Social Media and Voter Sensitization in Nigeria: A Retrospective Analysis of the 2019 General Election

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Abstract: With the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the world is now accessible with the click of the mouse and hence happenstances around the world can be related within the next possible minute. An average smart phone owner cannot do without visiting a social media platform daily, hence it can be used effectively to target particular voters, encourage people to exercise their franchise and make information go viral. This study seeks to examine the role played by the social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube toward increasing political participation in Nigeria with specific reference to the concluded 2019 general elections. There is no gainsaying that the election management body in Nigeria which is saddled with the responsibility of educating voters on their electoral roles doesn't have pronounced presence in the social space as at the 2019 general elections. This paper analyses the roles of social media in voters' sensitization as well as effective information dissemination and voter education. It is descriptive as well as analytical as data were got from secondary sources such as newspapers, magazines, periodicals, journals, etc, while the uses and gratification theory was adopted as the theoretical framework of analysis. Based on the foregoing, the paper revealed that; the social media is a vital instrument of information dissemination towards adequate voter sensitization and consequent participation has aided unreliable source of information, fake news as well as the promotion of hate speeches of candidates during campaigns. The paper therefore, recommends an increased presence of the election management bodies on the social media platforms to ensure adequate voter education and sensitization; with the urgent need for improved news censorship so as to checkmate the adverse effects of social media like hate speeches which has the capacity of exacerbating into full blown crises if not properly managed.

Keywords: Social Media, Election, Voters, Sensitization, Democratization

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1. Introduction

Since the social media platform is largely unregulated, all sorts of unsubstantiated information is allowed easy passage and disseminated among peer networks. The effects of such social media platforms in a country with a nascent democracy like Nigeria cannot be easily over emphasized. The 2019 general elections witnessed the advent of social media as a formidable force in political participation in general and political sensitization in particular. Since the technology is participatory, interactive and cost effective, it has increasingly assumed a greater role as far as political communication, sensitization and participation are concerned. However, the impacts of social media on the electioneering process have been of mixed effect. Though many positive effects were recorded, there have equally being many negative effects. According to a Human Rights Watch report on the 2019 general elections, the elections even though seen as among the freest and fairest in the annals of

Nigeria's history was also among the most controversial. Social media is believed to have played a major role in instigating and precipitating the propagandas and information that nearly marred the success of the poll. Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) believe that many Facebook pages conveyed false rumors and gossips that contributed to heating up the polity and creating unnecessary tension. False election results were spread and announced through social media. So, when the electoral body -INEC⁻ now announced the authentic results, the voters suspected foul play.

More so, it is factual that, there were series of social media wars on the various social media platforms which were more oftentimes counterproductive. All manner of abusive and violent language was employed in attacking and counter-attacking different parties, groups and individuals. Unless an in-depth and serious study is made, those recorded dangers and lapses noted in the usage of social media would reoccur in subsequent elections which would ultimately result in another orgy of violence and killings. Since Nigeria is the bedrock of the political temperature of the West African sub-region, any effect on the country has the capacity to affect the entire sub-region and even Africa as a whole. There is little or no regulatory framework as is applicable to traditional or conventional media in the case of social media. Since there are more than 5 million registered Nigerian users of Facebook, 500,000 on Twitter, 3 million on Whatsapp, the impact of social media cannot simply be ignored.

The use of social media as a formidable force for social engineering and political electioneering has continued to grow. The technology is participatory, interactive and cost-effective. This has made it the medium of the moment as far as political communication and participation are concerned. Nigeria had her first true test of social media use for political participation during the 2019 general elections. Many positive results were recorded. For instance, both the local and foreign observers rate the election as the best in the fourteen -year history of unbroken democracy in the country.

Accordingly, Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) believe that social media played a huge role in instigating and fuelling the violence. They argue that during the period, many facebook pages were awash with false rumors and gossips that added to hitting up the polity and creating unnecessary tensions. The GSM short message service (SMS) was used to spread false election results that differ from the later announced result and that showed that the elections were massively rigged. There was what Okoro and Adibe (2013) refer to as "social media war" on the various social media platforms, making use of all kinds of abusive languages, all manner of attacks and counter- attacks among members and supporters of various opposition parties and groups. Several insulting and inciting messages flourished on facebook and GSM-SMS. These culminated in the violence and tensions witnessed before, during and after the elections in many parts of the country, with some states ordering non-indigenes to leave.

2. Literature Review

Social Media and Politics

The arrival of social media has greatly enhanced all aspects of human communication. The new technology due to the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature, has barely made everyone who can use it as a mass communicator. This brings to fruition the prediction of Marshal McLuhan in 1964 that the world would someday become a "global village" where what happens in one part of the world would be known instantly and simultaneously worldwide. Today, one can stay right in his bedroom and access information, entertainments, events and enjoy full interaction with the world just by pressing a button. Writing on this development, Adibe and Odoemelam (2010) observe that the new media of communication have in no small measure helped human society to be aware of each other.

According to Sherman (2000) the term "social media" was in 2007 coined by Danah in Boyd of the School of Information at the University of California and Nicole B. Ellison of the Department of Telecommunications, Information Studies and Media at Michigan State University. Even though the term is usually regarded by several people to mean the same with similar concepts like new media and social networking, however, the

two concepts are not actually the same. In order to rightly contextualize the concept of social media, it is imperative to consider what social networking sites are. Boyd and Ellison (2008) opined that "social networking sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a common connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". Boyd and Ellison's definition provides us with an understanding for describing social media. According to them, social media is a medium that allows individuals to share important information with friends. Social media therefore, is a subset of information communication technologies. Corroborating Boyd and Ellison's definition, Chijioke (2013) asserted that "social media are simply internet-based[37] interactive platforms through which people can create and exchange information in a participatory manner on a real-time basis." He went further to note that they are online democratic and participatory communication channels that allow inhibited exchange of information and documents among users.

According to Arthur (2011), social media are internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute, and search for information online. It is the interactive or collaborative nature of the medium that makes them "social". In a nutshell, this paper defined social media as online tools that allow communication of information online and make participation and collaboration possible. Specifically, social media here is used to refer to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs, MySpace, Friendster, Linkedin and many others. The advent of the internet which brought about the development of different forms of social media platforms is increasingly supporting democratic participation and free flow of information between individuals in emerging democracies. Citizens are not merely consuming information content, but are privileged to become content producers, thereby encouraging participatory democracy which is the hallmark of democracy According to Agudosi (2007), political communication is the dissemination of information about the functioning of a political entity in order to influence the behaviour of the audience in a variety of ways. He went further to say that it is also the interactive process concerning transmission of information among politicians, the news media and the public. On the same view, Graber and Smith (2005) opined that political communication involves the construction, sending, receiving, and processing of messages that potentially have significant direct or indirect impact on politics. Political communication is an increasingly important area in communication and media studies.

A study by Okoro and Diri (2009) has shown the importance of the media in contributing significantly in creating public awareness and mobilizing participation in the political process. The media therefore help citizens to reach informed decisions about what course of action to take and also offer the populace the platform to be educated on political relevant information. It is on this premise that Rush and Althoff (1972) cited in Akasoro (2011) conceived political communication to be the process by which politically-relevant information is transmitted from one part of the political system to another, and between the social and political systems. It is a continuous process involving the exchange of information between individuals and groups of individuals at all levels of society, and includes not only the expression of the views and wishes of members of society, but also the means by which the views and proposals of those in power are transmitted to the society and the latter's reaction to those views and proposals. From all the above definitions given by various scholars, political communication is essentially important in a democratic society since the mass media are the purveyor of political information and education of the electorates.

According to Clark and Aufderheide (2009), social media are increasingly becoming popular among politicians and their organizations as a means to disseminate political messages, learn about the interest and needs of constituents and the broader public, raise funds, and build networks of support. Lending credence to this assertion, Hong and Nadler (2011) observed that in a very short space of time, politicians in modern democracies across the world have eagerly adopted social media for engaging their constituents, entering into direct dialogs with citizens and enabling vivid political discussions. Raiz (2010) equally posited that in the past five years, elections conducted in Africa witnessed a massive use of social media during electioneering campaigns by key political figures, political parties and civil society organizations. This development has made

researchers in recent times to investigate the influence of social media in the sphere of political communication, This perhaps explains why researchers like Graber and Smith (2005) contend that a great deal of research efforts has gone into assessments of the role played by new media in providing information to those citizens and politicians alike who need to fulfil their civic duties, A number of studies have been conducted by scholars on the growing influence of social media during political campaigns, for instance, a study by Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) attempted to determine whether social media usage actually impact on political self-efficacy and involvement of electorates during the 2008 United States Presidential election. Their findings show that there was a drastic rise in the use of social media by political candidates as well as the electorates. According to them, 27% of young people reported obtaining political information from the social media.

Corroborating their finding, Owen, Soule, Nairne, Chalif, House and Davidson, (2011) remarked that the 2008 US election marked a breakthrough year for political use of new media and social networks specifically. They further opined that social networking websites played an especially innovative and important role in the protracted primary race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Obama's subsequent victory at the main election was largely attributed to his massive use of the social media during the electioneering campaigns.

The study concludes that college students that participated in the political activities on Facebook felt more motivated to vote in 2008 presidential election and the students who had Facebook account had better identified with the candidates due to their presence and the information they received on facebook. Mclaughlin and Osborne (1997, p.10) Cited in Alakali, Titus, Akpan and Tarnongo (2013) revealed that nearly three-quarter (73%) of American internet users, or 54% of all voters went online in-2010 for news or information about midterm elections or communicate with others about campaign and the information voters are getting online, appears to have sway. In addition, one third of respondents said the information they saw online made them to vote for or against a particular candidate. This underscored the role of social in the US presidential elections.

Social Media and the 2019 General Elections
According to Otunji (2019), the Centre for Media Contact's Digital Marketing expert, while discussing on the the[43] impact of social media in the 2019 general elections gave a presentation that detailed presentation on the highlights, trends, insights and the general overview of the elections on social media; particularly Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

To measure the positive and negative impacts of social media on the outcome of the presidential elections in its entirety, the nature of conversations before, during and after were meticulously observed and it was discerned that most of the outcomes stemmed from the Nigerian youths. The hashtag '#NigeriaDecides2019' predominantly accompanied the conversations during these periods – other commonly used hashtags include '#ElectionDay', #AtikuIsWinning, #PMB4Plus4 and a host of others. Also, considered as a possible influential factor on the outcome of the presidential elections is the impact of social media influencers. Social media influencers have the ability to influence the decision making of users across all platforms and this was particularly leveraged on by some presidential candidates, including Atiku Abubakar, Fela Durotoye, Omoye Sowore, just to name a few.

There are two kinds of social media influencers, namely macro-influencers and micro-influencers. Macro-influencers typically have a copious amount of following, usually about fifty thousand to a hundred thousand and have a vast reach and engagement with their contents. Micro-influencers on the other hand usually have a fewer number of followers but have incredibly engaging contents which allows for a high conversation rate. Some noteworthy macro-influencers with the highest level of engagement before, during and after the elections include JJ. Omojuwa, Badmus Hakeem, Ani Nomso and Lazy Writa. Among all the social media platforms, Twitter formidably stood out in terms of general engagement, with memes, videos, gifs and infographics mostly being used in conversations by users. Polls on the platform were also heavily used by influencers and regular users to determine the political convictions of Nigerians as well as the personal perceptions of the presidential candidates.

Although not a social network, the messaging app, WhatsApp, also had an impact on the presidential elections. The reach however could not be measured, owing to the end-to-end encryption feature of the app, rather broadcast messages were used to ascertain the level of engagement. WhatsApp notably contributed to the negative impact on the elections as fake news about national insecurity were heavily proliferated on the app, increasing the existing fear of violence among Nigerians. The subjective nature of the messages shared among individuals on the app also contributed to the overall turnout of voters in various parts of the country, especially in Lagos.

Although social media played a major role such as engaging people, awareness generation for candidates, passing information (both negative and positive) in the 2019 presidential elections, it was discerned that it was not substantial enough to impact the turnout of voters or sway the results. This was evident in the results of some of the candidates with grandiose social media presence. A typical example is Omoyele Sowore who has over 81, 000 followers but only managed to garner 33, 983 votes! Another typical example is Atiku Abubakar who led most of the polls conducted on Twitter, eventually, these did not equate to the number of total votes he gathered.

All in all, it was determined that for social media to be effective enough to impact the overall turnout of voters, demographics should be a preeminent consideration. It was discovered that majority of voters during the 2019 elections were older people, most of who are not tech-savvy and have relatively no social media presence. Many are also located in the outskirts of the city with limited access to internet. A large part of these voters basically consumes traditional media and to reach them, traditional media vehicles and channels must be effectively exerted. Apathy among social media users was also identified as a contributing factor to the overall turnout of voters as many often doubted the credibility of the electoral system, citing electoral malpractice as a reason for choosing not to vote (Otunji, 2019).

According to Ayeni (2019), another factor which could be said to have contributed to the impact of social media on the elections is the considerable technological advancement in the electoral system. Millennial find the current electoral system monotonous and arduous as shown in their conversations and as such, many of them find it difficult to go out of their way to vote. If the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) could integrate a technology into their system that enables people to vote from the comfort of their homes, then the ample amount of active social media users during the elections will correspond to the total number of voters.

3. Empirical Literature of Social Media and Elections

The impact of social media on election as well as political awareness and sensitization has been put forward by scholars,. Accordingly, Apuke & Tunca (2018), in a study titled (Understanding the Implications of Social Media Usage in the Electoral Processes and Campaigns in Nigeria) sheds light on the implications of social media usage in the Nigerian electioneering campaigns and political processes. This study is anchored on the agenda setting and uses and gratification theory. Findings suggest that in the Nigerian 2015 and 2011 general elections, social media was employed due to its participatory nature. It was used as a platform for political campaign organization, electioneering crusades, ideological trumpeting exercises, and mobilization of voters. Specifically, in the 2015 elections, it was found that during the collation of results, citizen journalists and the civil society used social media to inform the public as regards the results in several states across the country. Social media was thus applied to influence the thoughts of many young people, increasing their political awareness and cognizance, which in turn resulted in an unbelievable presidential win of the opposition party All Progressives Congress (APC) over the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). Conversely, social media were also used as a weapon to undermine and even destroy the image of political parties. Character assassination, violence, and abuses (hate) speeches were carried out, which further increased the divide between the Northern and Southern part of the country. The study recommends that political messages should be based on truth and full of information that will enable the electorate to make a proper decision that will assist in

bringing the right people into governance. Future investigators are required to examine computational propaganda in electioneering campaigns in Nigeria.

In a collaborative study, Ekwueme and Folarin (2017), in a study titled   Role of Social Media in Electioneering: The Case of the Nigerian 2015 Presidential Election argues that the 21st century can be described as the age of information technology. Technology runs almost all human endeavors, including politics. In recent times, politicians have swerved from the use of traditional media (broadcast and print) to the use of social media to carry out their political and electoral campaigns in order to realize their political ambition. One of the major challenges of electioneering in the 21st century is that, due to the faceless nature of the internet, social media spreads propaganda, false information, and hate speeches about an electoral candidate. These go viral and are used to manipulate the electorate. This paper examines the role of social media in the awareness, participation, and possible influence on the Nigerian electorate in their decision or choice of leadership during the 2015 presidential election.

On their part Madueke, Nwosu, Ogbonnaya & Anumadu (2017), in a related study tilted (The Role of Social Media in Enhancing Political Participation in Nigeria) posited that the use of social media in politics has continued to grow in recent times. Since Barack Obama broke the world record in the history of social media use for political purpose during the 2008 US presidential elections, many nations and politicians across the globe have continued to embrace the platform to mobilise their citizens and candidates towards active participation in the political process. Nigeria had the first real test of social media use for political participation during the 2011 General Elections.

Similarly, Ayeni (2019), in a study (The Role of Social Media in Voter Sensitization in Nigeria) held that social media has become a prominent and a powerful forum for voter enlightenment, political activism and fastest means of information dissemination. An individual without a social media account is seen in the society as obsolete. Social media has indeed become our lives personally and professionally. An average smart phone owner cannot do without visiting a social media platform daily. Social media therefore, can be used effectively to target particular voters, encourage people to exercise their franchise and to make information go viral. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube help to activate citizens' engagement in political life. INEC saddled with the responsibility of educating voters on their electoral roles and responsibilities unfortunately doesn't have pronounced presence in the social space.

4.   Theoretical Framework

In conducting this study, the Uses and Gratifications theory was used as the base. This theory was popularized by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumber and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 and is grouped under the limited or indirect effect theories. The Uses and Gratification theory discusses the effects of the media on people. It explains how people use the media for their own need and get satisfied when their needs are fulfilled. In other words, it can be said that the theory argues what people do with media rather than what media do to people. Also, this theory is in contradiction to the Magic Bullet theory, which states that the audience is passive. This theory has a user/audience-centered approach. Even for communication, say – interpersonal, people refer to the media for the topic to discuss among themselves. By referring to the media, they gain more knowledge and exposure to the world beyond their limited eyesight.

Unlike other theories concerning media consumption, UGT gives the consumer power to discern what media they consume, with the assumption that the consumer has a clear intent and use. This contradicts previous theories such as mass society theory, that states that people are helpless victims of mass media produced by large companies; and individual differences perspective, which states that intelligence and self-esteem largely drive an individual's media choice.

According to Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso(2008) the theory is concerned with what people do with the media rather than what media do to the people. It is based on the assumption that consumers of media

influence the impact that media have on them. It takes a humanistic approach to the uses and effects of media on the people. Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) believe that the major thrust of the theory is that media consumers have certain needs which make them to be selectively exposed to, attend to and retain certain media messages while rejecting and discarding others. This is because of the perceived gratifications they derive from such messages. So, the media consumers are not passive consumers without a choice, but they play an active role in interpreting and integrating media output into their own lives.

Consumers of social media are not without choices or analytical abilities. Rather they are intentional and conscious seekers of such information which satisfies certain needs and provided some desired gratifications. They are able to select and use the technology in ways that suit their purpose and achieve their desired goal. So, the audience is not spoon-fed consumers of whatever is thrown at them. But they have a choice and they make conscious effort in deciding what they want to hear and see, the audience is largely active and not passive. Furthermore, the political participants and the voters are also able to consciously select and choose the media of their preference and the information content of their desire during electoral campaigns and other political activities.

Adeyanju & Haruna (2012) notes that the main thrust of the theory is that audience members have certain needs which make them to be selectively exposed to, attend to, and retain media messages because of the perceived gratifications derivable from such messages. Thus, this theory emphasizes the fact that people are important in the process of communication because they choose content, make meaning and act on that meaning.

5. Social Media and Voter Sensitization in the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

In a modern democracy, social media can be used by governments to involve citizens in decision making, and by civil society to engage people in specific issues. However, social media can also be used to broaden political participation by helping citizens to communicate with their representatives and with each other (Okoro & Adibe, 2013).

The use of social media as a formidable force for social and political electioneering has continued to grow. The technology is participatory, interactive and cost-effective. This has made it the medium of the moment as far as political communication and participation are concerned (Okoro & Adibe, 2013).

In Nigeria, the 2011 general elections were the first litmus test of the use of social media by political parties, political candidates, and the civil society organizations. The election was historic in the sense that it was the first time ever that new media technologies like Facebook, Blogs, LinkedIn and other social networks facilitated political communication and participation in Nigeria (Dagona, Karick, & Abubakar, 2013, p.2). Thus, these new media technologies have redefined methods of political communication in contemporary times and thereby led to significant shift towards the utilization of these modern tools in the electoral process.

This new paradigm shift has challenged previous methods used for political communication where television, radio and newspapers dominated coverage of political campaigns, and thus became the primary source of election-related information. However, today, the social media have become a major avenue where political parties and candidates connect with the electorate to share vital information about their policies, programmes and manifestos. Because of the ease, reach and speed associated with the social media, it has become a tool revolutionizing the field of political communication globally.

According to Clark and Aufderheide (2009, p.1), social media are increasingly becoming popular among politicians and their organizations as a means to disseminate political messages, learn about the interest and needs of constituents and the broader public, raise funds, and build networks of support. Lending credence to this assertion, Hong and Nadler (2011) observed that in a very short space of time, politicians in modern democracies across the world have eagerly adopted social media for engaging their constituents, entering into direct dialogs with citizens and enabling vivid political discussions. Raiz (2010) equally posited that in the past five years, elections conducted in Africa witnessed a massive use of social media during electioneering campaigns by key political figures, political parties and civil society organizations. This development has made

researchers in recent times to investigate the influence of social media in the sphere of political communication. This perhaps explains why researchers like Graber and Smith (2005) contend that a great deal of research efforts has gone into assessments of the role played by new media in providing information to those citizens and politicians alike who need to fulfill their civic duties.

A number of studies have been conducted by scholars on the growing influence of social media during political campaigns, for instance, a study by Kushin and Yamamoto (2010) attempted to determine whether social media usage actually impact on political self-efficacy and involvement of electorates during the 2008 US presidential election. Their findings show that there was a drastic rise in the use of social media by political candidates as well as the electorates. According to them, 27% of young people reported obtaining political information from the social media. Corroborating their finding, Owen, Soule, Nairne, Chalif, House and Davidson, (2011) remarked that the 2008 US election marked a breakthrough year for political use of new media and social networks specifically. They further opined that social networking websites played an especially innovative and important role in the protracted primary race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Obama subsequent victory at the main election was largely attributed to his massive use of the social media during the electioneering campaigns.

Similarly, Warren (2009) investigated the use of social networking site Facebook in 2008 presidential election in America. The study was specifically designed to analyze whether Facebook might be a practical campaign tool to target young voters, particularly college students. A survey research method was adopted for the study to collect data from 212 students at the University of Central Missouri to determine if Facebook was a viable campaign tool. The study concludes that college students that participated in the political activities on Facebook felt more motivated to vote in 2008 presidential election and the students who had Facebook account had better identified with the candidates due to their presence and the information they received on face book.

In furtherance of the view above, McLaughlin and Osborne (1997, p.10) Cited in Alakali, Titus, Akpan and Tarnongo (2013), revealed that nearly three-quarter (73%) of American internet users, or 54% of all voters went online in 2010 for news or information about midterm elections or communicate with others about campaign and the information voters are getting online, appears to have sway. In addition, one-third of respondents said the information they saw online made them to vote for or against a particular candidate. This underscored the role of social in the US presidential election.

In another related study, Larsson and Moe (2011) conducted a study on Twitter use during the 2011 Swedish election and found that Twitter also serves as a channel for disseminating political information and not for political dialog with the electorates. Larsson and Moe study revealed that Swedish political elites see Twitter as a medium to communicate political contents to the people and not necessarily as a tool to engage the electorates in political conversation. On the contrary, Williams and Gulati (2009) research on the extent of Facebook use by congressional candidates, during election campaigns, discovered that the number of facebook supporters can be considered a valid indicator of electoral success. In the context of Dutch election, Utz (2009) showed that social networking sites provided an opportunity for politicians to reach individuals interested in politics. Their view of candidates' profiles further strengthened their exiting attitudes. Confirming Utze's study the Pew Research Centre (2014) examined the use of new media techniques in Iowa and New Hampshire. The aim of the study was to determine whether or not the websites of political candidates were being utilized by potential voters. They found that 30% of likely voters in Iowa and 29% in New Hamshire said they visited candidate's websites. Roughly, the same percentage has viewed political candidate's videos online as well. Meanwhile, quite few of the respondents have joined a social networking page such as Facebook or MySpace.

The 2019 general elections provided political aspirants the avenue to use social media tools to connect with voters and constituents for the first time in Nigeria political arena; for instance, Ekine (2010) reported that

Atiku Abubakar had nearly 3000,000 followers on his Facebook account following the step of president Barrack Obama of the United State. Corroborating further, Okoro and Nwafor (2013) conducted a study titled "social and political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections: The lapses and the lessons". The objectives of the study were to find out the role played by social media in the political participation of Nigerians, observe the lapses in the use of social media during the elections, and the lessons learnt from social media use in the course of the election. The findings of their study revealed that 93% of the respondents attested to the fact they used social media for political participation during the election. Respondents also said they used different social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, SMS calls, and YouTube to participate during the election. The study also identified some lapses in the cause of the use of social media in the electioneering process. Social media in Nigeria has played a significant role in how citizens receive information, interact with government officials, interrogate their actions, pressurise them and demand better from them. These platforms have been able to relay the pulse of the nation to the elected officials on different issues as it affects the citizens at home and in the diaspora. The Data retrieved from the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) shows that over a hundred million people currently pay for mobile internet subscriptions in the country. This means that there is a significant number of Nigerians who can access mobile internet daily and spur conversations around social issues faster. If the Osun State election (and rerun) is anything to go by, Nigerians are now leveraging their access to the internet and several social media platforms to draw attention to issues such as electoral discrepancies and demand for better. To make sense of the increasing number of Nigerians using social media and what it means for 2019 general election, we had a conversation with ace broadcaster, Tolulope Adeleru Balogun, and social media expert, Rosemary Ajayi, and they both explained the important roles social media could play in the 2019 elections. According to him, come 2019, social media will enhance the campaign for "voter education, crowd-sourcing solutions on election day and independent election monitoring," says Rosemary.

Similarly, Tolulope (2018:9) believes that: "Social media exposes the aspirant and their message to an audience that may not be their electorate, but can help influence them. Between retweets, reach and influencers, the potential to shape a narrative or the perception of a candidate is strong," she says. Furthermore, she added: "While I don't believe social media cannot said to be solely responsible for election success, I think it can play a massive part in election failure and success, candidates can use social media to articulate plans and take a stand on issues."

More so, Bala (20190), presented a bill titled: The Frivolous Petitions (Prohibition, etc.) Bill to the Nigerian Senate in 2015 which bore the tacit implication of discouraging the anti-corruption campaign. The bill immediately provoked the ire of the Nigerian public who considered it an attempt to tamper with their freedom of expression and use of social media platforms. The bill, however, passed its first two readings amid agitations by Nigerians. In an attempt to discourage further consideration of the bill, Media and civil society organisations protested against it, tagging it the "Anti-Social Media Bill." Following these protests, the National Assembly withdrew the bill and suspended further consideration on it.

This act raised the fear of social media censorship across Nigeria, as the 2019 election date draws closer. Tolulope Balogun, however, is more optimistic. "Social media censorship will be difficult achieve in Nigeria, but it doesn't mean it won't be tried. Websites will likely receive requests for tracking accounts and IP addresses. Citizens will have to be accountable for what they tweet or post. How it may be attempted, I'm not so sure yet, but I think attempts will be made. We saw the death of the anti-social media bill, but that by no means is the end of state attempts to regulate the space, (Tolulope, 2018:18). As the campaigns intensify and the election date draws closer. It is important to note that social media will once again be at the centre of political campaigns across Nigeria; candidates will use social media to shape narratives about themselves, sell their manifestos, and reach out to a larger percentage of the youth. The next set of leaders will be those who can use social media to their advantage, connect to the voters and get their votes next year. Furthermore, civil society groups and activists were not left out in the political process. Groups such as "Safe Nigeria Group", "Vote or Quench", "Enough is Enough", "Light up Nigeria" and "Sleeves up Nigeria", and "Reclaim Naija", among others were formed in order to mobilize and create awareness for mass participation in the election.

Since these groups were mostly dominated by young people, they heavily employed social media to initiate and put up a youth presidential debates, and share intelligence to push forward the campaign for creditable elections on social media platforms. In doing this, the mainstream media struck a working relationship with social media platforms that enhance both citizen's participation and professional journalist practices.

Journalists from various media organizations in the country engaged with citizens on Facebook and citizen's contributions informed the journalist's questions during interview with political institution such as INEC. For instance, there was convergence of different media of communication like the print media and television and social networking sites to monitor, cover and report election proceedings from different polling stations. In regard to this, Channels Television features regular live coverage through their websites, ipad, iphone, and other devices. During the elections, the organization established a four-person social media team, with one each handling the website, Twitter, Facebook, and the fourth feeding information from the newsroom to the other three members of the team (Asuni & Farris, 2011). This therefore' facilitated simultaneous transition on Television, Twitter, and Facebook respectively. In the same vein, *Thisday Newspaper* and *Tell magazine* were able to used Facebook to update people with proceedings of the election as well as provided the avenue for members of the public to post their comments on Facebook. Similarly, Warren (2009) investigated the use of social networking site Facebook in 2008 presidential election in America. The study was specifically designed to analyze whether Facebook might be a practical campaign tool to target young voters, particularly college students. A survey research method was adopted for the study to collect data from 212 students at the University of Central Missouri to determine if Facebook was a viable campaign tool.

Further buttressing this point, one can argue that the role of youth in electoral activities cannot be over emphasised. They play active role in mobilising support for candidates and actual voting. They are the active participants of election violence and also the active users of social media. Disseminating useful information to youth in form of voter education is a means of forestalling incidences of election violence and electoral manipulations. Data released by statista.com indicated that there are 84.3 million internet users in Nigeria and that by 2019, there would be 93 million internet users. Chukwuemeka Afigbe, Manager Developer programme at Facebook revealed that about 26 million Nigerians now login on Facebook every month. Social media is indeed the best avenue for reaching out to majority of the voters.

The use of social media in politics has continued to grow in recent times. Since Barack Obama broke the world record in the history of social media use for political purpose during the 2008 US presidential elections, many nations and politicians across the globe have continued to embrace the platform to mobilize their citizens and candidates towards active participation in the political process. It was argued that four key stakeholders in the electoral process INEC, politicians/political parties, the electorate, and Civil Society Organizations) made extensive use of social media during the 2015 and the 2019 elections in Nigeria. Each of these stakeholders used the social media to achieve a number of interrelated objectives.

Indeed, research has demonstrated that campaigning through social media such as Facebook and Twitter place more emphasis on the individual politician rather than the political party, resulting to increased personalized campaigning and interaction with the electorate and supporters (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). Moreover, most political online campaign adopts the online relationship cultivation strategies that require the disclosure or openness, data dissemination, interactivity and involvement. Having understood the general usage of social media in political campaigns as well as in a developed nation such as the US, it is worthwhile to explore the Nigerian experience, since there is a continuous evidence to show that in the African context social media is now being utilized for political processes. In prospect of this, the next part will explore the role of social media in political movements and elections in Nigeria.

Based on the arguments, it is concluded that social media platforms have fundamentally aided political communication in Nigeria (Ayeni, 2019). Social media is the place for consuming political news and knowledge for the majority of young people. It is where they discuss politics and feel like their most civic selves.

6. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, the intention of this research was to shed light on the implications, uses, and role of social media in the Nigerian electioneering campaigns and political processes at large. It, therefore, increases our understanding of how social media impact elections and democracy in Nigeria. It was deduced that in the Nigerian 2019 general elections, social media was used due to its participatory nature. It was used as a platform for political campaign organization, electioneering crusades, ideological trumpeting exercises, and mobilization of voters. Thus, the civil society deployed the arsenal of social media effectively to distribute information.

Furthermore, there was evidence to show that during the period of the campaign, Tweet meets and Hangouts were the in-thing within Nigerian online sociopolitical networks. During the collation of results, citizen journalists and the civil society used social media to inform the public as regards the results in several states across the country. This validated social media role as watchdog and a reportage route for political processes in Nigeria, thereby adding value to the political culture. Therefore, the role of social media in the Nigerian 2019 elections is inevitable because it was employed to shape the opinions of many youths, increasing their political awareness and consciousness, which in turn resulted in the presidential win of the opposition party (APC) over the ruling party (PDP). It could, thus, be inferred that social media usage has an impact on electioneering campaigns in Nigeria and beyond. Nevertheless, if used negatively it tarnishes the image of political aspirants and opponents leading to high level of propaganda. Thus, political messages should be founded on truth and full of information that will enable the electorate to gain a proper decision that will aid in getting the good people into governance. Conclusively, it could be deduced that this study has elucidated the role of social media in the Nigerian electioneering processes, future researchers are encouraged to explore more in further research. For instance, there was no study found to have examined computational propaganda in electioneering campaigns in Nigeria. This calls for future investigators to see into such area. Doing so will increase the understanding of political manipulation and propaganda in the electioneering process in Nigeria. Based on the findings of this study, the researchers, therefore, made the following recommendations:

➢ The paper therefore recommends an increased presence of the election management bodies on the social media platforms to ensure adequate voter education and sensitization.
➢ There is the urgent need for improved news censorship so as to checkmate the adverse effects of social media like hate speeches which has the capacity of exacerbating into full blown crises if not properly managed.
➢ As a developing country, Nigeria must embrace this platform in other to ensure greater participation of her populace in government activities.

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