

Social Media and Political Campaigns: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

The conversation on digital platforms and political engagement has become central to modern political life. Technology is playing a key role in advancing democracies and, more importantly, political activities across the globe; this includes political campaigns. Recent trends have shown that social media platforms are fast becoming drivers of political campaigns, with much focus on young people, as mainstream media is largely believed to be state-captured. This work assessed the advantages and disadvantages of social media on political campaigns and provided answers to questions such as whether social media platforms influence political participation, including voter mobilisation and political awareness. The work adopted the trending model to assess the conversation on social media and political campaigns, with much focus on the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, as well as the public sphere theory conceptualised by Jürgen Habermas, which emphasised that the public sphere is an arena where individuals come together to discuss societal issues, form public opinion and influence political actions through rational-critical debate. Findings revealed that social media helped effective political campaigns, encouraged political participation and also provided a platform to check the weaknesses of mainstream media. The work recommended that, to avoid issues of fake news and cyber bullying; government should enact laws that punish offenders declared guilty by a competent court of jurisdiction and promote free speech and government laws should allow individuals to seek redress in court and not impose direct government regulations or bans.

Keywords: Political campaigns, social media, democracy, digital platforms, election.

Introduction

The idea of politics predates man. According to the Holy Bible in Revelation, Lucifer tried to contest God and, through campaigns, manipulated and confused certain angels to take sides with him and requested that God vacate his throne for him. However, he was overpowered and defeated by the archangel Michael. This scenario clearly shows that the power struggle had long existed before man was created. As God's creation, man has continually used various methods to control and stay in power. Politics is commonly referred to as the struggle for and the exercise of power and influence in society (Mbah, 2007). According to Harold Lasswell, "politics is who gets what, when and how" (Mbah, 2007). Thus, it is worthy to note that power is central to politics. Democracy, unlike other forms of government, requires that power must rest with the people and can only be accessed through popular elections by those who seek to represent the people.

To be elected, one has to go through various stages, from being a member of a political party, acquiring a party nomination form, engaging stakeholders in consultation, winning a party ticket and eventually campaigning to be elected at any level to represent the people. Five decades ago, political campaigns were exclusively within the reach of mainstream media, where candidates

put up jingles, posters, and other campaign messages to the public. Physical gatherings were also organised where candidates interacted and shared ideas with the electorate to gain their support to win elections. These methods were largely insufficient to reach out to electorates, particularly in most populated countries with limited access to public infrastructure. Political campaigns were organised by support groups, political parties, volunteers and through jingles aired on mainstream media. Again, access to these platforms was exclusive to certain privileged persons. Organisers of political campaigns will select and mobilise those they can easily influence and transport them to political rally centres.

In the mainstream media, only privileged individuals could get access to sponsor messages and jingles. The implication, however, is that a greater part of the political community was denied access to inclusive political participation. These limitations provided opportunities for political actors to manipulate the electoral process. Political awareness was low, and citizen contributions to broader political views and perhaps to determine government policies and programs were the exclusive right of the privileged few. Campaigns are largely avenues where citizens assess candidates of political parties who seek their support to occupy public office. The consequences, however, limited access for citizens to make meaningful contributions would result in the privileged few capturing state power. Citizens' awareness largely determines political participation, and campaigns are democratic platforms that seek the approval of citizens for the emergence of public office holders. The role of social media platforms during political campaigns has increasingly become significant in recent times. Political involvement and participation have become much easier for citizens who make contributions through various social media platforms from the comfort of their homes rather than the usual traditional method of organising physical gatherings.

Thus, the advent of social media does not cancel the traditional practice of physical gathering; rather, it provides a broader opportunity for political participation and access to support their favourite candidates, as well as increase political awareness. Despite its broad benefits, social media has also brought to the centre certain negativities in the political process. Fake news, misinformation, disinformation and character assassination have become more and more prevalent. These behaviours, if not checked, could lead to chaos and political violence during elections. Whereas, the positive impact of social media also remains significant in driving political participation and broader awareness.

Statement of the Problem

The 2023 general elections underscored the growing influence of social media as a tool for political engagement, particularly among young people who constitute a significant portion of the country's population and electorate (INEC, 2023). Despite their large numbers making up nearly 40% of registered voters and their increasing reliance on platforms such as X (Twitter), Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp to mobilise, express dissent, and demand accountability, the tangible impact of this digital activism on electoral outcomes and broader democratic processes remains unclear (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Statista, 2023). Nigerian youths aged 18-34 face persistent socio-economic challenges, including an unemployment rate exceeding 33%, limited access to quality education and widespread insecurity, which are perceived to have fuelled their frustration with the political establishment (UNESCO, 202).

The Specific Objectives of the Study Include:

1. Examine the extent to which social media platforms facilitated political participation among Nigerian youths during the 2023 general election.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of social media campaigns such as the “Obidient” movement in mobilising youth voter turnout and enhancing political awareness during the 2023 election.

Conceptual Clarification**Social Media**

The 21st century is driven by science and technology, and human society is closing the gap of distance through the adoption of technology. In the 20th century, discussions centred mostly on globalisation and the various means through which globalisation tried to create a world community. These factors were: communication, transportation, etc. Thus, the trend was not as sophisticated as we have today, even though greater efforts were made, which also brought us to where we are now. Communication is broad, and before now, print and electronic media were available for sharing information. Radio and television were key components of information sharing, and they linked people and communities and shared vital information. However, information sharing has undergone a dramatic change from the traditional model of television and radio to a digitalised form where information is shared through the web, and it is capable of reaching millions of users within minutes.

The term ‘social’ arguably means interaction among people. Social media is seen as an ingathering of people far and near, sharing ideas and interacting through the web. It is a virtual web or community where people who have not seen each other interact on broad issues including social, political, economic, security, fashion and more. It provides an avenue for different communities, such as political communities, economic communities, and social communities, to share ideas and advance perceived goals. The advent of social media has closed the communication gap globally, where information is shared and reaches millions of people within minutes. This advancement in science and technology has also provided a new opportunity for political activities, including political campaigns. Some vital features of social media include providing interactive platforms where users engage with each other through comments, likes and other forms of reactions. Others include live streaming and chat rooms where people connect and share first-hand information. Such social media platforms include:

- i. Facebook
- ii. X (Twitter)
- iii. TikTok
- iv. Instagram

Other features of social media include:

- v. User-generated content
- vi. Virtual communities, also known as live chat rooms
- vii. Real-time updates and information.

Social media has become a useful part of modern life. It increases business activities and positively impacts national economic development, as well as being a strong political tool. Broadly, the uses of social media platforms include the following:

- i. Information dissemination where information such as news, articles and content are shared between and among individuals, groups and communities.

- ii. **Product advertising:** Business owners use social media platforms to advertise and market their products online. It appears to be much more convenient and cheaper. With available data, a business owner can share their products with millions of people online, and this can improve economic growth, increase productivity, reduce unemployment and create millions of sustainable opportunities for people. Other usages of social media platforms include;
- iii. **Learning and education.**

Despite these uses that enhance human activities and bridge the gap in communication, social media has also encouraged bad behaviour in society. Some of these negative impacts include: fake news, cyberbullying, character assassination, misinformation, addiction, as well as general crime such as fraud and murder. Generally, whether the activities of social media are impactful or harmful, social media has become a firm part of modern life, providing broader opportunities and benefits to human society where information is shared, people from far and near connect, and freedom of expression is guaranteed without borders. Nevertheless, the need for continuous monitoring and improvement to meet expected standards remains significant.

Political Campaign

Despite the complex environment of social science research, the majority of scholars would agree that the most viable tool of democracy is elections because periodic elections largely consolidate democracy. We acknowledge the importance of the rule of law, constitutionalism and various democratic institutions, but access to all these political values, to an extent, depends on periodic elections. The central focus of democracy is that power rests with the people and through periodic elections, the people decide who represents them. Consequently, the success of candidates in any election depends largely on effective political campaigns.

Political campaigns are platforms where political actors interact with the public or electorates and share common concerns that affect individuals, groups or communities and, by extension, provide answers to questions. It can also be seen as an organised pattern to affect decision-making. It is a cluster to seek the support of the electorate to win political office. It is often related to elections. Political campaigns are a catalyst for political awareness and keep the public fully aware of policies and programs of government. It provides a broader spectrum for political participation and enables the electorate to assess candidates that can provide answers to common problems.

Key Objectives of Political Campaigns

The strategic importance of political campaigns can not be overemphasised. Some key objectives of political campaigns thus include the following:

1. **Political Awareness:** Political campaigns create political awareness. In many countries where the rural population is largely cut off from the centre, most often, political campaigns bring political awareness to rural dwellers. Political campaigns provide them with the opportunity to grasp trending and other political issues.
2. **Political Participation:** Political campaigns provide a platform for citizens to get involved in political activities, either actively or passively. Political awareness increases the desire for political participation. Political campaigns expose citizens to the national dialogue, the implication however, it increases citizens' consciousness, awareness and the desire to participate.

3. **Electoral Success:** It is assumed that political campaigns expose electoral fraud and increase citizens' awareness of the electoral process. More awareness creates more consciousness, and the possibility of participation is broadened. Thus, this can lead to electoral success.
4. **Organising a Support Base:** Through political campaigns, clusters are created, and these clusters metamorphose into groups, thereby creating a firm base for political parties.

In Nigeria, political campaigns have led to increased awareness and political participation. However, social media has contributed even more immensely to raising awareness, inclusion and political participation, as was witnessed in the 2023 general elections. Since 1999, it is arguable that the 2023 general election brought together more youth coalitions and support groups through the help of social media. Some believe that this momentum was a result of poverty and exclusion, and the desire of young people to make their voices heard. Thus, social media provided a much broader platform to catalyse these dreams.

Components of Political Campaign

Every political campaign has key components that provide a firm roadmap to actualising the goals. These components include:

- i. Fundraising through crowdfunding or donations, which are now made much easier through online platforms
- ii. Identifying a target audience to communicate and share vision and mission
- iii. Developing a clear message of key policy areas to attract support. This is also called the development of a manifesto
- iv. Identification of communication channels, with social media having become one of the most effective platforms to engage electorate reach
- v. Volunteer mobilisation and pressure groups to galvanise support to enhance campaign effort.

These components form the base of any political campaign.

Types of Political Campaigns

It is important to note that there are various forms of campaigns. While the term is commonly assumed to narrowly describe an interface between a political aspirant and their support base and the rest of society to showcase and advertise their policy plans to win an election, political campaigns differ. Thus, this includes:

1. Advocacy campaign
2. Electoral or election campaign
3. Issue-based campaign.
- 4.

Significance of Political Campaigns

Political awareness remains significant to sustaining democracy. In recent times, low voter turnout has become a recurring decimal in Nigeria's elections. A country of over 200 million people has continued to record less than 15% of its population participating in elections. Thus, political campaigns play a key role in advancing democracy. Some of the importance of political campaigns includes:

1. Political participation
2. Government policy change
3. Political awareness
4. Wide choice of citizens in political decision-making
5. Accountability

Methodology

The methodology adopted to provide a valid test of the hypothetical questions was qualitative, where data were sourced through the secondary method of data collection. The qualitative methods helped us to assemble various scholars' works, including government policies on social media regulation.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Public Sphere theory and the trending model. The public sphere theory was originally conceptualised by Jürgen Habermas (1962). Habermas' Public Sphere Theory described an arena where individuals come together to discuss societal issues, form public opinion, and influence political action through rational-critical debate. Originally tied to physical spaces like coffee houses in 18th-century Europe, the concept has evolved with technology. In the digital age, social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp serve as modern public spheres, facilitating open dialogue beyond traditional gatekeepers like state-controlled media (Habermas, 1989). The theory emphasises inclusivity, accessibility, and the potential for discourse to challenge power structures, though it also acknowledges distortions like unequal access or misinformation. As the theoretical framework to explore the impact of social Media and political campaigns, with emphasis on the 2023 Elections in Nigeria, the theory provides a lens to examine how social media platforms transformed into digital public spheres, enabling Nigerian youths to engage in political discourse, mobilisation, and accountability during the election.

This theory is highly relevant in analysing youth participation in the campaign of 2023 elections. Social media emerged as a "digital town hall and political rally field" where Nigerian youths, aged 18-34 and comprising nearly 40% of registered voters (INEC, 2023), gathered and debated policies, exposed electoral flaws, and mobilised support, notably through the "Obidient" movement. Unlike traditional media, often influenced by political elites (Oluwaseun, 2020), platforms like Twitter offered a space for unfiltered expression, amplifying voices historically marginalised by Nigeria's gerontocratic system (Olumide, 2021). This aligns with Habermas' vision of a participatory space shaping democratic processes. This digital sphere bridged urban and semi-urban youths, though rural exclusion due to limited internet access were some limitations (Adebayo, 2020).

Public Sphere Theory is apt for this study because it directly addresses how social media reshaped youth participation in the 2023 election campaigns, offering a lens to explore both its democratising potential and its constraints. It aligns with the research objectives of measuring influence, assessing effectiveness, and probing sustainability while grounding the analysis in a framework suited to Nigeria's digital political landscape. By focusing on this theory, the study can unpack how social media empowered youths to challenge the status quo and whether it can evolve into a lasting democratic force in future elections. Again, the trending model also provided a much broader theoretical framework, as political issues were always on hashtags, hence bringing young people or social media users to a cluster through the web to advance a general political

cause. During the election, youths used hashtags (e.g., #Obidient trending over 10 million times) and live streams to scrutinise candidates and monitor polling units, reflecting rational critical debate (Ezeibe et al., 2023).

The Nexus Between Social Media and Political Campaigns

The conversation on political activities has increasingly changed from the usual traditional model to a more sophisticated digital trend. Science and technology are playing a significant role in advancing human activities globally, both in the formal and informal sectors. The last four (4) decades have seen a dramatic turn in political events, where almost impossible activities are now gaining momentum. Access to large audiences and remote political gatherings in the past used to be difficult, but today, arguably, digital platforms are bridging this gap and making political participation even more effective than many years ago. Technology is exposing and advancing political norms, shaping political behaviours and civic participation in many societies, which is largely becoming a key factor in the modern democratic process (Nwanne, 2021).

Social media has fundamentally altered how citizens, especially young people, interact with governance structures, providing new channels for expression, mobilisation, and accountability while also serving as a check on traditional media, which is largely believed to be state-captured in many authoritarian regimes (Oluwaseun, 2020). Nigeria is a country of over 200 million people, with a greater number of the population between the ages of 18 and 30. It is noteworthy to mention that social media has profoundly influenced young people and provided a platform through which political agendas are pushed, and also to check government policies and programs and ultimately change certain policies of government. (World Bank, 2022). This shift has disrupted traditional power dynamics, enabling rapid organisation and amplifying voices that were once sidelined by mainstream institutions and gatekeepers of political discourse (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). The 2023 general elections in particular offer a compelling case study to explore this transformation, illustrating how digital connectivity empowered young Nigerians to engage in electoral politics on an unprecedented scale, much broader than since the return of democracy in 1999 (Onyechi, 2018). Beyond election cycles, the increase in digital engagement also signals a long-term shift and a new trend in political consciousness, where young Nigerians are consciously shaping political conversations and holding leaders accountable (Aina, 2022).

Social media platforms such as Twitter (X), Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, etc. have become integral to Nigeria's social and political fabric, with over 30 million active users, reflecting the country's expanding internet access and social consciousness awakened by the digital age and closing the gap between the analogue and digital political culture in Nigeria (Statista, 2023). These platforms have evolved from mere social networking tools into powerful arenas for political discourse and activism, offering a space where information flows freely, often bypassing traditional media controlled by elites or state actors (Adebayo, 2020). While it is largely believed that such unchecked trends could carry misinformation, disinformation and fake news, it is also believed that they now serve as digital town halls where citizens debate policies, expose corruption, and mobilise collective action in real time to change policies and programs that are anti-people and anti-democracy (Olayiwola, 2021).

In Nigeria's urban hubs like Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja, where smartphone penetration is high, young people harnessed social media platforms to share political content, challenge misinformation, and coordinate voter education efforts to deepen democratic ethos (Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018). The 2023 General elections largely highlighted this trend, as

candidates and their supporters employed innovative digital tactics such as viral hashtags, live streams, and influencer partnerships to engage a tech-savvy electorate (Ezeibe et al., 2023). This digital revolution not only amplified political participation but also democratised information access, allowing grassroots movements to thrive without reliance on traditional political structures, which were largely monopolised by the privileged political class (Omotayo, 2016).

In this discourse, Nigerian youth are defined as individuals between the ages of 18-34, which, according to available data, comprises over 60% of the country's population. This group has faced a myriad of challenges that have long kept them in political shambles and now desire a new path to national recovery and inclusion. In the 2023 general election, the exodus to embrace the slogan "Take Back Young Country" by the candidate of the Labour Party remains significant to accessing the desire of young people to use social media platforms to influence voters and advance their favoured candidates (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). However, the desire to be actively involved in the 2023 campaigns was fuelled by several factors, including a high level of unemployment, with rates exceeding 33% in 2023, coupled with underemployment, as well as other factors that pushed many Nigerian youth to actively get involved in the campaigns with the help of social media platforms, which brought political information to their convenience to push for a better future (World Bank, 2022).

Also, access to quality education remained uneven, with millions out of school due to poverty, insecurity, and inadequate infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, and the conflict-ridden northeast contributed largely to the active involvement of young people in the campaigns using social media to expose lies and fact-check fake campaign statements (UNESCO, 2022). Insecurity ranging from Boko Haram insurgency to banditry and communal clashes displaced countless youths, while police brutality, epitomised by the #EndSARS protests, deepened their distrust in state institutions (Amnesty International, 2021). Compounding these socio-economic challenges was a perceived lack of political representation, as many young people believe their concerns were sidelined by an older political class that dominates leadership positions (Olumide, 2021). These socio-economic and security challenges fueled frustration and alienation, setting the stage for their growing political participation as a means of seeking redress through both digital and offline activism (Ezeibe & Ani, 2022). It is worthy of note that Nigerian youths have begun to channel their grievances into political participation, a shift significantly catalysed by the rise of digital platforms.

Historically marginalised by a gerontocratic political system, young people who make up nearly 40% of registered voters have been empowered by social media to demand inclusion and accountability in governance (INEC, 2023). The 2020 #EndSARS movement was a turning point, as youths used digital tools to organise nationwide protests, crowdfund support, and document state violence, demonstrating their capacity for collective action against all forms of exclusion and injustice by the system or subsystems (Oladapo & Ojebuyi, 2021). The period of the EndSARS protest saw the emergence of decentralised leadership structures among young people, where online influencers and grassroots activists played crucial roles in shaping the movement's trajectory, thereby making it largely impossible for the system to target a leader or group through its security departments such as the Nigeria police or the Department of State Security (DSS) (Adegbuyi, 2021).

This momentum was effectively carried into the 2023 election, where people mobilised and rallied behind candidates addressing their concerns; among them was Peter Obi of the Labour Party, who used online platforms to mobilise voter registration, drives and monitor electoral

processes (Obi & Chukwuma, 2023). Such efforts illustrate how technology is enabling a more informed and politically active generation that is willing to challenge the status quo and demand reforms beyond electoral cycles, for the general well-being of young people in Nigeria (Adebisi, 2022). Again, the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, held on February 25, was a defining moment that showcased the disconnect between mainstream media and digital platforms. The most popular candidates were Bola Tinubu (APC), Atiku Abubakar (PDP), and Peter Obi (Labour Party), with Tinubu emerging victorious with 8.79 million votes amid allegations of electoral flaws and a low turnout of 27% (INEC, 2023).

Peter Obi's campaign, however, captured the imagination of the youth, leveraging social media to build the "Obidient" movement, a grassroots effort driven by young Nigerians frustrated by economic stagnation and governance failures (Ojo & Daramola, 2023). Supporters shared policy videos, organised virtual town halls, and posted real-time updates from polling units, reflecting a push for transparency (Ezeibe et al., 2023). Beyond mere online engagement, this movement demonstrated the power of digital tools in shaping political narratives, influencing public discourse, and challenging the traditional dominance of established political parties (Omololu, 2023). While Tinubu and Atiku blended digital outreach with traditional campaigning, Obi's reliance on youth-driven online momentum set his campaign apart, raising questions about the broader impact of social media on youth participation, which this paper seeks to address. However, the outcome of the election raised further concerns about whether digital activism alone is sufficient to translate into electoral victories or if structural barriers within Nigeria's electoral system still pose significant challenges to youth-led political movements (Ajayi, 2023). This paper assesses the role of social media in advancing political campaigns, with much emphasis on the 2023 general elections.

The Impact of Social Media on the 2023 General Elections

There were mixed feelings and assumptions on the outcome of the 2023 general elections. Losers felt the process was marked (marred) by flaws and fraud, while winners felt it was among the best elections since 1999. But of course, this has become the standard in Nigerian elections since 1999, where losers and winners share opposing views on the outcomes, which scholars must concern themselves with to understand the socio-political dynamics that drive these opposing views. Thus, the 2014 general elections proved otherwise when President Jonathan lost to President Buhari and called to congratulate him, a political behaviour that appeared to be strange to the Nigerian political web. This defeat acceptance, however, did not completely validate the electoral process as Jonathan went further to question the credibility of INEC.

The broader spectrum remained speculative and uncertain. Like many other elections, the 2023 elections were defined by several factors, but more importantly, the role of social media remained significant. The enthusiasm of young people to participate was overwhelmingly demonstrated through various means. Hashtags were created across various social media platforms to support preferred candidates. Crowdfunding became prominent in raising campaign funds, and social networks were established across the country to mobilise support groups. Most popular among such efforts was the one-million-man march for the candidate of the Labour Party, Mr Peter Obi, where thousands of supporters, mostly young people, came out in different states to demonstrate support for him. It is worthy to note, however and affirmed by several observers, that the seamless demonstration was largely possible because of the availability of social media platforms where people connect immediately, share information and create content to make their chosen candidates

trend. One of the key roles social media played among several others was live broadcasting of events or activities.

Election monitoring was very effective as supporters shared voting processes, collation of results from the polling units to registration area centres (RAC), to local government and so on. Acts of ballot box snatching and sponsored violence were all shared on social media. These efforts brought to the public first-hand information on the election. The Obi/Datti support group appeared to have taken the centre stage as members of the movement provided social media coverage in most polling units across the country, including remote areas where previous elections could not provide live updates and information. From the campaigns to voting to the point of result announcements or declarations, events were streamed live on social media platforms. There were several implications that social media brought to the centre in the 2023 general election. Beyond election monitoring, it provided broader insight into future elections and the role social media can play in curbing electoral fraud, exposing rigging and creating global access to live election activities.

In some units, rigging was exposed. Results were shared online before they were officially declared, and inadequacies on the part of the electoral umpire such as late arrival of election materials, incomplete election materials, fake election materials, insufficient election materials, among many other lapses were exposed by social media users. This new trend in elections only pushes the electoral umpire to prepare for future elections.

Advantages of Social Media on Political Campaign

The arrival of social media has brought certain changes to political campaigns in Nigeria. The diversity of the impact remains significant and provides some answers to scholarly questions about democracy and the rule of law. Thus, some of the advantages of social media on political campaigns include:

- 1. Social Media Provide Effective and Efficient Political Campaigns:** It is largely believed that the advent of social media has created a platform for effective and efficient political campaigns. Political actors can now reach their audience conveniently. Large audiences or groups can be reached conveniently at a time through various social media platforms. This trend has helped to promote effective and efficient political campaigns to a large extent.
- 2. It Encourages Political Participation:** Active and passive political participation either encourages or advances democracy, arguably. Thus, social media has broadened the scope for both passive and active political participation. Recent trends have triggered citizens' consciousness of political activities, and these trends are fast conveyed by social media platforms. The consciousness to participate in politics has largely increased (Ajayi, 2023). Social media platforms now convey political messages directly to social media users as content, harsh tags and jingles. These mediums have created political consciousness and participation.
- 3. It Provides an Avenue to Check the Excesses of Mainstream Media:** Many scholars have argued that mainstream media is now largely state-captured. There are several factors to this argument. Whether mainstream media houses are scared of government fines, withdrawal of operational licences or government intimidation by state security, the spread of underreporting

issues that affect the public have become a debate. Thus, social media platforms have largely closed this gap, where live streams and content have continued to report or bring to the public issues that mainstream media would not report. For instance, it took over four days for mainstream media to report the Owo terrorist attack even though it went viral immediately on various social media platforms. Whereas the issues of fake news, misinformation and disinformation are common on social media, it has also provided a firm ground to check the excesses of mainstream media. Thus, other advantages of social media include the fact that it encourages political inclusion, breaks the monopoly of elite control of political activities, allows people to report political fraud, exposes deliberate electoral fraud, creates issue-based and people-centred campaigns, provides access to global media to monitor and report electoral activities locally, advances democracy, creates a platform for competitive campaigns, and creates a platform to influence government policies. It provides access for reaching out to a large number of groups, bridges the gap in difficulties in rural campaigns, as contents are created to support choice candidates, provides an avenue for crowdfunding online, supports seamless mobile campaigns, and serves as a political archive where political information is kept and accessed.

Disadvantages of Social Media on Political Campaigns

Social media also has its disadvantages in political campaigns. Some of the perceived disadvantages are:

1. Social Media aids Online Bullying: Recent trends have shown that social media has increased the spade of online bullying. There are several cases of defamation and character assassination in various courts in Nigeria arising from social media. Online bullying is a situation where social media users attack people's characters, defame them and spread fake reports about the targeted persons online. The aim is to intimidate and make targeted persons compromise. This type of attack, perhaps, reduces the chances of fair political competition.

2. It helps in Spreading Fake News on Political Campaigns: It is observed that social media has encouraged far-reaching fake news on political campaigns in recent times. Often, unfiltered, unvetted, and unapproved messages get to the public through various social media platforms. The 2023 general elections had a lot of candidates withdrawing from the contest, whereas these reports were unverified and were debunked by the affected persons. This trend is dangerous to healthy political competition. Other disadvantages of social media on political campaigns include the fact that it aids disinformation on election matters, misleads the public on certain political issues, facilitates character assassination on campaign, breeds election violence through sharing of sensitive content, etc.

Conclusion

It would be difficult to assume the impact of social media on political campaigns, but it requires a concise empirical study. It is also believed that different methodologies will provide different answers. This is perhaps a general problem in social sciences where different methods and approaches are adopted to inquire into the same social question by researchers. Nevertheless, the comparative advantages of social media also present much broader social concerns, as clearly stated in this work. While it provides a community-based engagement to influence political decisions, it also provides a platform for fake news, misinformation, character assassination and online bullying. Despite these challenges, it has also provided answers to fundamental political

questions of free speech, freedom of expression, political participation and much political awareness.

It has bridged the gap in political campaigns where electorates used to rely only on physical mobilisation to attend political rallies and most often were unable to contribute objectively because of social inducement that makes them compromise. Social media has largely raised the standard of objectivity, exposing political behaviours and shaping political norms. Despite these significant contributions to readdressing inclusion, it has largely been criticised. It should also be noted that these complaints reflect the pattern in which political actors react to political question, whereby it can only be valid if it aligns with their perceived interest or goal. This is proof that social media can never be adjudged on a uniform ethical basis, but on the circumstances in which actors feel it serves their interest. Thus, it is on these complex dynamics that we make the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. To avoid issues of fake news, misinformation and cyberbullying, the government should ensure that offenders who are declared guilty by a competent court of jurisdiction, are punished. Free speech is a guaranteed democratic norm and any attempt to silence opposing voices in the guise of fake news or misinformation, without first establishing a point of breach by a competent court, would be anti-democratic.
2. To enhance effective use and promote free speech, strict government regulations should be discouraged. The assumption, however, is that these regulations are often driven to limit public opinion, particularly constructive criticism of anti-people policies of government. Government regulations should be inclusive and collective irrespective of political opinion and divide.
3. Government laws should allow individuals who feel offended by social media posts, contents and jingles to seek redress and justice in court and not direct government regulations or bans. Such actions may likely favour the ruling elite who have access to state security and do not want to be criticised, even constructively. Democracy recognises constructive criticism and freedom of speech, and if government laws recommend an outright ban or strict regulations of social media, the essence of democracy would be defeated.

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