian populace a young one. Youth engagement in the country's electoral process, on the other hand, is not proportional to their numbers. Authorities have remarked that Nigerian youths are often uninterested in electoral affairs, resulting in poor voter turnout at elections.

The purpose of this research is to look at how Facebook and Twitter may be used as a true mobilizing tool for electioneering in general elections, with an emphasis on Owerri Municipal. As we prepare for the 2023 general election, this study will examine how the usage of Facebook and Twitter political messages has influenced youth willingness to vote in the forthcoming election and how they voted in the 2019 elections.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to investigate how Facebook and Twitter political message has influenced youth willingness to vote in Nigeria. The sub objectives are;

- To find out the extent youths in Owerri Municipal utilize Facebook and Twitter.
- To measure the extent youths participated actively in voting during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria
- To find out if Facebook and Twitter political message have influenced youths' participation in politics and voting or otherwise.
- To determine the credibility of Owerri Municipal youths attach to the Facebook and Twitter political messages.

Significance of the study

The findings of this study will add more knowledge to the existing literature on media effect theories. It will also add as reference for future researchers that may want to undertake research on a similar study. The result of this study will be of interest to all political parties that want to promote their manifestos, candidates, ideas to the youths in order to secure their votes.

This study will contribute to sustainable development of democracy in Nigeria. The youths are the future drivers of any country, however conducting the research on the impact of Facebook and Twitter political

messages in influencing the Nigerian youths in Owerri municipal willingness to vote in an election is essential.

Conceptual framework

Meaning and nature of social media

Social media are interactive technologies that facilitates the creation and sharing of ideas, information, in virtual communities and networks. Social media comprises of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Tik-Tok, WhatsApp etc. Social media is also known as the new media because is the extension of the conventional media. However, the different scholars have tried to give meaning of social media. According to Carlos et al (2008) as cited in Chukwu and Uzoma, (2014), social media is regarded as a form of electronic communication through which users create online communities (computer-aid) and other related network. Social media gives users quick electronic communication of content such as personal information, documents, videos and photos. Users engage with social media via computer, tablets, smart phones via web-based software or applications. In America, Europe, Africa and Asian countries has the most social media population. According to social media's users by population 2023, The number of people using social media grew by 9.2 percent between 2019 and 2020.

History of Facebook and functions

Facebook is a social networking sites that was created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 while, he was still a student at Harvard University. It was initially restricted to Harvard students only. However, it was extended to include other Universities/colleges and later accommodated high schools in US ([www.wikipedia/en/history of Facebook](http://www.wikipedia/en/history_of_Facebook))

The popularity of Facebook grew to become worldwide and it was eventually opened for everyone with an email address to create a profile and join. Facebook can be accessed through www.Facebook.com and has all a prospective user need. However, it grew from a Harvard campus networking site to a global internet site in the world with the whooping number of 2.9billion active users

Twitter history and functions

Twitter is a micro blogging social messaging service that allows people communicate brief messages called 'tweets' in real time (Antenos, 2023). When you sign up with Twitter on www.Twitter.com, you can use the service to post and receive messages to a network of followers. Twitter was founded in 2006 by the Trio of Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams and Biz stone who were all programmers that were interested in creating a micro blogging social network that could be updated via short message services (SMS). Despite the fact a "tweet" is limited to a maximum of 140 words. Twitter has grown at an astronomical rate since inception. Over the last few years, Twitter has continued to become one of the biggest names in social media. People and businesses use this social media platform on a daily basis and there are approximately 500 million tweets posted every day. Twitter has become an incredibly useful tool for business of all sizes, allowing them to interact with customers. Keep up with latest trends and promote their contents and website features.

Empirical review

Gromark and Schliesman (2012) in their study of, the effects of politician's social media activities on voting behaviour submitted that there is evidence that the total social media activity has a positive effect on voter turnout. The result for the effect of social media messages on voters' preference was not conclusive.

Akpoveta (2015) in his study of assessment of the impact of social media on the 2015 electioneering in Asaba, Delta State reached the same conclusions as that of Gromark and Schliesmann by stating that social media increased the turnout of voters by increasing information exchange and participation of the electorate. A similar study was carried out in Anambra state by Edegoh and Anunike (2015) and they also

concluded that social media platforms present unique opportunities for mobilization of youths for political participation.

In their own study carried out in Ondo state Okioya, et al. (2015) concluded that social media actually stimulated voters to participate in the electoral process in Akure Metropolis. Similarly, Onyike et al. (2015) in their study set in Enugu state reveal that a substantial number of respondents were influenced to a large extent by exposure to social media in the way they participated in the 2015 general elections. Sanni (2015) reported that the majority of respondents in her study set in Oyo state agreed that the use of social media as a political awareness tool positively influenced them in voting for the candidates of their choice.

The verdict of Okoro and Nwafor (2013) in their study titled social media and political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 General elections: the lapses and lessons was that whereas many used the technology (social media) to make vital input in the political discourse, others used it to spread hate and inciting messages.

Acholonu, et al (2015) in their study of the 'influence of social media on political knowledge and participation of electorates in 2015 electioneering campaign in Nigeria concluded that others are low knowledge levels on the use of social media political learning and use of social media has different levels of influence on electorates political participation.

The role of social media in shaping public opinion of Nigerians in the 2015 electioneering was the study undertaken by Nwaolokpe and Mbaka (2015) and the concluded that the social media are influencing the publics on issues that are important to them especially politically.

Theoretical frame work

This study's foundation was built on the uses and gratification theory. According to a source cited by Klapper (1963), the uses and gratifications theory primarily emphasizes how and why the public uses media (Haridakis & Hanson, 2009 p.7). The primary question raised is "why do people use media, and what do they use them for," according to Wright (1974) as cited in McQuail (2010, p.423) saw the media as meeting a variety of societal needs, such as social control, cultural continuity, cohesion, and the wide dissemination of all forms of public information. This in turn assumes that people utilize media for other relevant objectives as well, such as self-direction, relaxation, adjustment, information, and identity development. The Theory acknowledges and upholds the fact that audiences have a variety of demands that drive them to consume media or media material. The theory's basic tenet is that there are specific advantages that media message consumers expect to derive from every medium they choose to engage with. The audience tends to turn away from the very channel or content that does not satisfy them whenever the medium fails to provide the people with the aims, wants, and/or benefits they expect from the organ.

Once more, the theory might be seen as being extremely pertinent to this study, which examines why youth in the Owerri Municipal utilize Facebook and Twitter. This study therefore focuses on identifying the goals and advantages that Facebook and twitter supply for their consumers and that inevitably maintain their usage. It assumes that the public receives certain satisfactions from Facebook and Twitter, without which their use would have declined. Because these two social media have been used for so long, it is clear that individuals who utilize it receive real value from it. The purpose of this study is to identify the advantages or satisfactions that the numerous users of Facebook and twitter in Owerri municipal receive from using these platforms. The main focus of the uses and gratifications theory is that the user or audience has a significant influence on the media or material they choose to consume, and this choice is influenced by the gratifications the media or content gives.

Research Methodology

According to Dominick (2011) Research design "when it comes to gathering of information about media effects, scientist have typically used two main methods: survey and experiments". The study employed the mixed-method which allowed for the use of survey and in-depth interview designs. This study utilized the survey method using questionnaire to solicit response from eligible Nigerian youths' residents in Owerri Municipal who have Facebook and Twitter accounts. Oral interview was also used to solicit more in-depth information from 25 selected participants within Owerri Municipal. The population study for this research is Owerri Municipal. Owerri Municipal is a local government located in Owerri, Imo State. Owerri Municipal has a population size of 127,123 according to 2006 census among which inculcated 31,347 youths within 18-30 years. The population of youths was shown to be 31,347 since this study is on youths within Owerri Municipal. Since the last census in 2006, it is expected that the population size should have increased. Therefore, to ascertain the correct figures of the present population, the researcher used an annual increase rate of 2.28% to extrapolate and predict the new population.

The formula was provided as;

$$Pp = Gp \times P^1 \times T$$

Where Pp= Projected population

Gp= given population

P¹= Population increase index

T= Period between the given population and year of study.

Given that: Gp= 31,347

P¹=2.28% = 0.0228 = 0.023

T= 2023 -2006

Pp=31,347 x (0.023 x 17) = 3.91

Pp=31,347 x 3.91= 122,566

Pp= 31,347 + 122,566= 153,913

The population for this study is 153,913.

As for the sample size, it was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, hence the population of this study is known. The Taro Yamane method for sample size calculation was formulated by the statistician Taro Yamane in 1967 to determine the sample size from a given population. Below is the statistical formula devised by Taro Yamane is as follows.

$$n = \frac{N}{(1+N(e)^2)}$$

where:

n signifies the sample size

N signifies the population under study

e signifies the margin error (it could be 0.10, 0.05 or 0.01)

$$n = \frac{153,913}{1 + 153,913 (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{153,913}{1 + 153,913(0.0025)}$$

$$n = 384.7825$$

approximated= 385 became the sample size used for this work.

The instrument for data collections was the questionnaire instrument and the in-depth interview guide. The copies of questionnaire were distributed around the five communities under Owerri Municipal. This was to increase the chances of getting responses from young Nigerians between the ages of 18 to 30 years that have Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The presentation gathered from the using questionnaire as the primary instrument and interview as a backup instrument. A total of 400 copies of questionnaires were distributed to youths in Owerri Municipal. About 385 copies of the questionnaires were returned fully answered correctly, while 15 was rejected for not being completed. However, the 388 copies returned fully completed out of 400 distributed represents a response rate of 98.7 percent which is ideal for the analysis.

The data is presented by means of table:

1.1 Gender Distribution of Respondents

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Male	200	51.9%
Female	185	48.1%
Total	385	100%

From the above table 51.9% of the respondents in the study were males, whereas 48.1% remaining were females.

1.2 Distribution of Respondents according to Age bracket

Options	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	153	39.7%
26-30	232	60.2%
Total	385	100%

From the above data an overwhelming we see that among the respondents, we had much y which is same as specified in the study's target participants.

1.3 Respondents in possession of Facebook account

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	385	100
No	-	
Total	385	100%

From the above table 100% of youth in Owerri Municipal have a Facebook account. This indicates that Facebook is a popular social media platform.

1.4 Respondents in possession of a Twitter account

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	361	92.2%
No	24	7.8%
Total	385	100%

From the table above, 92.2% of respondent possess a twitter account. This means that most Owerri Municipal youths have Twitter accounts.

1.5 Respondents time spent on Facebook and Twitter daily

Options	Frequency	Percentage
About 30 minutes	83	21.5%
An hour	149	38.7%
Two hours	121	31.4%
Over 3 hours	32	8.3%
Can't say	-	-
Total	385	100%

From the above table it we see that 38.7% use Facebook and Twitter daily for an hour, whereas 31.4% agreed to stay active there for 2hours daily. This implies that Owerri Municipal youths daily spend time on Facebook and Twitter for 1-2hours.

1.6 Have you ever come across political message on Facebook and twitter

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	369	95.8%
No	11	2.8%
Can't say	5	1.2%
Total	385	100%

From the table above table we see that 95.5% of the respondents admitted seeing political messages on Facebook and twitter, which shows how powerful these social media are. This implies that Owerri Municipal youths come across political messages as they spend time in their Facebook and Twitter accounts.

1.7 Influence of Facebook/twitter political message on youth's willingness to vote

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, it influenced voting	320	83.1%
No, it didn't influence voting	51	13.2%
Can't say	12	3.1%
Total	385	100%

From the above table, data revealed that majority of the respondent at 83.1% agreed that Facebook and twitter political message influenced their willingness to vote. This implies that political messages posted on Facebook and Twitter made youths willing to vote during the election.

1.8 I voted in the 2023 concluded Presidential, Senatorial and House of Representative elections.

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	376	97.6%
No	9	2.4%
Can't say	-	-
Total	3885	100%

From the above table it shows that 97.6% of the youth voted in the just concluded election. This means that most Owerri Municipal youths voted in the just concluded 2023 election.

Qualitative data presentation

In addition to the use of questionnaire as the primary data gathering instruments, a short interview was conducted on the first five respondents to completely fill their questionnaire in all the 5 communities that

make up Owerri municipal. In essence 25 respondent participated in this interview and they were asked the following questions:

Q1: Which of media was your major source of information in the 2023 presidential elections and why did you choose it over others?

Majority of them said Facebook which tallied with the finding from questionnaire I often come across political message on Facebook and did it influence your willingness to vote.

Q2: Did you participate in the electoral process in Facebook or twitter during the 2023 presidential election?

20 out of 25 responded positively, some of the respondent stated that they used Facebook and twitter to campaign for their candidates. While others said they just did a non-partisan manner of liking and retweeting other people's post.

Q3: Did you vote during the last concluded 2023 presidential election?

25 of them responded positively that they voted during the election.

Discussion of Finding

The finding of this study revealed interesting facts based on the data gathered from both the questionnaires and interview. The finding will be discussed along with the research questions

To what extent do you utilize Facebook and Twitter political message

To answer this question, it was analyzed on table 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 100% respondent reported having Facebook account while 93% admitted having twitter account and 39% spend over an hour of both social media in a day. In essence Facebook is very popular among youths in Owerri Municipal and Twitter also have a great usage as well. this shows that Youth in Owerri utilize Facebook and Twitter to a large extend. This finding corresponds to the report by Data Reportal, (2023) that, in the final quarter of 2022, Facebook reported over 3.7 billion monthly core users.

To what extent did Facebook and twitter political message influence your willingness to Vote.

Response to this in table 1.7 were analyzed to answer the research question. Even though majority (84%) of respondent admitted that Facebook and twitter political message influence their willingness to vote. To that extent, Facebook and Twitter aided youth participation in the electoral process as they used it as a source of information on the political scene. From the interview finding, majority said Facebook the often see political message on Facebook and it did influence their voting behaviour positively. This finding tallies with the finding of Akpoveta (2015), Edegoh and Anunike (2015), Okioya, Talabi and Ogundeji (2015) and Onyike, Ekwenchi and Chiaha (2015) which all agree that social media has a positive influence on youths participation in the electoral process.

Did you vote during the last 2023 Presidential, Senatorial, and House of Representative elections?

Response to this was found in table 1.8, where majority (98%) affirmed voting in the election. The respondent inclined that the way the political candidates passed their mandate through Facebook and Twitter gave them confidence to vote for their preferred candidate. A closer scrutiny of their response in the interview shows that all respondent voted during the election. This research tallies with Sanni (2015) reported that the majority of respondents in her study set in Oyo state agreed that the use of social media as a political awareness tool positively influenced them in voting for the candidates of their choice.

Conclusion

Facebook and Twitter political message have powerful and positive influence on the willingness of Nigeria youths in voting. These social mediums also influenced youth participation in 2023 general elections. Political parties and candidates made use of Facebook and Twitter as a veritable mobilization tool for electioneering and are credible and contribute to powerful awareness.

Recommendation

- The media should work harder to increase the adequacy of the content in powerful messages to achieve more positive influence on youth's participation during election.
- The federal government and the media should work together to encourage youths of eligible age to participate in the electoral process and vote for candidates of their choice.
- All media type should work harder to ensure that their media message are credible.
- Youths should utilize social media more and pay more attention to political messages when they come across it online.

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